



THE DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGNS – IMPORTANT COMPONENTS OF HYBRID WARFARE –

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The evolution of the international security environment and information technology has given a special impetus to the development of interpersonal and inter-community communication, especially through new media. Hybrid warfare is the most eloquent example of adapting the phenomenon of war to the evolution of human society and information technology. Disinformation has a very important role in the development and establishment of the outcome of the hybrid confrontation, which is used in all kinds of inter-community confrontation. Mass media, especially the online social platforms, are the most used and effective vehicles for carrying out and spreading disinformation.

Keywords: hybrid warfare, military stratagem, disinformation, military surprise, mass media.



INTRODUCTION

The democratic societies were based on the free expression of the citizens' will – a right that is ensured by the powers and institutions of the state under the permanent monitoring of a free and independent mass media.

The media contributes substantially to the communication between the powers and institutions of the state, on the one hand, and the population, on the other. In other words, the media collects information that is relevant to the population and makes it available to citizens in order to help them form their own opinions about the functioning of state institutions (quality of the government, transparency and accountability¹) and the situation of the human community they belong to. Through the way it works, the mass media – monitoring and analysing the activity of state institutions – it contributes to the promotion of democracy, and through the correct information of the population, it contributes to ensuring its right to inform and to ensure free expression.

Although the media should be objective, impartial and independent², it has a dual role³. In most cases, the media in democratic states respect their self-assumed status through the codes of ethics of journalists and other media professionals, contributing to the proper functioning of democracy.

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¹ Irina Moroianu Zlătescu, *Drepturile omului – un sistem în evoluție*, Institutul Român pentru Drepturile Omului, București, 2017, p. 3, available on http://irdo.ro/irdo/pdf/175_ro.pdf, retrieved in October 2019.

² Silvia Șpac, *Impactul mass-media asupra formării personalității elevului de vârstă școlară mica*, Studia Universitatis Moldaviae, 2015, available on <http://ojs.studiamsu.eu/index.php/education/article/view/279/237>, retrieved in October 2019.

³ Because of the dual effects of the media, Paul Dobrescu likened communication to a despot, because this is “a weapon, perhaps the most powerful, of conditioning and mystifying the human being”. (*Un despot modern – opinia publică*, in *Revista română de comunicare și relații publice* no. 2-3/2000, p. 15).



In the democratic states there is partisan mass media, but also mass media belonging to some owners who obliged it to represent their interests through the audio and video articles and reports.

The media play a negative role when the intention and interest of a person (group of people) that does not agree with the general interest of the community appears. In these cases, means of influence are used, mainly disinformation and manipulation, to determine the citizens to support this interest or not to oppose the objectives of the initiator of disinformation.

Disinformation has been used successfully in all confrontations over time. Currently, this method of influencing the population has a very important contribution to the development and establishment of the outcome of the hybrid warfare.

The human losses due to the armed confrontations have caused many thinkers to initiate projects to eliminate the wars between states, respectively between communities within the states.

THE HYBRID WARFARE – A NEW STAGE OF EVOLUTION OF THE INTER-COMMUNITY CONFRONTATIONS

War has long been considered a form of armed confrontation to which political, diplomatic, economic, financial, cultural and informational actions have been associated.

About war, as a form of dispute settlement between human communities, many historical studies, literary works and articles in mass media have been written. Memorable sequences from different wars have been the main subjects of many artistic productions – films, paintings, sculptures, etc., through which deeds of heroism have been glorified or abominable actions and attitudes of some of people who had nothing in common with humanity. Their actions have been made known to the public (mass murder, terrorist attacks, destruction). deliberations of historical vestiges and places of worship, etc.).

As time has passed, mankind has experienced, including in real time in recent decades, the atrocities generated by some of the participants in violent inter-community confrontations.

The human losses due to the armed confrontations have caused many thinkers to initiate projects to eliminate the wars between states, respectively between communities within the states. Some of the most well-known projects of this kind belong to the Abbot of Saint Pierre and to Immanuel Kant. Ideas about eliminating wars

from international relations were issued by Jean Jacques Rousseau and other Renaissance thinkers. Those ideas have proven to be largely utopian because it seems that we humans have a natural tendency to confrontation⁴.

The two world wars have mourned tens, perhaps even hundreds of millions of families around the world, and their conclusions have relaunched some of the ideas launched by Kant, the Abbot of Saint Pierre and other thinkers who spoke out against armed confrontation as a way of dissensions between states. As a result, some international governmental organizations have been established. They have responsibilities in the field of global (UN)⁵ and regional security (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe – OSCE, Organization of American States – OSA, Organization of African Unity – OAU), Arab League – LA)⁶ etc. They have also been drafted and ratified by most of the countries of the treated world, conventions and agreements for the prohibition of chemical weapons and anti-personnel mines, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, limitation and reduction of nuclear weapons, reduction of conventional weapons in Europe, disarmament and military disarmament, etc.

