Propaganda and Information Warfare in Contemporary World: Definition Problems, Instruments and Historical Context

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Abstract–**Attention to the problems of propaganda and information wars has recently grown in accordance with the results of communications revolution. In turn, definitions, instruments and historical context related to informational conflicts are being reconsidered. The article deals with the state of these processes in contemporary world, their evaluations by experts, the efficiency of methods of influence on collective and individual conscience of home and outsider audiences.**

Keywords–*propaganda, information warfare, communication tools and models*

I. INTRODUCTION

Globalization and revolution in communications have substantially changed the global media space. Currents of information have extraordinarily increased in volume, and began to grow at an exponential rate with the arrival of the Internet. They can now easily bypass regulatory bodies, state borders and can be instantly spread in social networks.

Growth of the volume of information allows for not only forming public opinion, but also manipulating it with much greater ease than in the past and wage large-scale information wars [1].

During these wars a country's information space inevitably transforms into a single propaganda space. It conforms to united goals of creating an image of an enemy and justifying the current government policy. It is known that external propaganda is not capable of destroying a unified information space of an enemy country. Because of this propaganda efforts are as a rule focused on narrow marginal social layers (pacifists, social dropouts, political opponents of the existing enemy government, disloyal national minorities, etc.), with the aim to prompt them to act against engaging in a war and weaken military effort of the their own government.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this article we strive to examine the existing definitions of the subject of our analysis, tools and methods used by sides of the information confrontations, as well as their participants. Naturally, this is impossible to do without referring to the works of the specialists on information warfare and without the comparison of the existing definitions, as well as without looking at the historical experience provided by a plethora of sources.

Information sphere of human activities has been historically changing as a result of the influence of common social factors [2] These factors are connected with the decrease in the availability of new territories, demographic changes in certain regions and on Earth in general (surplus of population needed for traditional occupations leads to a part of society finding themselves outside the customary situation of information exchange, and the lack of population needed for sustenance of a given territory leads to people from other regions migrating and bringing different cultural values and information that is unique for this region).

Changes in information sphere are also connected with radical occupation changes – for example, when migration from rural to urban areas occurs, or with transition from manufacturing to service activities, with a change of the scale of occupation – from the spheres completely covered by an individual (growing crops, handicrafts) to spheres that require interaction between a number of individuals (factory manufacturing); finally, with the progress of the information communications and technologies [3].

III. SUBJECT AND DEFINITIONS OF INFORMATION WARFARE

It is known that any information has both positive and negative roles. The problem lies not as much in the contents of information it as it is in the influence it has on people, in the power and efficiency of the images and meanings used. A lot also depends on which target groups of consumers receive the information. For instance, lives of politicians and other public figures are becoming more and more transparent; there are more and more causes for their potential discreditation and using them for propaganda purposes. The only way to preserve the process of decision making that influences state policy in secrecy is the creation of a special information shield [4]. As Winston Churchill said, "In wartime, truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies." It becomes increasingly difficult to discern truth in the abundant flow of information, which creates the opportunity to hide the decisions that influence the image of the country. The results of those decisions become the subjects of the real information wars.

The term "information warfare" has appeared much later than the term "propaganda". Propaganda means the dissemination of views, facts, arguments and details,

including knowingly false ones, in order to form public opinion or for other purposes pursued by propagandists. The term "propaganda" began to be widely used just before the First World War and during its days. The term "information warfare", in turn, was coined only in the second half of the 20th century [5]. The key difference between propaganda and information war is, in our view, as follows: propaganda is being conducted on a continuous basis, whereas information warfare – only in certain periods, which, as a rule either precede or coincide with a conventional, hybrid or cold war [6]. Propaganda emphasizes the positive images of "us" and information war emphasizes the negative images of "others". Information warfare represents the most concentrated propaganda campaigns aimed at creating an image of an enemy and convincing the population in the justness of the governmental cause, as well in the necessity to defend certain values and strive to achieve certain goals. In these campaigns some parts of information become falsified, and the information that is true gets manipulated and dissected in order to comply with the goals of the information war.

According to one of the definitions, propaganda represents sayings or actions by individuals or groups created with certain aims in order to influence the opinions or actions of other individuals or groups [7, 8]. However, this definition seems to us to be too general. That is due to the fact that essentially any producer of information ultimately strives to influence the position of individuals or groups. In our opinion it would be more correct to define propaganda as information that has been prepared in certain way aimed at making individuals and groups share a certain position and line of behavior towards given events.

