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The mechanism and instruments of psychological warfare

Abstract

This article presented mechanism and instruments of contemporary psychological warfare. Phenomenon of propaganda will be discussed and also the role of its main carrier: mass media. In the further part of the work cyberspace will be presented as other large area of contest for influence on societies. Manipulation of social consciousness, which is conducted by state regimes and other participants of international relations, is permanent element of contemporary international environment. That is the reason why it is so important to know mechanism of it.

Słowa kluczowe: *psychological warfare, psychological operations, Infowar, PSYOPS, PsyWar, public diplomacy, propaganda, mass media, social engineering*

Introduction

Psychological warfare could be defined as a system of operations to make an influence on society to achieve own goals. This term was introduced during II World War and spread during the Cold War, however this type of operations was conducted yet in ancient ages. Today we may see a tendency to resign of the term „psychological warfare”, which raises pejorative associations, and to camouflage this type of activities by other terms, like psychological operations, public diplomacy, international information. The main goal of this operations- to manipulate own and other societies- is the same, only it was changed and developed instruments of it. This article presents mechanism and instruments of contemporary psychological warfare, included its main tool- propaganda. There will be discussed also the new area of the warfare for „brain and hearts”, a cyberspace.

1. Manipulation of consciousness - social engineering

As it was told, psychological warfare is a system of operations to make an influence on society to achieve own goals. Its mechanism bases on manipulation of consciousness and bringing properly targeted information and misinformation¹.

Individual consciousness consist of rational and emotional element, the second one usually plays more important role. For psychological warfare there are important such elements of personality, as communication and

¹ D. Wołkogonow, *Wojna psychologiczna*, Warszawa 1986, p. 125.

cognitive abilities and the ability to function in society². Because of, that it is difficult to adjust and direct the coverage to each person individually, psychological operations are conducted towards social groups and societies. That is the reason, why social consciousness is a main object of influence in psychological warfare. Dmitri Volkogonov (head of the Department of Special Propaganda and at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s deputy head of Main Political Directorate of the Soviet Army and Navy) defined it as: „the whole of ideas, views, imaginations existing in society in a given period and reflecting social reality”. It is not a simply set of individual units' consciousness, but the bigger wholeness, which functions above it³. One of the forms of social consciousness is a public opinion, which appears in the context of current political and social events. Professor Franciszek Ryszka defined it as „a reaction of human groups in macro scale on global and particular political actions, which express in approval or disapproval for political actions or events, which in this opinion decide about policy, its directions and course”⁴. Manipulation of consciousness is conducted, using the achievements of social, psychological and derivative sciences, among which the most important is social engineering, a practical science about different methods of social influence, which are called sociotechnics⁵. There are information and mechanical sociotechnics. Mechanical sociotechnics included physical influence on human, his state of consciousness. It may be violence, terror, rape, technical (like for example ultrasounds), chemical (drugs) means of

² Ibidem, p. 41-44.

³ Ibidem, p. 17.

⁴ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, Janina Faras, Beata Ociepka, *Teoria i praktyka propagandy*, Wrocław 1997, p. 68.

⁵ P. Pawełczyk, Dorota Piontek, *Socjotechnika w komunikowaniu politycznym*, Poznań 1999, p. 63.

influencing emotions and mental states. Because of their controversies, for psychological warfare more important are information sociotechnics. They can be reduced to three forms of action: persuasion, manipulation, facilitating activities.

Facilitating activities should create situation, in which it will be more successful to influence on recipient. The base for further operations may be prepared earlier, for example during the process of indoctrination⁶. By the persuasion sender tries to influence the opinions and behaves of recipient, who knows their intentions⁷. In manipulation recipient does not know intentions of sender. Manipulation bases especially on permanent operation by slogans and definitions, symbols, pictures and specially prepared information and disinformation.⁸

Disinformation is based on introducing false views and beliefs into the consciousness. It is not always lie: specially prepared informations also could be an instrument of it, because „information is disinformation too”⁹. Words, sounds and pictures can make influence on thinks, emotions, and as a result, on people's views and behaviors. However, firstly they should be specially used, prepared and promoted. Information sociotechnics are closely related by phenomenon of propaganda.