Despite these organisational measures and the international normative acts that regulate the relations between states, respectively between citizens and their states, the violent confrontations continued in large numbers, but with a smaller number of human victims. This tendency, against the background of the end of the Cold War, determined some politico-military analysts and experts in international security to estimate that we are witnessing the decline of the war. Other reputable authors have launched predictions



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⁴ Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1955, p. 57, *apud* Dr. Lewis B. Ware, *An Islamic Concept of Conflict in Its Historical Context*, Blank, Stephen J, Grinter, Lawrence E., Magyar, Karl P., and Wheaters, Bynum E., *Conflict, Culture and History*, Air University Press, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, USA, 1993, p. 67 (“human nature makes war a norm, not an exception”).

⁵ Madeleine Albright, *Who Broke the UN?*, in *Foreign Policy*, 13.08.2012, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/08/13/who-broke-the-u-n/>, retrieved in December 2019.

⁶ Roberta Cohen, *The Role of Regional Organizations*, ECOWAS, Brookings, Monday, 30 September 2002, <https://www.brookings.edu/on-the-record/the-role-of-regional-organizations-ecowas/>, retrieved on December 2019.



The phenomenon of war in the last century was manifested mainly by the brutal confrontation, in which the means used were mostly destructive and lethal. Currently, non-military means have the most important role in the confrontation, and the military force is kept in reserve, with the role of warning-threat, which could be used when needed, according to the principle “when diplomacy is silent, weapons speak”.

such as “*the end of geography*” (Virilio Paul - 1997)⁷, “*the end of nature*” (Charles McKibben - 1990), “*the end of history*” (Francis Fukuyama – 1992), “the end of science” (John Horgan – 2012)⁸ etc.

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Today, the present confrontations have mainly taken the form of hybrid warfare – a combination of concepts that us conventional and unconventional means of combat and weapon systems, designed to surprise the opponent and bring victory to the initiator.

Some authors consider that hybrid war would have appeared in the 21st century, but a brief recourse to the history of armed confrontations, only from the 20th century, reveals the existence of many similarities with the concept of hybrid warfare. There are, of course, quite a few differences because the technology has evolved a lot, both for the production of lethal and destructive means, and for those in the “*soft power*” category. It is worth mentioning the role of the international community and international governmental organisations which, through decisions and regulations, have sought to resolve differences between states peacefully, and in the event of violent conflicts to reduce the number of victims and destruction. These requirements have materialised in conceptual and technological adaptations that have reduced collateral and unnecessary losses. This is how surgical precision strikes, intelligent weapon systems, unmanned aerial vehicles, drones, research robots, military satellites, etc. were made.

The hybrid war is an example of adapting the war phenomenon to the evolution of the international security situation and the information

⁷ Paul Virilio, *Un monde surexposé: fin de l'histoire ou fin de la géographie?*, in *Le monde diplomatique*, August 1997, p. 17, apud Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalizarea și efectele ei sociale*, Editura Antet, Oradea, ISBN 973-9241-91-3, pp. 16-17.

⁸ Christopher Goker, *Future War*, Polity Press, 2014, UK, p. 137.

technology, by applying the principles of armed struggle to this situation, especially the principle of achieving surprise and avoiding surprise. Each and every military commander knows that he or she will have a better chance of winning a confrontation if he or she manages to capture the enemy. Therefore, the production of new means of combat and new weapon systems will also require an adaptation of the concepts. Under the conditions when these elements of novelty are not known by the adversaries, they constitute prerequisites for achieving surprise in the armed confrontations. Through the concept of hybrid warfare many of the conditions presented above are fulfilled, which has led some authors to assert that the war is similar to a chameleon⁹, because it always changes its form and it is continuous¹⁰.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE USE OF DISINFORMATION IN ARMED CONFRONTATIONS

Communication is a way in which people relate to each other, but also communities, and it is a method of communication through which people and human communities intend to reach their goals, regardless of the legal and moral norms that govern human societies.

