Value of Information Wars in Ethnopolitical Conflicts as Exemplified by Kosovo and South Ossetia

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Abstract – **The main target of the information war is influencing a socio-political structure of the society with the objective to exert pressure aimed at its further subordination. This can affect both international state authority discredit and its inner destruction thereby causing irreparable damage to the country and its allies. Information wars can lead to political changes at both the local and regional as well as international levels. They contribute to generating new strategic alliances and changing political centers of attraction. The relevance of the article is stipulated by the importance of information wars as the main component of ethno-political conflicts in the modern world as well as the most important tool of political coercion. Information wars are one of the most important aspects of modern society due to the development of information and communication technologies. The object of the present study is information warfare in ethno-political conflicts. The subject of the research is the information war in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Republic of South Ossetia. The theoretical aspects of the information war phenomenon are analyzed, which is of great applied value since the study of this phenomenon contributes to the development of strategies in the matters of national security and also reduces the degree of information and psychological impact. The degree of the information component influence on the formation of world public opinion during an information war is revealed. The study analyzes the importance of information war using the example of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Republic of South Ossetia. Information war phenomenon appeared in scientific terminology not very long ago. Therefore, this aspect is understudied, which requires further in-depth comprehensive research.**

Keywords – information war, armed conflict, international community, public opinion, Yugoslavia, Republic of South Ossetia

I. INTRODUCTION

The foundations of the modern information war were formulated in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. A detailed study of social groups existing in society and their moods as well as the channels, intensity and nature of their interaction with the political elite for a purposeful influence on public opinion is expected with the objective to achieve the goals of an information war.

Information technology, which is directly used in information wars, is prior to other means of struggle due to the total influence on the psychological and moral state of the citizens belonging to a warring party.

Application of these technologies in an information war is dangerous due to the fact that states security services cannot fully ensure the information security of their country against the background of the impossibility of timely recognition of this type of leverage.

Propaganda is one of the techniques of information war. It disorientates population, which can lead to a decrease in the authority of state power and its legitimacy thereby provoking political instability and a split in society within the state. Such processes can lead to civil confrontation and political conflicts [1].

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The authors studying the phenomenon of information war fall into three main groups:

1. Supporters of the first group believe that this is a phenomenon related to the peaceful period. This approach is based on solving non-violent political problems as well as applying preventive measures to control potential conflicts [2].

2. Supporters of the second group believe that information war is a new type of struggle, where the protection of one's own information space becomes no less important than the resistance and use of various information technologies in an information war. Protecting your own information field is relevant since the information war continues in peacetime and it is undeclared and unpredictable [3].

3. Supporters of the third group being the representatives of military science believe that information wars are

not conducted in peacetime but are an accompanying element during an open military confrontation aimed to demoralize the opposing side. In this regard, it is necessary to achieve and maintain information superiority over the opponent [4].

Since the early 20th century when mass media generated and started spreading, the power of the media as an instrument of influencing public consciousness and shaping public opinion became rather clear. The 21st century characterized by being the century of information technology revealed the importance of victory in the information field. In some cases, the victory on the information front makes it possible to defeat the enemy even before the commencement of hostilities [5].

The phenomenon of information warfare has been investigated by many scientists and experts. G. Murklinskaya indicates that after the military operation in Iraq in the early 90s of the 20th century the Americans created a concept of so called revolution in military affairs, which focuses on conducting a more humane military operations using non-lethal weapons by means of new information technologies, which made it possible to facilitate the process of control, management and was also used for intelligence purposes.

M. Libiki being one of the founders of the information warfare concept noted that the information war is a type of conflict whose main task is to protect their information systems, distort and manipulate the opponent's information and prevent the enemy from accessing and processing information. According to Libika, the main goal of the information war is not to defeat the enemy in a straight-line collision but to establish and maintain control over everyone [6].

According to I. Vasilenko, information war is a systematic information influence on the entire enemy's information and communication system and neutralization of a state with the objective to create a favorable, global information environment for any political and geopolitical operations that provide maximum control over the territory [7].