Propaganda as an instrument of psychological warfare

Psychological warfare is sometimes called “special propaganda”, because propaganda is a main instrument of it. Propaganda is usually define as

⁶ V. Volkoff, *Dezinformacja- oręż wojny*, Warszawa 1991, p. 9.

⁷ P. Pawełczyk, Dorota Piontek, *Socjotechnika...*, op. cit., p. 64-65.

⁸ D. Wołkogonow, *Wojna psychologiczna*, op. cit., p. 127.

⁹ V. Volkoff, *Dezinformacja*, p. 5-17.

intentional influence on humans and groups by information sociotechnics, in order to forced targeted attitudes, aspirations and behaves¹⁰. It is a process of control of information flow, managing the public opinion and manipulation of patterns of behavior.

It is possible to distinguish a few types of propaganda, based on different categories:

1. Distribution method: there is a direct propaganda (the message is sent directly from sender to the recipient and there are interactions between them) and an indirect propaganda (the coverage is sent from sender to the recipient through mass media). Owing to development of information technologies, especially Internet, differences between both types of propaganda are reduced and indirect propaganda gets some characteristics of direct¹¹.
2. Reception method: there is visual, auditive and audiovisual propaganda.
3. Recipient: there is internal propaganda (the coverage is sent to own auditory, it is often called „traditional propaganda”) and external propaganda (the message is sent to other auditoriums, it is often called special or subversive propaganda)¹².
4. Time of events and propaganda coverage about them: there is a pre-propaganda, an accompanying propaganda and a post-propaganda. The pre-propaganda should prepare auditory for event through consolidation of specific attitudes and views. In the accompanying propaganda the sender has to be ready for fast reactions for changing circumstances and for

¹⁰ E. Banaszkiewicz-Zygmunt [red.], PWN Leksykon. Media, Warszawa 2000, hasło „mass media”.

¹¹ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, J. Faras, B. Ociepka, *Teoria...* op. cit., p. 43-45.

¹² Ibidem, p. 35-37; Subversive propaganda is sometimes identified with a psychological war as such.

adapting the message content to them. The post-propaganda affects the recipient with consolidated opinions and is more difficult¹³.

5. Based on level of adulteration of content: there is white, black and gray propaganda. Informations in white propaganda are true, in grey propaganda informations don't have to be always true or precise. In black propaganda, which is often called „the big lie”, content is fake and has to mislead the recipient. A lot of scholar use this categories to define the type of the sender. With this approach, white propaganda come from the sender, which doesn't mask his identity. During grey propaganda sender may be identified correct, but he is not known at the moment. In black propaganda sender stay unknown, all power of his influence bases on convincing the recipient, that his identity is other, than in reality¹⁴. With this approach there is some trap, because correct identified sender doesn't sent always true coverage and conversely, messages from small reliable source must not always be false. Another type of propaganda is a masking propaganda. Sender tries to distract the recipient from specific problems and concentrate him on something else. There is also difference between propaganda and agitation. Propaganda concentrate recipients attention on long-term goals and agitation is used to encourage to specific, immediate actions and is carried out directly¹⁵.

¹³ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, J. Faras, B. Ociepka, *Teoria...* op. cit., p. 40.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 33-34, According to the definition from the doctrine AJP 3.7, the propagator of gray propaganda is always unknown..

¹⁵ O. Thomson, *Historia Propagandy*, Warszawa 2001, p. 12.

Mass media as a main tool of psychological warfare

Characteristic of mass media and media coverage

A main role in psychological warfare has the indirect propaganda. Its carrier are mass media, which have very important place in states policy. The term „mass media" was introduced in Western in the same period as „psychological warfare". It is used to define technical devices and institutions (private senders, public agencies etc.), which manage them. They are used to send message to numerous and varied auditory. As with propaganda, because of reception method, there are classified: auditive media (radio, and also electroacoustic stations or music tape/CD's), visual (press, posters, pictures, books and others) and audiovisual (television, cinema, VHS, DVD movies). Contemporary there is classified fourth format too, which concerns new mass media, first of them Internet.

