

INFORMATION DIVERSION AS A TOOL OF HYBRID WARFARE

In the modern world, the problem of information sabotage is becoming particularly relevant as a new tool of hybrid warfare [11, p. 32] is capable of having a serious impact on the stability of the social and political situation in a particular country or in the region, in general, is becoming particularly relevant. Issues related to the protection of human and civil rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as issues related to the improvement of information security and digital stability of the state, are of paramount importance at the moment.

The development and improvement of mechanisms for protecting and safeguarding human beings and society, as well as activities to resist an aggressive policy, including those in the media space, are priority tasks of deep concern to the population and political leadership of any sovereign state.

There is a quite well-reasoned opinion proving that “the whole development of mankind is inseparably connected with wars. Historical experts have counted that in each century, humanity has existed in peace for only one week. From war to war, there is a continuous process of improvement of weapons” [12]. It is significant that this development in military thought is related not only to traditional types of weapons but also to new ways of warfare that bring principally new but no smaller damage to the opponent.

The powerful technological leap that took place between the 20th and 21st centuries has once again forced humanity to change its views on the content and essence of wars. The widespread availability of computer hardware, including the creation of the global network ‘The Internet’ as: “a communication network and a worldwide system of interconnected computer networks for storing and transmitting information” [3], have become the most essential prerequisites for the arrival of the digital age [7], which largely determined new reality where technology is also used to conduct a new type of military action: **information** warfare. Cyberattacks [2, p. 187], network sabotage are the most recent effective tools for carrying out psychological and political operations, the aims of which are often:

- changing the vector of foreign policy of the opponent country, changing the course of development of international relations of this state;
- influencing the internal political process of the enemy (based on its own motivations, goals and tasks);
- destabilization of the institutional system and corresponding impact on the relations between the government and society inside the opposing country.

It is necessary to realize that modern technologies that are used in information wars can do no less harm to the enemy than ‘traditional’ methods based on the use of military force. Such attacks (without the direct use of the army) are often more profitable for the country that started the information pressure because they cause no less damage at lower financial costs. Also, at current moment, such psychological and political operations are not within the responsibility of any international regulator. Legal responsibility, the risk of facing sanctions due to this type of information aggression is practically absent. Thus, the ‘efficiency – cost’ indicator is often one of the main reasons for choosing information campaigns over ‘regular’ wars. New technologies turn out to be more perspective, and their use allows achieving the same political aims with less risk.

An example of sabotage using the latest information technologies to destabilize the internal political climate within the framework of the hybrid confrontation “Russia – Collective West” can be regarded as an example of the events of October 2023, which took place in the Dagestan Republic. In the evening of 29 October 2023, several thousand people broke into the territory of Makhachkala airport. The outburst of such delinquent behavior among the local population was caused by the fact that a flight from Tel Aviv had arrived. In the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict that was unfolding and the newly emerging active hostilities in the Middle East region, the residents of Makhachkala faced an active information campaign to spread anti-Semitic sentiments and ideas of religious, national and other superiority of Russian citizens over Israelis. This information diversion was realized via media resources, including messengers such as Telegram [10].

This incident provoked a wide resonance in both national and foreign media. Many regional authorities gave their comments on this incident [10]. The President of the Russian Federation also commented on the mass riots in the region, paying ‘attention of the heads of all regions, heads of law enforcement agencies and special services to the need for solid timely and clear actions to protect the constitutional order of Russia, the rights and freedoms of our citizens, ethnic and religious harmony’ [4].

The prerequisites for such crimes were identified by many journalists as ‘rumors spread through social networks and messengers about the accommodation in Dagestan of Jewish refugees evacuated from Israel’ [4]. Western news agencies and mainstream American political figures quickly called the events in the Republic of Dagestan ‘anti-Semitic pogroms’ [8], ‘bloody massacre at the airport’ [16], ‘a rebellion of the Russian Muslims’ [13]. This Russia's internal political incident became a common and widely distributed information occasion for ‘Collective Western’ media at the same time [1, p. 26].

The riots in Dagestan were used in social and political interests, as they allowed the Western press to show Russia as a country divided by ethnic, religious and other

inner conflicts, where local and federal authorities are poorly organized, incompetent and unable to cope with their duties. The information that such illegal acts were organized by media curators from abroad, such as Abakar Abakarov, the administrator of the 'Utro Dagestan' telegram-channel, who according to media reports [17] lives in Turkey and is known to co-operate with the Security Service of Ukraine and Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami terrorist group or Ilya Ponomarev (foreign agent [14], listed in the register of extremists and terrorists by Rosfinmonitoring [15]), who according to the media [5] is a citizen of Ukraine, assisting in the work of the center of information and psychological operations of Ukrainian Armed Forces, are purposely kept silent by news agencies from Europe and North America. Thus, informational sabotage, as an integral part of hybrid war, is masked as domestic political conflicts.

In conclusion, it should be noted that informational diversion is a powerful tool in the arsenal of hybrid wars. The growing role of information technologies in public life creates new opportunities to manipulate public consciousness, destabilize the socio-political climate, and provoke conflicts. Such harmful actions, which bring chaos and disorganization to the political system, need particularly close monitoring by authorized bodies. The society needs to be careful about the information and digital environment and resist criminal calls; this is essential to prevent information diversions from having such damaging consequences.

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