For example, it is known that citizens of one country can consider themselves as peaceful and kind people. And if it is then discovered that these same people collectively hate somebody, a discussion begins with the aim of saving the idea of peacefulness and kindness, that propaganda is to blame, that it is the propaganda that incites hatred. At the same time propaganda professionals know that it can only be successful when it complies with the existing expectations of people. Propaganda can heat up the conflict, provide arguments if they are needed, but it is not capable of becoming the reason of ordinary citizens' hatred towards some object. When people understand that their views or behavior are far from being ideal, they gladly represent themselves as victims of propaganda, but in situations when they are confident in being right they believe that they had puzzled everything out themselves and what they see on the screens only confirms their findings. That is why blaming propaganda as a reason of collective hatred towards something or somebody means closing the opportunity to understand and explain these reasons together with the group conscience [9].

The term "information warfare" means influencing not only the domestic population, but also has two other meanings: firstly, influencing the civil and / or military population of a different state by disseminating certain information; secondly, purposeful actions taken in order to achieve informational advantage by damaging adversary's information, information processes and information systems while simultaneously protecting own information, information processes and information systems. Based on historic experience, the first of the given definitions is more often used during the periods of peace and implies that there is only "cold" war between states. The second predominantly refers to the actions taken during a real, hot war. In such times all means for disinformation and demoralization of both civil and military populations are used. The main principle of conducting an information war is "the enemy is always wrong, our side is always right" [10].

IV. INSTRUMENTS AND EFFICIENCY

Propaganda began to play a significant role when the majority of population in the countries of European civilization became literate. At that point means of communication capable of delivering information to wide audiences of population had appeared. We would like to remind that these means are newspapers and magazines that achieved mass circulation, whereas even in the middle of the 19th century their circulation was limited to only several thousands of copies. Posters, postcards, leaflets and brochures, as well as cinematography that was taking its first steps, also became a part of mass communications. Print editions of books were still small, so books mainly influenced the intellectual part of society. After the First World War the print editions of books increased, and so did the sphere of their influence. Starting from 1920-s such powerful instrument of mass communication as radio appeared. It became an important tool of influence on illiterate population and soon spread all over the world. At the same time cinematography also became a considerable instrument of mass communication. From the mid-20th century television has been playing an ever-increasing role as a means of communication, and it still remains to be the most powerful propaganda tool. Starting from the 1980-s the Internet has become an important instrument of communication, and from the beginning of the 21st century – social networks that have been since forcing television out, especially within the most educated part of the audience.

Propaganda and information warfare are most efficient in the states with strong authoritarian regimes, since most media there are under the government control, which introduces hard censorship and coordination of how the media shape the desired positive or negative images within the majority of population. And since such information delivery regime exists not only during the times of hot war, but also during the time of peace, the transfer to the mode of information war is conducted quickly and easily [11]. In democratic countries purposeful propaganda on a state level is used during war times only and is conducted in the form of information warfare. In such times censorship over the coverage of military actions and internal events is introduced. The government tries to influence media in order to create the enemy image from the opposing side in war. The influence is conducted through financing of the government media and specific information projects, as well as through introduction of new legislation in the form of tax benefits for media that serve the military needs, and consequently, that participate in the information war. At the same time, since the freedom of speech is preserved, even if limited by the wartime conditions, critical views of the images imposed by the government are possible within the society. Their acceptance does not have such a total quality as in totalitarian states [12].

If modern audiences in developed democratic countries, or at least its most progressive parts that form the public opinion, are to be discussed, then we have to take into consideration that the words "propaganda" and "information warfare" themselves entail a strong negative connotation. It is precisely because of this reason why propaganda in such countries is characterized by a more discreet and less totalitarian quality. Real discussions and expressions of viewpoints opposing the governmental ones are acceptable in the media [13]. Propaganda in such countries can be efficient only under the condition of at least superficial objectivity and freedom of criticism [14].

The notion of the quality of information in connected to the interpretation of purposeful human actions. Information technologies that appeared in the end of the 20th century have changed the worldviews and have made the interpretation of the information sources more difficult [15]. This has led to a fast and uncontrolled increase in the volume of information and has drastically reduced the quality of information, both in terms of its reliability and in terms of the opportunities to verify the degree of its reliability. It is currently almost impossible to perform the necessary critical evaluation of the information. Even if a researcher or a regular consumer receive information that, for example, they regard as new, it is not necessarily so because similar or equal results could have been achieved and used by other researchers and by other consumers of information.