Media coverage is mass, public, it is directed to all members of society, which want and have possibilities to receive it. Because of this mass communication is popular, simply and schematic. The recipient get through mass media an access to knowledge, entertainment and information¹⁶. Mass media are main source of information in information society, they are main instrument to form and to express public opinion¹⁷. This character of mass media is good expressed by Russian term to name them, „средства массовой информации", „mass information facilities".

Dmitrij Wołkogonow specified 4 main functions of mass media:

¹⁶ E. Banaszkiewicz-Zygmunt [red.], PWN Leksykon., op.cit., headword „mass media".

¹⁷ J. Potulski, *Wprowadzenie...*, op. cit., p. 368.

1. spreading knowledge about the world and providing information,
2. „social regulation and control”- a raising and a promotion of desirables behaves
3. promotion and enriching the culture;
4. an instrument of ideological warfare.

The last function is a result of 3 other.¹⁸ Image of reality created in mass media reflects interests of their principals and has an impact on social consciousness: ideas and behaviors, which are compatible with ideology of this principals. Mass media are also a „gatekeeper”, a distributor and a controller of information flow¹⁹. Because of their importance, mass media have important role in states government policies.

Mechanism of influencing the mass media and media coverage

Rules about mass medias functioning are an effect of government’s media policy. Media policy may be defined as „an activities of government and institutions and social organizations, which create legal, political and economic framework conditions of mass media functioning, according to purposes from own values system, actual social-economic conditions and social needs and interests”²⁰. Media policy is connected by information policy. That are rules, which regulate creating, using, collecting and transmitting

¹⁸ D. Wołkogonow, *Wojna...*, op. cit., p. 151.

¹⁹ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, J. Faras, B. Ociepka, *Teoria...* op. cit., p. 58.

²⁰ E. Stasiak-Jazukiewicz, *Cele polityki medialnej UE*, w:

http://ec.europa.eu/polska/news/opinie/121129_cele_polityki_medialnej_ue_pl.htm
(dostęp 16.06.2015).

information between government and media institutions²¹. Besides, regardless of legal regulations, an impact on information flow rules, methods of its share, concealment and distribute have common practices and customs. Informational policy in state may be conducted on different ways, which depend from type of institution and specific situation. The stronger and more centralized is the power, the stronger it affects the media system. That affects to conduct by it psychological operations.²².

Governments have a lot of possibilities to make an impact on mass media. The easiest method to control contents in mass media is to create governments media institutions. It enables to full control of contents and to engage mass media to realize ideological goals of power. The main disadvantage of this institutions is, that they are often considered as a propaganda tube of regime by other subjects.

The main instrument to control contents in mass media is a censorship. There is indirect (positive) censorship and direct (negative) censorship. Direct censorship bases on blocking media access to specific information or preventing publication²³. It is used rather during psychological defense. Direct censorship is controversial in democratic society, it raises objections and can undermine confidence in the government. Indirect censorship is less controversial. It based on controlling the creation of information materials or on their own preparation and on control of disseminated of them.²⁴. That can

²¹ A. Ogonowska, *Polityka informacyjna UE na progu XXI wieku*, w: http://www.ce.uw.edu.pl/pliki/pw/3-2001_Ogonowska.pdf (dostęp 16.06.2015)

²² A. Zebrowski, *Walka...*, op. cit., p. 15.

²³ *Prawda, kłamstwo, cenzura i autocenzura*, in: „Problematyka militarna w wybranych zagranicznych środkach masowego przekazu”, nr. 3/97, Sztab Generalny Wojska Polskiego, Zarząd Rozpoznania i WRE, p. 22.

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 23.

be done for example by dedicated ministries of propaganda/information or by the other governmental institutions, like former United States Information Agency (USIA), which conducted American public diplomacy during cold war. Such instruments are also government-controlled press agencies, which collect and prepare information for other media²⁵.

