Propaganda in Ukrainian Conflict. Case Study

The paper presents the most important element of the information warfare conducted in the conflict on the territory of Ukraine in the years 20014-2015. The theoretical foundations of the use of information as a combat tool, the most important areas of information fight with elements such as propaganda and its meaning in the modern world are presented. The author also drew attention to the importance of cyberspace as a perfect environment for spreading false information (black propaganda).

Introduction

The modern world has contributed to the development of humanity based on the emergence of an information society. A characteristic feature of this development is the fact that the largest and most important good, and also the commodity, is information. It has become an equivalent, if not more important commodity, for other resources such as raw materials, energy, capital, human resources as well as a factor that is necessary for taking any action and for social activity. Information has always had and will be of great importance, but now it has become a guarantee for any activity, and more and more often even for the purpose of such activity. In the fight, because it will be mentioned here, information has become a weapon replacement and has even become the most effective weapon of the future. Information is characterized by the fact that it directly reaches the human mind and influences the shaping of its awareness the more effectively, the more communication channels are used to deliver it.

Information and information warfare

Currently, the term information is used to describe many forms of description related to various types of communication methods, which is why it has many definitions. Defining information therefore depends on the context in which the information was used or in which field it is considered. However, this also does not fully exhaust its definition, be-
cause within a given field the authors present it differently, which can be determined by analyzing the literature of the subject.

For example, in the vocabulary of PWN foreign words we can meet the definition of information as a notification of something, communicating something, a message or an instruction. The next definition says that information is considered as a set of data collected for processing and obtaining results, which is an abstract quantity and can be sent, processed and stored in a given object, it can also control these objects. Objects in this definition are defined as living organisms, technical devices and object systems. At the same time, the view is visible that the notion of information and data should be distinguished from each other.

Knowing American views, one can notice that data is understood as raw, not subject to any analysis, numbers and facts about phenomena or events, but the information is the result of classified data or its examination in a significant way.

The well-known Polish authority dealing with the information warfare - Leopold Ciborowski - taking up the analysis of the notion of information, in his book *The information warfare*, referred to several definitions created by cybernetics scientists. According to the creator of cybernetics Norbert Wiener, the information is defined as the name of the content downloaded from the outside world, as we adapt to her senses. In turn, Wiktor Głuszkow identified information with all information about the processes and states of any nature that can be perceived by sensory organs of man or nature. Ciborowski also refers to definitions in the field of physics, and more specifically to the definition of the concept of information created by Jerzy Seidler, according to which, due to its elementary nature, information is impossible to define with simpler terms, just as it cannot be done in physics in relation to mass and energy. He also claimed that information can be used to name everything that is used to efficiently select actions to achieve specific goals. This is based on the fact that when talking about efficient operation, one should bear in mind that by possessing and using the right information, we can perform purposeful actions better, without increasing material resources or without consuming energy. Summarizing the above definitions, Ciborowski recognized that information is a stimulus that affects the human reception system, that it causes in his imagination the creation of a mental object that reflects the image of material and abstract things and is associated with this stimulus in his message.

It is worth paying attention to the fact that the human factor is of great importance in relation to the source and recipient of information, as well as the directions and ways of information flow. Man has a direct or indirect influence on the transmission of information through the channel of its flow. The essence of a single information transfer is a set of interpersonal relationships that act as a source or are associated with a source, recipient or even a channel of information flow. When dealing with the act of communication, we can

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1 Słownik wyrazów obcych PWN, Warszawa 1971, s. 305.
5 Ibidem, s. 50.
notice that it has a social character and information is being transferred within society\(^6\). And this has a measurable dimension in the information campaign and the propaganda used for its needs.

Recognition of information as a strategic resource, both in the military and non-military dimension, resulted in the emergence of a new category of information warfare. The term was first used in the 90s of the last century. In 1994 at the University of Defense in Washington, the first School of Strategy and Information Struggle was created. In the same year, Winn Schwartau published the book Information Warfare, in which information fight was defined as actions aimed at protection, damage, use, destruction of information and information resources, as well as denial of information in order to achieve the adopted goal, benefits or even victory over the opponent\(^7\).

The oldest records that referred to the role of information fighting in armed struggle appeared already in the 6th century BC, in the text of the book „The Art of War” by Sun Tzu\(^8\). From the descriptions contained in it, one can conclude that the problem of information struggle already appeared at that time, although at that time it was not so-called. These activities were defined as:

- getting to know the enemy, weather and terrain, which is today’s recognition,
- getting to know each other, that is, undisturbed functioning of the information system,
- contributing disturbing messages by the opponent, that is today’s disinformation.