When approaching the subject of disinformation, renowned specialists from all over the world have quite different opinions, but these opinions have at least two elements in common: the interest and intention of disinformation initiators to hide (distort, truncate, modify) the reality by: inventing bomb news, minimising important events, exacerbating the importance of events that are insignificant for the public interest, etc., events and actions meant to divert public attention from the compromising aspects for the disinformation initiators or to impose ideas, projects, objectives that satisfy the interests of the initiators. The ways to achieve these goals are different



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⁹ Mihail Orzeață, *Suntem pregătiți pentru războiul viitorului?*, in *Gândirea Militară Românească* Journal no. 4 (October-December) 2016, pp. 20-29, published by Statul Major General, București, http://www.smg.gmr.ro/gmr/Arhiva_pdf/2016/revista_4_final.pdf, retrieved in December 2019.

¹⁰ Mihail Orzeață, *Războiul continuu*, Editura Militară, București, 2011, see also Tom Toles, *Friday Rant: Perpetual War Edition*, in *The Washington Post*, 26 September 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/opinions/wp/2014/09/26/friday-rant-perpetual-war-edition/>, retrieved in October 2019.



Disinformation existed in some armed confrontation because some military commanders were interested in hiding from their adversary the data regarding their own troops that they considered to be vulnerabilities (weaknesses), but also to watch over his strengths (centers) and intentions.

both by the means and by the methods that are used. Since Sun Tzu, considered by some to be a “*prophet of disinformation*”¹¹, many civilian and military experts have studied disinformation and presented their ideas in studies and papers considered to be benchmarks in the field, although some of them seem to contain “*an amalgam of terms*”¹². To support this assertion, we present the opinions of some well-known specialists:

- “*disinformation is the set of dialectical processes intentionally put into play in order to succeed in the treacherous manipulation of individuals, groups or an entire society in order to deviate them from political conduct, to dominate their way of thinking or even to subjugate them*”¹³;
- “*disinformation is the manipulation of the public opinion (not individuals) for political purposes (otherwise it could be propaganda) of truthful information, or not (it is not the truthfulness of the information that matters but the way it is presented)*”¹⁴;
- “*manipulation is an instrument of disinformation, along with intoxication, propaganda, influence, lying, tactical cunning, subversion and diversion*”¹⁵.

It may seem paradoxical, but disinformation is disheartened, even rejected, by the moral norms of the society because, in the vast majority of cases, it is associated with the lie, but in the armed confrontations it is accepted by both International Law, which considers it a “*war stratagem*”¹⁶ as well as the military regulations that define it by the phrase “*military deception [meant] to contribute to the fulfillment of the mission*”¹⁷.

Disinformation existed in some armed confrontation because some military commanders were interested in hiding from their adversary the data regarding their own troops that they considered

¹¹ Călin Hentea, *Noile haine ale propagandei*, Editura Paralela 45, București, 2008, p. 59.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Henri Pierre Cathala, *Epoca dezinformării*, Editura Militară, București, 1991, p. 24.

¹⁴ Vladimir Volhov, *Dezinformarea văzută din Est*, Editura ProEditură și Tipografie, București, 2007, p. 24.

¹⁵ Ștefan Stanciugelu, *Logica manipulării*, Editura C.H. Beck, București, 2010, p. 64.

¹⁶ Ion Dragoman, *Drept internațional umanitar*, Fundația Andrei Șaguna, Constanța, 1999, p. 69.

¹⁷ *Doctrine for Information Operations*, Joint Pub 3-13, February 1998, United States of America.

to be vulnerabilities (weaknesses), but also to watch over his strengths (centers) and intentions.

Historians have recorded famous acts of disinformation (deception) such as:

- The Gleiwitz incident, which was the pretext for the outbreak of World War II – 1 September 1939¹⁸;
- the moment of the aggression against the USSR – Operation Barbarossa – in the Second World War – 22 June 1941;
- the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on the US Pacific Fleet – 7 December 1941 – and the outbreak of the Pacific War between Japan and the US;
- the place and time of the Allied landing, in World War II – June 6, 1944, Normandy;
- relocation and installation of Soviet medium-range missiles in Cuba (1962)¹⁹ – during the Cold War;
- the changed perception over Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevich and the Serbian people, before the Kosovo war broke out²⁰;
- influencing American public opinion and part of the international community to support the outbreak of the second Gulf War and to halt Iraqi weapons of mass destruction development programs²¹.

THE USE OF DISINFORMATION IN THE HYBRID WAR IN UKRAINE

The causes of the crisis in Ukraine are manifold, both internal (poor economic performance, political and ethno-linguistic division), and external (influence of the population by Russia in order not to accept the country's integration into the Euro-Atlantic organisations,



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¹⁸ Dennis Whitehead, *The Gleiwitz Incident*, in "After Battle Magazine", no. 142, March 2009 (http://en.wikipedia.org/Gleiwitz_incident/, retrieved in November 2019).