Direct contact between government and media is provided by spokespersons and during press conferences. It may be especially important for power to keep information monopoly from war zone or zones of unusual events, like protests or terrorist attacks. As much as possible, government tries to control activities of journalists, reporters, correspondents in these areas to prevent getting and publishing of some information. State supports also some types of institutions, which may be classified as self-censorship. That are for example ethical codes, programs guidelines or organizations, which enable consultations of some publications with government. Authorities or well indoctrinated society often put pressure on the media, what causes, that journalists are prompted to use self-censorship. Government may control media system in the state by such instruments, as material and financial support for some institutions or persons. A significant role is also played by the links between power centers and proprietors of the mass media. It is very often, that people associated with the authorities have performed some functions in media institutions, for example as board members or directors. Individual media support more or less certain political groups and their activities. Some media support actual power, some of them support opposition- that depends on their sympathy or personal connections. Authorities grant licenses to broadcasters and also they can cancel them,

²⁵ D. Wołkogonow, *Wojna...*, op. cit., p. 184-186.

when they find it necessary. Government can use the intelligence services to make an influence on mass media. They can recruit or intimidate journalists, fabricate materials or create pseudo-independent media.

Manipulation in mass media is conducted by construction of media coverage, using sociotechnic. The content of the media coverage should meet the following conditions: maximal emotional load, efficiency (the ability to match the message to the situation and recipient), clear indication of the recipient of the message, combining psychological impact and topicality of information²⁶. In the mass media seemingly neutral content (educational, entertainment, cultural and others) are combined with journalistic, information and other programs of a social, political and economic nature. First one serves to attract audiences and to make them more vulnerable to the propaganda impact of the remaining program²⁷. During the providing of information there are used linguistic manipulations, myths and stereotypes, thinking patterns, understatements, simplifications, appropriately selected titles, which are functioning in the social consciousness. There are created some slogans and schemes for propaganda use²⁸. Short, simply and plain, they are easy to remember and to distribute and they have big propaganda load. Other typical activities are stigmatization, password theft, forgery and rumor. In medias coverage there is discredited enemy institutions and management authorities. It can be used also an intimidation against the recipient, which means mental terror, which is about creating a sense of danger and atmosphere of tension. People under the influence of fear become inclined to

²⁶ D. Wołkogonow, *Wojna...*, op. cit., p. 157.

²⁷ A. C. Hansen, *USIA. Public Diplomacy in the Computer Age*, Nowy Jork 1984, p.1118.

²⁸ An example of this kind of slogans is the use of the words "junta", "Banderites", "fascists" in the propaganda of pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine to describe their opponents.

agree for actions they would not agree to otherwise²⁹. Because of a lot of information from media the information noise phenomenon appears. It makes difficult for recipient to choose, which information are really important for him. A creation of media noise can also be a deliberate action to mask inconvenient information³⁰.

A black and white, simplified vision of the world is usually presented in the media narrative. There is a lot of exaggeration, a contrast between wonderful and happy „our” reality and negative, full of violence and poverty „their”. The manipulator should be careful not to succumb to his own disinformation, using this instrument.

Cyberspace as a new area of psychological warfare

The term „cyberspace” comes from W. Gibsons novel „Neuromancer” from 1984 year. It is usual defined as all virtual connections („non-spatial” in physical sense, no-material and non-geographic),), which was created and functions through their material manifestations (computers and telecommunications infrastructure³¹. There are recognized 3 levels of cyberspace: material (physical), logistical (logical) and information (cognitive, social)³².

Creation and development of cyberspace was possible thanks to great progress in information technology, which started in second half of 20th century and led to the creation of computer networks, particularly to the

²⁹ D. Wołkogonow, *Wojna psychologiczna*, op. cit., p. 132-138.

³⁰ Z. Modrzejewski, *Operacje...*, op. cit., p. 33.

³¹ T. R. Aleksandrowicz, K. Liedel, *Społeczeństwo informacyjne...*, op. cit., p. 23.

³² Y. Harrel, *Rosyjska....*, op. cit., p. 33.