All the above elements make up today’s information warfare. Referring to contemporary records, we can identify that the information warfare is referred to as actions taken to achieve information advantage over an opponent, by having information on the subject having a negative impact on his image and operation. Information warfare is characterized by such elements as: logical destruction (IT), physical destruction, psychological operation, sabotage, electronic battle. As tools used in the information campaign, one can point to: propaganda, diplomacy, psychological campaign, actions influencing political or cultural processes (agents of influence), manipulation of local media, disinformation as well as infiltration of cyberspace\(^9\).

Summing up, it can be assumed, after Ciborowski, that the information warfare is an activity carried out in the sphere of acquiring, disrupting and protecting information, where every such action is a subordinate action taken by the other party in an antagonistic manner. In armed operations, the essence is to create situations that make it difficult for the opponent to make right decisions or to make efficient moves with their troops in offensive or defensive actions. These actions are directed primarily at confusing the opponent as to the situation that is on the battlefield, so that he can make wrong decisions or be late\(^10\).

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\(^6\) M. Madej, Rewolucja informatyczna- istota, przejawy oraz wpływ na postrzeganie bezpieczeństwa państwa i systemu międzynarodowowego, w: Bezpieczeństwo teleinformatyczne państwa, M. Madej, M. Terlikowski (red.), Warszawa 2009, s. 18.

\(^7\) P. Bączek, Zagrożenia informacyjne a bezpieczeństwo państwa polskiego, Toruń 2006, s. 132.

\(^8\) Sun Tzu, Sztuka Wojny, Warszawa 1994, s. 116.


\(^10\) L. Ciborowski, Walka informacyjna..., op.cit.
Elements of propaganda

Propaganda has been known for a long time. The first examples of propaganda can be found in the Mesoamerican and Egyptian cultures, where hieroglyphic records consisting of symbols and images depict history in a way beneficial to the rulers. Also, the buildings and texts of the Maya were often manipulated and gave false dates of historical events, mendacious data on the length of life of rulers, or even real events. All this was aimed at presenting the prevailing power in a favorable light. This was of course possible, because only the rulers and their priests had the ability to create and read hieroglyphs, so that the information message was one-way, directed from the ruler to the masses. The first records in which the term propaganda was used appeared in 1622, with the creation of the Congregation for Propaganda of Faith by Pope Gregory XV. The word propaganda came into common use until the 20th century, when during the First World War propaganda was defined as a new technique of persuasion and later used by totalitarian regimes. It was perceived as the propagation of biased ideas and views, often using lies and deceit. The propaganda gained a new meaning when the scientific community became interested in this phenomenon. Since then, the word propaganda also includes suggestion and exerting influence using manipulations using psychology and social engineering, often based on prejudice or emotions. It is a kind of communication created by a certain point of view, aimed at inducing the recipient of this message to voluntarily accept the viewpoint contained in the communication and recognize it as its own. Nowadays, propaganda has become the basic tool for the influence of power on society, both internal and international. Propaganda is not used only by the government, but also all kinds of companies (advertising), politicians (creating the image) and terrorists (spreading fear and gaining supporters). According to American views, propaganda consists of five elements, necessary for its proper implementation. If one of these elements is not taken into consideration, propaganda will prove ineffective and pointless. These elements are: Source, Time, Audience, Subject, Mission.

The first element - Source - is the sources (communication channels) of information through which the propaganda campaign will be conducted. Nowadays, apart from classic information channels, such as radio and television, social media available in cyberspace are becoming more and more important. Time is nothing other than to determine when and how long propaganda will be carried out. Determining time is extremely important because it is easier to influence the society in crisis, awaiting systemic changes. For this reason, it is possible to observe intensified propaganda campaigns before the election or, as in the case of Ukraine, before the preparations for strength solutions. Recipients to whom propaganda will be directed are a significant challenge for propagandists. The directed message must take into account their education, social attitudes, beliefs, religion, mechanisms functioning in a given community. Propaganda should be subordinated to a specific topic, which is a si-

12 Ibidem.
14 P.M.A. Linebager, Psychological warfare, Pickle Partners Publishing 2015, s. 67.
significant problem in a given population. This topic should easily lead to the achievement of the adopted objective of the information campaign, which is the last element of propaganda.

Speaking of propaganda, one cannot forget that it occurs in three basic types: white, gray and black. The first of these - white propaganda - are activities in which the source and origin of information are known. It is transferring the official point of view of the government or organization. The message is kept open, the recipient knows who gives the information, but the information they provide is given in a selective way, and inconvenient facts are deliberately omitted15.