¹⁹ Igor A. Amosov, Captain First Rank (ret.) Professor, Ph. D., *Caribbean Missile Crisis, 1962 – The World on the Brink of Nuclear Catastrophe*, in colonel dr. Petre Otu, colonel Gheorghe Vartic, locotenent-colonel dr. Mihai Macuc (coord.), *On Both Sides of the Iron Curtain*, Editura Militară, București, 2001, pp. 237-246.

²⁰ Simona Ștefănescu, *Media și conflictele*, Editura Tritonic, București, 2004, pp. 194-218.

²¹ Alexandru Ioan, *Între putere și democrație. Presa în politica internă și internațională*, Editura Centrului Tehnic-Editorial al Armatei, București, 2017, pp. 145-158, see also Tim Weiner, *CIA, O istorie secretă*, Editura Litera Internațional, București, 2009, pp. 355-356 și 364-366.



The disinformation initiated by Moscow was supported by decisions in the political, diplomatic, economic, financial, cultural, informational and military plans, that were disseminated throughout the world through a highly developed and performing media apparatus.

influence of the population by the West to eliminate corruption and the development of democracy, with a view to the integration into Euro-Atlantic organisations). Against this backdrop of internal contradictions and external influences, Ukraine has become a space of confrontation between Russia and the West²².

In order to support its declared interests (supporting the Russian population in eastern Ukraine and stopping NATO expansion to the east) and undeclared (regaining the status of world superpower and the possible restoration of the USSR), the leadership of the Russian Federation launched extensive actions to influence the Ukrainian population., but also the international community through manipulation and disinformation. The disinformation initiated by Moscow was supported by decisions in the political, diplomatic, economic, financial, cultural, informational and military plans, that were disseminated throughout the world through a highly developed and performing media apparatus. The actions of Kremlin are considered hybrid warfare specific actions by most Western specialists and Euro-Atlantic organisations.

The disinformation campaign against the Ukrainian population, carried out by the Russian leadership, evolved mainly upwards, in terms of magnitude and intensity, after 2000, when President Vladimir Putin came to lead the Federation. Among the most important and extensive disinformation campaigns, carried out until the onset of the current crisis in Ukraine, are those aimed at influencing the 2004 and 2010 presidential elections.

If in 2004 the Russian campaign of influence prevailed over the pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich, popular protests, generated by pro-Western militants, led to the resumption of the electoral process and the victory of candidate Yushchenko²³, the man who wanted to direct the country to NATO and the EU and to cause the withdrawal of Russian military forces from the Crimean Peninsula.

²² Mihail Orzeață, *Ucraina – spațiu de confruntare între Rusia și Occident*, in Eugen Lungu, coordinator, *Federația Rusă și echilibrul de putere în secolul al XXI-lea*, pp. 95-127, Editura Militară, București, 2019.

²³ Malin Ostevik, *Communicating Conflict: Russian Mediated Public Diplomacy in Relation to the Annexation of Crimea*, University of Oslo, May 2016, p. 21.

In 2010, Viktor Yanukovich ran again, backed by Moscow, and won the chair of the President of Ukraine. From this position, Viktor Yanukovich signed the extension of the Russian-Ukrainian agreement on the stationing of the Federation forces in Crimea until 2017 and the loan agreement of 15 billion USD from Russia, in package with the agreement to reduce the Russian natural gas, delivered to Ukraine. Although the details of the negotiations for these agreements were not officially communicated, unofficial but well-informed sources revealed the Kremlin's condition imposed to Yanukovich not to sign the Association Agreement with the EU.

President Yanukovich complied about the condition imposed by the Moscow leadership and did not sign the agreement with the EU, but his gesture sparked massive protests in Kiev and then across the country. The protests have degenerated into violent clashes with law enforcement, prompting President Yanukovich to take refuge in Russia in February 2014 and call on his Russian counterpart to intervene militarily to save the country from undemocratic forces.

Against this background of political instability, street violence and tendencies towards authoritarianism, promoted by right-wing forces, the Moscow leadership intensified the disinformation campaign towards the Ukrainian population, the international community and its own population. In this way, it achieved several notable successes, such as:

- the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula (18 March 2014²⁴), without firing any fire, but benefiting from the support of the Russian ethnic population from the peninsula and from the actions of some military members without insignia of belonging, previously infiltrated in the strategic areas and several tens of thousands of combat-equipped soldiers stationed on the border with Ukraine to “prevent the infiltration of extremist elements into Russia”;

²⁴ Ilya Somin, *Russian Government Agency Reveals Fraudulent Nature of the Crimean Referendum Results*, in *The Washington Post*, 6 April 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2014/05/06/russian-government-agency-reveals-fraudulent-nature-of-the-crimean-referendum-results/> retrieved in 2020.