Archives, museums, collections, education models and science can serve as means of information exchange. In the process of these means being used thinking is activated, research regarding how to overcome the absence of a material necessary to create a product is conducted, consideration takes place regarding what words and terms need to be used to express the result, etc. However, since in modern conditions the production of an information resource is a commercial undertaking, its manufacturers often imitate the product and add stimulating additives to make it sell better. A manufacturer tries to replace facts with emotions (fear, disgust, mysticism, etc). Instead of rational inquiry an appeal takes place to subconscious structures of pre-logic thinking, to subconsciousness, to consumer instincts (8). At the same time, exactly the same stimulators are used when a legitimately reliable information product, or at least product the seems reliable, is sold. The absence of these stimulators leads to a consumer regarding information as boring. But in the case where we deal with false information, stimulators, as a rule, constitute its main contents. It is important then to draw consumer's attention not to the core of information, but to its external effects. The growth of the volume of the false information leads to a situation where instead of accumulated real knowledge a deficit of real information and imposition of stereotypes appear [16]. These stereotypes conform to the information fashion – things that everybody has heard, read and known.

V. COGNITIVE SCHEMES AND BEHAVIOUR MODELS

It is obvious today that the methods of information warfare influence collective consciousness similarly to how methods of psychotherapy influence individual consciousness. Psychologists know that survival mechanisms get activated under anxiety disorders. An individual picks danger signals from the incoming information and blocks safety signals. Under such therapy a person reacts more to the cognitive schemes in his or her head rather than reality.

Cognitive schemes that define the mode of behaviour can be represented in the following sequence: personalization, when all events are interpreted by an individual too personally; dichotomous thinking, when all events are processed either as good (wonderful) or bad (terrible); selective abstractions, when evaluation of one detail transforms into an evaluation of the whole situation; spontaneous reasoning, when reasoning that is not based on facts becomes definitive for consciousness; overgeneralization, when generalization is made based on a single or several randomly chosen facts; finally, exaggeration, catastrophization, when destructive consequences of some event are greatly exaggerated [17].

Often human actions are guided not by the knowledge of the real situation, but rather by a pre-set scheme of interpretation of events. If this scheme exists, we begin to accept only those signals that confirm it. However, an alternative model of the world and specific situation are opposing such cognitive model. For example, an opposition of the same images exists in traditional and official cultures. This is also used in propaganda. Its arsenal is equipped with the replacement of one worldview with the other. A process of re-coding occurs when the initial message is transformed beyond recognition. A propaganda message includes three stages of preparation: attraction and arousal of attention; arousal of emotions; demonstration of the way to relieve the emotional tension. If necessary, a propaganda specialist can reinforce or slow down the pace of change of the public opinion, but he or she is incapable of returning it into the initial state [18].

A tool of diverting information is often utilized in information wars – one of diverting from actions (future or past) and the other diverting from information itself. The first option is often used during military operations. Historians have tracked in detail how Stalin was deceived regarding the start of military operations in 1941, how Hitler was deceived regarding the Allied Forces landing place. The second option is connected with the struggle to define the current agenda, when media set the problems that the public discusses. The media can exercise their influence both through the news selection and through changing the importance of the news. In the case when messages from opponents come regularly, the following tools are used in interactions with them: describing actions in a way that sets a more favourable tone; putting an emphasis on a different action while diverting the attention from the public action; emphasizing the negative side of the opponent; disproving the information [19].

American sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld built a scheme of two-step model of communication. He showed that the influence of information increases as the result of discussion with those who are accepted as "opinion leaders" in the society. Their difference in democratic and non-democratic countries is that they appear as a result of competitive process in the first, and are appointed from above in the second [20]. A system of regular surveys exists, including those connected with major TV-companies. A lot of attention is paid to the representativeness of the sample and precise evaluation of

dispositions of certain groups of population. It provides for timely adjustments of propaganda, elimination of uprising contradictions of propaganda stereotypes and public opinion. The research of indirect influence of the media in the framework of a multi-step information flow concept shows that along with the channels of mass communications that affect "opinion leaders" the are also interpersonal informal channels of information that should be covered when conducting information war.

VI. CONCLUSION

The drastic change of the information sphere of human activity has led to, on one hand, the transparency of the political life and, on the other, the building of its defence with respective shields of disinformation. Propaganda with its long and continuous history builds around this, as well as information wars that arise at certain periods and that represent concentrated propaganda campaigns [21]. The efficiency of these wars largely depends on the political regime of a given state, but at the same time also on those cutting-edge technologies that provide the opportunity to overcome the total control over currents of information and reduce the verification of their reliability: facts are replaced with emotions, rational is displaced by subconscious, cognitive model is opposed with an alternative worldview based on re-coding of reality [22]. Considering all this, experts on propaganda in information wars develop new ways of deciphering and overcoming the methods of influencing people, based on using the stereotypes, opposition and psychotherapy.

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