Gray propaganda is characterized by the fact that its source is not completely known, only one can guess its origin, and the information conveyed in it is unfavorable for one of the parties to the conflict. The information provided is presented in such a way that the views of a given government are accepted by the intended target group. Most often it takes the form of an unofficial government statement16.

The last type of propaganda - black - is embedded in total hypocrisy of reality. Both the source of information and the information itself is false. The aim of these activities is to obtain a proper psychological effect. By providing false information and not granting their dissemination, the perception of the surroundings and events changes completely in society17. In the Internet age, black propaganda has become the most important way of blending the minds of modern societies.

The case of Ukraine

Observing the recent events in Ukraine related to the ongoing armed conflict, one can see that its perception in the international community is heavily dependent on the propaganda. And while it is too early to draw far-reaching conclusions, one can try to identify the characteristics of this conflict, commonly referred to as the asymmetric conflict and the hybrid war. The parties to the conflict, on the one hand, are state actors, subjects of international law, on the other side the separatist groups, unofficially supported by the Russian soldiers. Due to the nature and purpose of this article, attention is focused on the parties involved in propaganda in the conflict in Ukraine. Trying to identify the characteristics of the propaganda conducted in the Ukrainian conflict one should first attempt to answer following questions: Who runs it? What are their goals? What methods and tools does it employ? Answers to such questions can be ambiguous and conditioned, what irony, the results of propaganda conducted. From the point of view of an independent observer, it can be concluded that the Russian Federation, Ukraine, the post-Soviet countries and the countries of the western world participate in the propaganda.

Russia, as the separatists’ supporter country, is carrying out intensive, active information campaigns aimed at presenting a positive image of the separatist side and depicting the

16 M. Nieć, Komunikowanie polityczne w nowoczesnym państwie, Warszawa 2013, s. 146.
17 A. Bhatt, Psychological Warfare and India, Lancer Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi 2006, s. 31.
Ukrainian side in a negative light. For this reason, all aspects show the nuisance of the conflict to civilian populations living in the area where military operations are being conducted. The separatists are presented as freedom fighters against the Ukrainian dictatorship, which gained power as a result of an armed uprising, and the Russians’ takeover of the Crimea was a fulfillment of the will of the population living there. In turn, the Ukrainian side is most often portrayed as the “Bandera people” and fascists aiming at the destruction of the Russian-speaking population. Russian-led propaganda is aimed at both the international community, the Russian and Russian communities living in Ukraine as well as the Ukrainian community. On the one hand, the Russians are expected to agree on the image of the conflict, and on the other, the Ukrainian authorities are extremely unfavorable both on the international scene and in the Ukrainian society, which results in problems with Ukraine’s military abduction. As you can see, the Russian information and psychological war with Ukraine has been going on for many years.

From the very beginning, it was a war against the so-called „orange plague” (commonly used Russian propaganda name) and was supposed to provide support for the Yanukovych camp at the turn of 2003/2004 until its victory in the presidential election in 2010. Undoubtedly, it is also stated that this war has a geopolitical background, which aims to build Eurasia as a giant sphere of Russia’s influence with Moscow as the center (from the Pacific to the Atlantic). Russia, however, encounters a problem in the form of sovereign Ukraine, which due to its location is in a situation of suspension between the East and the West.

There is no doubt that in 2014 the Russian Federation launched an attack on Ukraine18, initiating another conflict, called by many observers an asymmetric hybrid war that combines conventional warfare with irregular military action and propaganda warfare. The annexation of the Crimea provoked patriotic euphoria in Russia. Seeing the lack of resolute actions and protests from the international community, Russia decided to intensify operations in eastern Ukraine.

Although the operation was successful, it can be said that Putin has made a strategic mistake, namely that while trying to maintain Ukraine in the Russian sphere of influence, it not only accelerated its decision to integrate with the Euro-Atlantic system, but also exposed Russia to a long-term conflict with Western world, which Russia, taking into account the effectiveness of economic sanctions19, simply cannot win.

For many months, Russia has engaged itself and the international media in a great propaganda campaign. Its purpose was to persuade and persuade local and foreign societies that the Russian demands for Ukraine have a legal basis and are justified by the course of events. The media offensive used both traditional and completely new forms of propaganda to infuse others with their goals. Social media was used extensively, initially by Russia - later also by the Ukrainian side, but on a much smaller scale. Full-scale propaganda by the Russians was seen during Euromaidan in Kiev. The purpose of the propaganda aimed...