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The efforts of the Russian Federation to break the economic-financial blockade, established by the European Union against it, materialized in bilateral economic-financial relations with Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Germany and Bulgaria.

- supporting the secession of the Lugansk and Donetsk regions, populated mostly with Russian ethnic groups, self-proclaimed republics, under the pretext of an intention to exterminate (alienate) the Russians from Ukraine, an intention attributed to former Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko²⁵;
- gaining the trust of the majority of the Russian population in Ukraine, which voted for the integration of self-proclaimed republics in the Russian Federation;
- the ascension of its status in international relations, a status maintained by the other members of the BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), but also by the states in conflict with the US and some western states;
- attempting to destabilise NATO by approaching Turkey, to which it sells S-400 ground-to-air missiles, leading to the exclusion of Ankara from the F-35 program²⁶;
- the efforts of the Russian Federation to break the economic-financial blockade, established by the European Union against it, materialized in bilateral economic-financial relations with Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Germany and Bulgaria²⁷.

CONCLUSIONS

Disinformation is a method of influencing large masses of people, in a declarative plane, by political personalities and by states, which is used quite often in subversive campaigns, meant to lead, by any means, to the achievement of great objectives.

The Internet, through the social networks and the classical mass media²⁸, has greatly contributed to the increase in the scope

²⁵ Mark Thompson, *Russian Forces Double Along Ukraine Border*, in *Time*, 28 March 2014, <http://time.com/41490/russia-ukraine-crimea-putin/>, retrieved in November 2019; see also Maria Dejevsky, *News of a Russian Arms Buildup Next to Ukraine Is Part of Propaganda War*, in *The Guardian*, 11 April 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentsisfree/2014/apr/11/russian-arms-buildup-ukraine-propaganda-war-nato/>, retrieved in November 2019.

²⁶ Ted Galen Carpenter, *Is It Time to Expel Turkey from NATO?*, in *The National Interest*, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-skeptics/it-time-expel-turkey-nato-14518>, retrieved in September 2019, see also Burak Bekdil, *Turkey: Putin's Ally in NATO?*, Gatestone Institute, 19 March 2019, <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/13882/turkey-putin-ally-nato>, retrieved on September 2019.

²⁷ Tatia Dolidze, *EU Sanctions Policy towards Russia: The Sanctioner-Sanctionee's Game of Throne*, CEPS Working Document, Center for European Policy, No. 402, pp. 8-9, January 2015, <http://www.ceps.be/system/files/WD%20402%20TD%20Sanctions.pdf>, retrieved on 10 April 2015.

²⁸ Sonia Cristina Stan, *Manipularea prin presă*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2004, pp. 35-36.

and efficiency of the manipulation and disinformation campaigns²⁹. Lately, the media in general, and opinion formers in particular, have played an important role in disseminating false information. Thus, there has been a significant increase in the number of news programs that amplify prefabricated and exaggerated narratives.

With the development of artificial intelligence technologies, disinformation campaigns have become much more sophisticated and better organised, in order to direct citizens' attention to preconceived narratives, to discredit political opponents, and to counteract different opinions.

In an information environment oversaturated with false information, preconceived narratives that appeal to personal prejudices are very accessible. Some researchers in the field have associated preconceived narratives with epidemics, respectively the spread of preconceived narratives is similar to the spread of viruses. They transcend the information space, moving from one cognitive system to another. Therefore, the problem is not irrational trust, but it concerns a much deeper aspect, namely the systems of personal beliefs that determine decisions and form prejudices. Thus, experts claim that the human cognitive system perceives the world around it as divided into objects located in space and time, but is not always able to faithfully reproduce its shape.

The disinformation campaigns carried out by the Russian Federation against the Ukrainian population and the international community have brought it numerous international criticisms and sanctions, mainly from Western states, but they have also generated an upward course of its status in the international arena which was indirectly recognised through the accusations of influencing the presidential election in the United States of America. The rise of the Russian Federation in the international arena is facilitated by the increase of anti-globalisation, anti-Western and anti-American currents and feelings.



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²⁹ Vladimir Volhov defines television as a “paradise of misinformation”, in a world where cybernetics is a real Olympus and the internet the “trade plains” of disinformation Vladimir Volkoff, *Tratat de dezinformare. De la calul troian la internet*, Ed. Antet, ISBN 973-9241-87-5, p. 213.



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