Internet. A genesis of Internet is in researches conducted by Pentagon to create distributed computer network, which could function during nuclear war, even if some of its elements would be destroyed. They led to the creation of a military computer network ARPANET. Internet was at beginning civil part of it. This genesis of Internet and the fact, that subjects from USA have still big control over this network, are controversial for a lot of other states, include Russia³³.

Computer networks are a main instrument, used by sending, collecting and processing the information. According to the opinion of authors of „US National Strategy for Cyberspace”, cyberspace became a „nervous system of the state” and its economy and defense are depend from computer networks³⁴. It is not surprising, therefore, that states attaches to it a lot of importance. Cyberspace become new area of contest in international relations, it may be used in military dimension as new space of warfare, like ground, airspace, water and cosmos³⁵.

Cyberspace is a new area of information warfare, also in its spiritual aspect³⁶. Information technologies are used by conductors of psychological warfare as instruments to promote their own values³⁷. The importance of cyberspace for propaganda arises from the fact, that the Internet became a carrier of traditional mass media, at the same time, however, creating completely new communication possibilities, such as social media³⁸.

³³ Ibidem, p. 24-26.

³⁴ T. R. Aleksandrowicz, K. Liedel, *Społeczeństwo informacyjne...*, op. cit., p. 24.

³⁵ Y. Harrel, *Rosyjska....*, op. cit., p.34.

³⁶ T. R. Aleksandrowicz, K. Liedel, *Społeczeństwo informacyjne...*, op. cit., p. 35.

³⁷ Y. Harrel, *Rosyjska....*, op. cit., p.105.

³⁸ Z. Modrzejewski, *Operacje....*, op. cit., p. 126.

Media, which are distributed, using IT, are cheaper than traditional. They make possible of free communication in global scale, thanks to the increasing availability of necessary technical devices (like computers, mobile phones, tablets, etc.) and an infrastructure. New media can transmit practically any visual or auditive message, thereat they become the most flexible and universal means of mass communication. What is special in them, new media give a possibility to make interactions between sender and recipient and blurry the boundaries between them. It makes possibility of feedback appearance, what makes an illusion of direct communication. Bidirectionality of the message increases the power of propaganda influence³⁹.

There are some typical for cyberspace characteristics, which make difficult to make an influence on it by the state. That are: discretion (undetectability), variability, virality (quick spread), reproducibility, omnipresence, mischievousness, identification, fallaciousness, interactivity, volatility and unpredictability⁴⁰. In the cyberspace there were equalized opportunities between subjects with different potentials in the real world, thereat the importance of the state is decreasing, that creates a field for action for other entities, like terrorist organizations (cyberterrorism), or different „freelancers”, hackers and hacktivists⁴¹.

A main problem for states sovereignty in this context, in opinion of dr Marek Madej, is a fact, that different process are carried out outside its borders and

³⁹ J. Nye, *Przyszłość siły*, op. cit., p. 202.

⁴⁰ Y. Harrel, *Rosyjska....*, op. cit., p. 35.

⁴¹ As a hacker there are defined a person, who tries to test their IT skills in practice by obtaining unauthorized access to data or devices. As 'hacktivists' there are defined ideological motivated hackers. Both groups could be in service for state. J. Nye, *Przyszłość siły*, op. cit., p. 228-230 and: M. Madej, *Cyberterroryści, cyberprzestępcy i hakerzy*, in: J. Symonides (red.), *Świat wobec współczesnych wyzwań i zagrożeń*, Warszawa 2010, p. 390 i 402.

jurisdiction, however, thanks to the connections in cyberspace, they exert a great influence on it. An activity of foreign hackers groups can lead to paralysis of states information system and make a serious influence on its security⁴². Accidents in Estonia in 2007 are a good example for it. A massive hackers strike blocked the servers of many state institutions, banks and the media. It is assumed that the Russian hackers are responsible for the attack and that they were inspired or supported by Russian Federations government, which was in the conflict with Estonians authorities over the monument of Soviet soldiers in Tallinn at this time⁴³.