On the other hand, G. Viren believes that information warfare is a set of measures aimed to influence the mass consciousness by means of information in order to change people's behavior and impose goals that are not among their interests as well as protection from such influences [8].

The methodological basis of the study is a systemic, structural-functional method, methods of comparative analysis and synthesis, analogy and induction.

III. Results

In the modern world, the threat of information technology influence on public consciousness is being increased in order to turn the status quo to advantage. The information war applies various tools of information suppression. Nowadays, the world community has faced the problem of controlling the impact of information technology in the information war, which provides the basis for protecting information resources and developing information security technologies.

Various approaches to the concept of information war have been studied, which is of great practical importance. A comparative analysis of the use of information technology in the information war in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Republic of South Ossetia has been carried out. As a result of the analysis, common features have been revealed in those technologies that were used in information wars in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and South Ossetia, which enables to conclude that in both cases the Anglo-Saxon model of psychological conflict management was applied.

IV. Discussions

The most striking example of using the media to influence an opponent is NATO aggression against Yugoslavia. In the 1960s Kosovo Albanians began the struggle to become independent from Yugoslavia. The situation was rapidly deteriorating and by the mid-90s grew into a murderous war [9].

At the beginning of March, 1999 the military block of NATO intervened into the conflict, which came out on the side of the Kosovo Albanians and began the bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) without UN authorization [10]. Bombing Yugoslavia was NATO's attempt to force Serbian President S. Milosevic to withdraw troops from Kosovo [11].

Actually, the result of the NATO military operation was posing international control over Kosovo. The consequence was the expulsion of the small Serb population from Kosovo and the actual separation of Kosovo from Serbia. On February 17, 2008, Kosovo's independence was proclaimed and courted controversy in the world community. Presently, more than 100 countries including the United States, Canada, Japan, Austria, Germany have recognized Kosovo's independence.

According to the representatives of the United States and some Western countries, the Kosovo precedent is unique. The recognition of Kosovo's independence should not trigger the recognition of other new self-proclaimed states [12]. In 1998, military preparations for NATO intervention into Yugoslavia began. An anti-Serbian hysteric information campaign has begun in the Western media and the topic of ethnical cleansing has been raised. As a result, Western public opinion was prepared for NATO military intervention in Yugoslavia. Having formed public opinion in the direction necessary for NATO, it thereby created a situation in which countries opposing NATO plans concerning Yugoslavia were unheard by the world community.

The purpose of the information war was:

- to create a negative image of the Yugoslav leadership headed by President S. Milosevic, by means of propagating the FRY leadership failure to manage the state economy and political processes as well as accusing them of extreme nationalism and even of ethnic cleansing;

- to project the image of victims and fighters for freedom from the nationalist Serbian burden over Kosovo Albanians, who are ready to foster a peaceful dialogue with the opposing side as well;

- to form a public opinion on the appropriateness of the Kosovo Albanians' claims of independence through manipulation of international law, specifically, the right of nations for self-determination;

- to justify the military presence of the North Atlantic alliance in Kosovo by disclosing humanitarian catastrophe in the region. Information about the plight of Kosovo Albanians was actively inflated in the media, while most of the photos and videos recorded Serbs rather than Albanians;

- to pose psychological impact and intimidation over the Yugoslavia leadership by the NATO military actions by means of demonstrating strength and military potential as well as the commitment to implement the demonstrated power;

Thus, we can say that:

- the information war conducted by the coalition of Western countries in relation to Yugoslavia was successful;

- world public consciousness was prepped for NATO military intervention by means of a clearly prepared information field;

- intimidation of the Yugoslavia leadership by the Western coalition and its demoralization has led to the inability to fully resist the information war at the international level;

- very often the media in the hands of Western political strategists in the information war around Yugoslavia turned from sources of information into a source of misinformation, thus, shaping world public opinion on the proper track;