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at Ukraine was undoubtedly the destabilization of the Ukrainian state, and all actions were from now on mass. The greatest emphasis was placed on ideological, political and socio-cultural diversion. The main target of the impact was the population of Crimea and eastern Ukraine. The victims of the propaganda first became the people of Crimea, then Eastern Ukraine, and then their own Russian society. The Crimean operation of the information war was aimed at the breakaway and annexation of the Crimea. The desired effect of such a precise goal was the lack of opposition of the people of Crimea subjected to psychological and information processing. The conviction of the inhabitants of Crimea about the imminent incursion of „fascists” and derusification and the occupation of the Black Sea Fleet by NATO. Without propaganda, it would be impossible. Diversified message was aimed at dulling its own and international public opinion.

A few years before the conflict, the Kremlin launched a media expansion in Ukraine, which resulted in the infiltration of the neighbor’s information structure.

Putin was able to do so, because in Russia he subordinated all media companies, which enabled the coordinated infiltration of Ukraine.

The expansion took place gradually, with the purchase of shares in local media, which belonged to the Ukrainian oligarchs. Thus, the residents of Lviv, Kiev and Donetsk started to receive information that highlighted the situation in terms of the interests of Russia, not of Ukraine. This gave way to the collective manipulation of the minds and emotions of the Ukrainians, which, of course, was accompanied by the organization of, so called, the fifth column, that is, pro-Russian circles.

At the time when Ukraine Chose a pro-European option, the media was immediately turned over to Maidan as a negative event.

It was accompanied by messages calling for “all active people to counter the coup.” The news of the infiltrated media campaign was launched against the new legal authority in Kiev. At the same time, media coverage of Russia’s support for such activities was included in the media space, dressed in “help for discriminated Russians”.

On the other hand, “activists” appeared in Ukraine (E.G. Igor Strielkow from the FSB), who gave appropriate instructions to the crowded masses in Crimea, Donetsk and Lugansk. As you can see, Moscow has made the landing of the right people, with a proper plan of action, which in the case of corrupt and incapable of functioning the apparatus of power has been successful. It was only then, in order to consolidate the effects of the information attack, that in Donetsk and Lugansk, and earlier in the Crimea there were so-called “green men”, who with arms in their hands protected “activists” and “patriots”.

To achieve goals, the Russian Federation uses “online trolls”. An Internet Troll is a person who most often anonymously publishes statements based on persuasion or change of thinking or emotion by using half-truths or false information. This term became popular in the 1990s when Internet users began using nicknames to offend individuals, groups and their opinions. The troll’s view is very unequivocal, and is far less likely to be based on fact. We should pay attention to the number of posts generated to exert a psychological pressu-
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...re on the rest of the users to agree with the majority, as well as on the scale of topics that have scored anything bad in the US, and Europe, and in Ukraine, and what is good in Russia. Manipulation European and Russian public opinion are the specific objectives of the actions taken. According to one analysis, “the internal affairs administration of the Russian President controls the work of so-called trolls and bloggers” whose tasks include, among other things, “publishing and distributing approved articles, setting up false accounts on social networks to disseminate information and spamming and denigrating opponents online”21. As a rule, information is prepared for every popular social networking site such as: VKontakte, LiveJournal, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook. Comments and articles are also posted on English, Polish and Ukrainian portals. The articles prepared were most often characterized by insults against Ukrainian President Petr Poroshenko. They described the alleged atrocities of the Ukrainian army, optimistic comments about the financial crisis in Russia.

When analyzing the actions of the Ukrainian side in the information war, it must be clearly stated that they are inconsistent and inefficient, and the same ones that put Ukraine in conflict with Russia in unfavorable light. This is manifested, of course, by many factors, namely organizational and informational clutter resulting from the takeover of power, the conflicts of interests of the Ukrainian oligarchs, corruption and lack of systemic solutions aimed at improving the state of the economy. The flagship example of the inability of the Ukrainian actions is fatal, according to the author, the international presentation of the shooting down of a passenger plane.

Ukraine has lost the information war. Success is due to the fact that she saw a huge threat, but the authorities did not learn how to respond effectively. Administrative methods are used, such as the expulsion of 100 Russian journalists-propagandists and the withdrawal of the accreditation of a number of Russian media, recognized as instruments of war. The transmission of Russian television and radio is jammed. Kremlin's actors and musicians were also included in the list of people who were unwanted, and banned films promoting the strength of the Russian army and the special services.

In 2015 Ukraine launched satellite television intended for the inhabitants of Crimea, Donbass and Russia. The task of television is to present the Ukrainian version of the event and promote the reforms undertaken. In the ministry of information policy, the doctrine of media security is emerging. There was also a department of information war, which was strengthened by volunteers voluntarily carrying out tasks on the network. In a few days about 40 thousand volunteers came forward22.