Attack on Estonians servers showed the next question about operations in cyberspace: how they should be treated from the point of view of international law and whether a cyber-attack can be treated as an aggression? The most important problem in this question is, how can any activity in cyberspace affect the real world, in particular, cause physical damage and loss in people. It is connected by theoretical question, are the activities in cyberspace an element of soft or hard power?⁴⁴

This problems induced NATO experts to prepare a document „Tallin Manual of International Law Applicable to Cyber Warfare”. They adopted the principle of territorial jurisdiction. It means, that this state is responsible, on whose territory is the infrastructure, used by attackers⁴⁵.

⁴² Marek Madej, *Cyberterroryści, cyberprzestępcy i hakerzy*, in: Janusz Symonides (red.), *Świat wobec współczesnych wyzwań i zagrożeń*, Warszawa 2010, p. 390 i 402.

⁴³ Yannick Harrel, *Rosyjska....*, op. cit., p. 39.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, p. 39.

⁴⁵ Piotr Rutkowski, *Strategia cyberbezpieczeństwa Unii Europejskiej- pilne wyzwania, niespieszna debata*, w: Krzysztof Liedel, Paulina Piasecka, Tomasz Aleksandrowicz (red.), *Sieciocentryczne bezpieczeństwo. Wojna, pokój i terroryzm w epoce informacji*, Warszawa 2014, p. 50.

Nowadays, in international discourse, it is assumed, that using a cyberspace to preach propaganda and intelligence activities is not usually a subject to the laws of war. For the other activities, which lead to effects in the real world, comparable to the use of other types of weapons, this law may be used. It was also assumed, that both types of activities could be a subject to the laws of war, if they would be conducted during hostilities, in parallel with others activities⁴⁶.

Despite all the above-mentioned circumstances, because of their potential, states have still an important position in cyberspace⁴⁷. A lot of them, especially world powers, developed its own cyberstrategies, or visions of policy in this area⁴⁸.

Initially cyberstrategies were mainly defensive, they should be an answer for potential threats in cyberspace. Nowadays, cyberstrategies contain also records about own offensive operations⁴⁹.

In published by White House in May 2011 document „International Strategy for Cyberspace” or in Pentagon's „The Department of Defense Cyber Strategy” from April 2015 there were shown the view of the US authorities on the issue of security in cyberspace⁵⁰. In this approach it is evident, that

⁴⁶ Tomasz R. Aleksandrowicz, Krzysztof Liedel, *Społeczeństwo informacyjne...*, op. cit., p. 36.

⁴⁷ Ibidem, p. 26.

⁴⁸ Yannick Harrel, *Rosyjska....*, op. cit., p.35-40 Government's cyberstrategy does not only refer to the actions of the armed forces. Within the framework of cyberstrategy the army conducts an electronic war, which can be considered as one of the elements of the information war.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, p. 33.

⁵⁰ *The Department of Defense Cyber Strategy* z kwietnia 2015 roku, w: https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/2015/0415_cyber-strategy/Final_2015_DoD_CYBER_STRATEGY_for_web.pdf, *International Strategy for Cyberspace* z maja 2011 roku, w:

Americans has awareness of their own domination in the information technology sector and that they strive for its preservation. International cooperation in this aspect should base on acceptance by other entities the rule of „safe and reliable cyberspace”⁵¹.

Russian attitude to question the security in cyberspace is very interest also. It is a derivative of general attitude to informational warfare. It was presented primarily in Information Security Doctrines of Russian Federation from 2000 and from 2016 year. The cyberspace become for Russians a relay of civilization, than a technical system⁵². In Russian cyberstrategy the information function is in the foreground⁵³.

Summary

Mechanism of psychological warfare base on manipulation of consciousness, using achievements in social sciences, especially in social engineering. The main instrument of this influence is propaganda, which is disseminated by mass media. They are a main instrument to shape public opinion, also social consciousness is constructed basing on their coverage. Cyberspace is nowadays a new area of contest in this aspect. Development of information technologies created more possibilities to make an influence on the own and foreign societies and enables to conduct propaganda in global scale.

⁵¹ https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/international_strategy_for_cyberspace.pdf

⁵² Yannick Harrel, *Rosyjska....*, op. cit., p. 124.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 64

⁵³ *Ibidem* p. 32.

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