- Serbia being in conditions of limited resources and opportunities and under constant pressure, maintained resistance in the information field and could not fully resist the combined forces of Western countries. However, it should be noted that the information war within Serbia was won;

- a well-planned and implemented information war as well as the intervention of the North Atlantic alliance in the Kosovo conflict has led to the actual separation of Kosovo from Yugoslavia. Nowadays, more than 50 % of the UN countries have recognized the independence of Kosovo;

- one of the outcomes of the information war against Yugoslavia was the establishment of the International Tribunal for prosecuting those who are responsible for major violations of international humanitarian law in the territory of the former Yugoslavia since 1991 and condemnation of war crimes, i.e. the crimes against humanity and genocide.

The models of psychological management contain several basic approaches to the pacific international conflicts settlement. It goes about the Romano-Germanic, Middle Eastern, Anglo-Saxon and East Asian approaches. These models are based on cultural and civilizational differences. However, they are mutually reinforcing. In the opinion of A.V. Manuilo, the information war accompanying the hostilities of August, 2008 in the Republic of South Ossetia clearly corresponded to the schemes and patterns of the Anglo-Saxon model of psychological conflict management [13].

The main characteristics of the Anglo-Saxon model of psychological conflict management are as follows:

1) Armed conflicts are initiated in those places where latent conflicts or conflicts of low intensity already exist. Moreover, the goal is the production of PR news focusing attention on certain points, thereby, drawing certain states into this conflict.

2) The main objective is a major participant in international relations who has a national interest in the region. Any action of the aforementioned actor (no matter whether it is active or passive in relation to the conflict) becomes a target for information and psychological warfare.

3) The outcome of informational and psychological warfare during the conflict is political myths and stereotypes, substitution and manipulation of factual evidence, which affects the world public opinion and, as a rule, an aggressor and a victim swap their roles.

4) Smart stuffing the media at certain intervals keeps viewers in suspense and prevents them from a critical analysis and their own understanding of the situation. The idea of threat to the life of the entire world community is being imposed. The population stops evaluating the situation sensibly, which results in fear spreading. The outcome of this technology is uniting against an artificially created threat and legitimizing actions aimed to interfere in the internal affairs of the parties to the conflict.

5) Direct intervention into the internal affairs of the state under the guise of a peacekeeping operation aimed to strengthen its own military presence in the region.

Nationalist leaders, led by Z. Gamsakhurdia, came to power with the collapse of the Soviet Union and Georgia independence. The policies pursued by this regime including gross violations of the island rights and freedoms of national minorities living in the GSSR caused a national liberation struggle of these peoples and led to the formation of new states, namely the Republic of South Ossetia and the Republic of Abkhazia. The first attempt to restore territorial integrity in the early 90s ended with the defeat of Georgia in both republics. In August 2008, Georgia made another attempt to annex the territory of the newly formed states [14].

The Russian operation called Forcing Georgia to Peace did not allow Georgia to implement the Clean Field operation, which was aimed at the destruction and expulsion of the ethnic Ossetians from their historical homeland [15, 16].

As in the case with Kosovo and South Ossetia, the hostilities were accompanied by an information war, which to one degree or another was waged by both sides with the support of allied states, primarily Russia and the United States.

The Georgian-Ossetian war in 2008 was accompanied by a tough information confrontation on the global stage including manipulation mechanisms and elements of information warfare. According to the majority of scientists and experts, notwithstanding the fact that Russia had the full support of the population within the country and won a convincing victory on the battlefield, it lost the information war in Georgia.

It should be noted that Georgia worked with a coalition of Western countries both on the internal information space and on the external one in the information war in August 2008. However, South Ossetia worked only in the internal information space, and the Russian Federation worked exclusively in the external information field.