The situation is hampered by the fact that the security system and international law did not foresee such a war.

Neither the UN Charter nor the founding documents of the OSCE defines the notion of information war, nor the methods of monitoring and prohibit its conduct.

International law is helpless against Russian aggression, as exemplified by the lack of re-

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21 S. Ėlerte, Kremļa troļļi, online in ir.lv http://www.ir.lv/2014/7/18/kremla-trolli/.
response of the OSCE mission to the Ukrainian evidence on the matter. International observers are simply helpless, and can’t act contrary to the statute and legal framework of the organization.

In the information policy in Ukraine as well as in the Western states lack cooperation and coordination. The problem is not just financial resources but also the lack of official government support for new analytical or media initiatives and projects, including a more flexible approach to grant or scholarship policies. There is also a lack of financial support and training for the media, journalists and experts who deal with anti-Russian propaganda.

The quality of Ukrainian journalism is also a problem. One of the main shortcomings is still the widespread lack of foreign languages (which makes it impossible to use directly from foreign sources and causes fundamental shortcomings in the interpretation of European events) and non-compliance with Western standards in the development of press materials (plagiarism and copyright infringement), which affects the quality of the message, and consequently the credibility of the individual media. This is obviously a derivative of low earnings in the industry and the lack of funding for them, but also the lack of facilities for think tanks, research centers or analytical, about the crisis in higher education not to mention. It pays off on the quality of the staff, but also on their approach to work.

This also means that, despite the conflict in the East, many journalists are still using the Russian media to prepare information. This is particularly evident in the statements of foreign politicians on Ukraine or Russia, which are most echoed in Ukrainian society. The most prominent example of this will be the attitude of the largest Ukrainian news agencies, which, following a report from Angela Merkel on the rally of the Christian-Democratic Union of 17 February 2016, repeated the manipulated message of the Russian agency RIA Novosti that “Europe wants to build peace with Russia and cooperate with it”23. This was used in Ukraine to amplify negative sentiments, especially the sense of betrayal from the West, while the words “again” ran out in the headlines24.

A serious challenge for the services of Ukraine and Western countries is the attempt to intimidate journalists and activists who study the relationships of organizations, media or politicians with Russia. Such actions, which have also taken place in Poland, seriously threaten public order and discourage experts and analysts from tackling more difficult subjects related to Russian activity, which undermines the government in the fight against the agents of influence. It is necessary to limit and neutralize the influence of the Russian propaganda and to weaken the Kremlin’s potential allies first in its own territory. For this, the cooperation of non-governmental organizations and state structures, including in particular diplomacy and power structures, is needed.

The situation in Ukraine shows how implicit funding of media and non-governmental organizations can be dangerous, even those focused on social networking sites. Although there are many differences between the Ukrainian and Polish situations, it is worth noting that Russian activity is directed at patriotic (mostly right-wing) communities and is linked to their direct funding and organizational support. Particular attention should be paid to youth
and paramilitary organizations, which may become particularly dangerous in the future, given the long incubation period that the Russians practice.

The post-Soviet countries are also part of the propaganda. Russia’s actions aimed at convincing the societies of these countries that Russia alone, a military and economic power, are capable of providing them with security. An example of such an information impact is the movie “Russian occupant” which places the western world at an unfavorable light while at the same time delineating the merits of the Soviet Union in the economic development of the former Soviet republics. It should be noted, that the Ukrainians also began to effectively counter the propaganda used by the Russians, as exemplified by the film, which was a response to the “Russian occupant”.

Looking at the propaganda of Western countries, including the European Union, NATO and the United States, a picture of its ineffectiveness emerges. This is primarily a result of conflicts of interest not only between the United States and the European Union, but also between the Member States of the Union itself. Looking for reasons of this state of affairs can be tempted to say that this is due to, among other things, effective information and foreign policy of the Russian Federation. The analysis of Western states’ behavior towards the Ukrainian conflict, mistakes made by individual politicians and EU member states could be a separate topic, and therefore it will not be a subject of further discussion.

Summary

The information warfare with the use of propaganda elements is reflected in contemporary conflicts. The tools and techniques used are aimed at achieving the goal, in line with the previously identified STASM scheme.

It is difficult to agree on the dimension of propaganda in the conflict in Ukraine. Nevertheless, one can try to identify its most important aspects and areas of influence. The opportunity to create reality in cyberspace is of great importance. The scope of this dimension of influence is immediate, practically unlimited space, reaching a wide audience even in the furthest corner of the world. For this reason, we should pragmatically approach the use of cyberspace as a perfect propaganda environment, which should be reflected in the information policy of every modern state.

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