The information war of Georgia and the Western coalition against South Ossetia together with the Russian Federation being its geopolitical ally and main strategic partner began long before the military invasion of the Republic of Georgia into the Republic of South Ossetia. The illegal assumption of power by M. Saakashvili as a result of the rose revolution in Georgia in November 2003 can be considered the initial stage of the information war that led to the 2008 war [17]. Information has periodically appeared on the information field about the allegedly shot-down drone belonging to the Russian Federation, the interception of Russian missiles, the arrests of Russian peacekeepers with supposedly prohibited weapons, etc., thereby creating a hostile image of the Russian Federation preparing for an invasion to the territory of Georgia in the international information field. These actions were aimed to substitute the image of Russia being the peacemaker and backer of stability in the region with the image of the aggressor. In parallel with the disinformation against Russia, Georgia presented the image of the legitimate leadership of South Ossetia as a criminal regime that keeps the entire population of South Ossetia in fear, allegedly dreaming to return to Georgian jurisdiction. The Georgian media published photos and personal data of public and political figures of South Ossetia, declaring them to be criminals, opened criminal cases against them on far-fetched charges thereby trying to demoralize the republic's leadership by analogy with the technologies used in Yugoslavia. Thus, the ground for a military invasion of South Ossetia was prepared by having formed the public opinion of the population of Western countries in a way that was beneficial to Georgia and its allies by 2008. This situation was similar to the actions of the United States of America and NATO towards Iraq and Yugoslavia.

The Internet and all Russian television channels were blocked in Georgia with the outbreak of hostilities in 2008. The population had access only to local and western sources of information, which showed a one-sided picture and distorted existing realities. Destruction and numerous casualties caused by the massive bombing of South Ossetia by Georgia and recorded in photo and video materials were distributed in the world media as the results of Russia's invasion of Georgia. South Ossetia together with Russia unlike Georgia and its allies were not ready for an information war. Having won the real war, Russia lost the information one.

V. CONCLUSION

It should be noted arom the above that:

- the information war of Georgia and the Western coalition against South Ossetia and Russia was successful;

- public opinion of the world community was prepared for the invasion of Georgia in South Ossetia;

- the media in the hands of Western political technologists turned from sources of information into a source of misinformation rather often in the information war around South Ossetia, thus shaping world public opinion in a favorable direction;

- South Ossetia, in the face of constant pressure, limited opportunities and lack of access to international political and information platforms could not put up worthy resistance to Georgia and Western countries in the information field thereby having lost the information war on the international arena. Nevertheless, the information war within South Ossetia was won;

- despite the loss in the information war, Russia and South Ossetia won the real war, which resulted in the recognition of South Ossetia as an independent and sovereign state by the Russian Federation on August 26, 2008. Russia thereby laid the foundation for the process of international legitimization of the Republic of South Ossetia.

Having analyzed information wars against Yugoslavia and the Republic of South Ossetia, we can identify the following:

- the technologies used in the information warfare against Kosovo and South Ossetia are consistent with Western political technologists;

- the Western coalition victory in the information wars in Yugoslavia and South Ossetia resulted in the following:

  1. For Yugoslavia:
     - condemnation of S. Milosevic's regime by the international community;
     - establishment of an International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since 1991 and Condemnation of War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity and Genocide;
     - the vast majority of convicts were ethnic Serbs, although war crimes in Kosovo were committed by both parties.
  2. For South Ossetia:
     - the regime of M. Saakashvili was not condemned by the international community;

- a political and legal assessment of the actions of Georgia in relation to South Ossetia was not provided;
- a tribunal aimed to investigate war crimes against the population of South Ossetia by analogy with Yugoslavia was not created.
- having lost the information war in South Ossetia, Russia learned a lesson that led to a qualitative strengthening the work and expansion of the geography of Russia Today broadcasting in different languages, which currently competes with news agencies such as CNN and BBC on equal terms, as well as the creation of the international news agency Sputnik.

The importance of information wars both in the period of hostilities and in peacetime is growing with the development of information technology in the modern world. It is necessary to create competitive national media ready to repel any information attacks from outside in order to ensure information security, as well as for the security of the country as a whole.

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