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Polish perspective on psycho-informational war conducted by the Russian Federation

Abstract

The primary objective of this paper is to show a Polish view of psych-informational warfare conducted recently by Russian Federation in Europe. It highlights that the information warfare, which includes psychological operations, has lately become the core element of warfare theory and practice. By presenting the effectiveness of Russian actions in Ukraine or Poland, it shows the complexity of modern forms of influencing the enemy and the transformation of international security environment in general. It provides the characteristic and the significance of psychological and informational actions in the modern world, going beyond typical military, diplomatic or propaganda actions.

Author points out that Russian actions are directed not only at Crimea, Donbas or Ukraine but also at US, NATO and EU. Aiming at the position in the world, to remain a powerful international leader and hegemony in the world. Author forms hypothesis that there is a vital need to adjust the security system to new challenges. Moreover it is necessary to make amendments in doctrinal documents and to prepare armed forces to be able to counter new threats.

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A Polish Perspective

Recently we have been witnessing complex, well-funded and multidimensional hybrid and information war conducted by Russia against different countries and recipients. Those actions have differentiated according to not only areas but also Russian objectives. The main targets have been US, NATO, EU, Eastern Europe and primarily Ukraine.[1]

As far as the Ukrainian conflict is concerned it involves parallel conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence, coercion and criminal disorder. And what is more it includes informational and psychological tasks. Hybrid character of actions taken place in Crimea and Donbas is conductive to psycho-informational actions which are aimed not only at the local society but also at international environment and different world organizations. As a part of process of influencing West and its public, Russians and separatists supported by Russians try to give credibility to their individual rights and try to discredit the opposite Party.[2] The most visible example concerns Crimea annexation. Russian Federation has been using simultaneously diplomatic, informational, propaganda and psychological tools and in many cases has been successfully using it.[3] Russians have managed to convince world to the very dubious arguments. It concerns the following statements:

- Russian trespassing on Crimea is synonymous to NATO operation in Kosovo,
- Crimea has not been occupied by Russia, but only has used the right to self-determination and independence,
- thanks to Russian intervention in Crimea, unlike Kosovo, there was no bloodshed including avoiding Ukrainian nationalists' revenge on Russians living in the region,
- Russian intervention has prevented Crimea from destabilization,
- the whole Crimea society (what was proved in Russian referendum) were the supporters of Russia affiliation,
- in relation to destabilization in Ukraine there should have be a constant NATO supervision under Black See fleet bases.

Russian influence on a part of Ukrainians especially those living in the occupied lands have been possible due to following:

- cultural closeness and similar tradition,
- the same language,
- in the region where combat actions were conducted the high percentage of Ukrainian society was with the strong Russian roots,
- the high level of infiltration of Ukrainian secret service, armed forces, and administration by the Russian Federation,
- close economic and political relationship between Russia and Ukraine before conflict.[4]

In this particular case it has been easier for Russians to use tools of psychological impact and to achieve the specified form of views and the way of thinking which should result in following the imposed ideology not personal beliefs.

To achieve its objectives TV, radio, press and leaflets have been widely used. What is more, modern media, internet and social media have significantly changed the way of influencing people by repeatedly replicating the information and causing its rapid spread. On the other hand the main difficulty concerning social media is that it has been impossible to verify the source of information and the issue if it was true or not. To achieve intended psychological effect there was no source named. The recipient could have only guessed the origin of information. However in the enormous wave of fake news it was not easy to judge the truthfulness. In many cases there were reliable

authoritative sources such as well-known experts, journalists, political scientists and representatives of the West used to create inspired, planned and manipulated Content.[5] It was conducted to induce specified beliefs or to trigger certain activities. The information in which stated that Kiev would return the Eastern rims to Russia can be presented as an example. Its aim was to weaken Ukrainians' morale and to weaken their confidence to carry on the fights. With the same objective through the method of destruction and misinformation Russians influenced Ukrainian soldiers in order to achieve their conviction of fake threat in non-existent areas and also of separatists' advantage supported by regular units form Russian Federation. Within the framework of psycho-informational campaign and through the wide spread of allegedly true information showing Ukrainians as criminals and untrustworthy Russians reinforced the feeling of threat among Russian speaking society in Eastern Ukraine. At the same time they stripped them of any trust in Ukrainian authorities. By manipulating of emotions and through the impact on local people perception and consciousness Russians strengthened pro-separatists' and pro-Russian attitude. It meant also the strengthening of separatists with regard to social status and their capabilities. For internal use Russian experts in psycho-informational war created the image of separatists as victims: poor but honest people working hard in industry in Eastern Ukraine (miners, steelworkers, employees of different factories) controlled by Kiev capitalists manipulated by imperialist American business.[6]

In a similar and very effective way Russia has used the wide range of informational war tools to distort the conflict reception among international communities. One of the example is the indirect influencing the content presented by media and their journalists. A case in point is a press article of German correspondent from "Der Spiegel" in Moscow, Benjamin Bidder who in 2015 stated: "it is time for Kiev to accept the loss of Donetsk in order to save the rest of the country". It is clearly the publication supporting the Russian point of view and Kremlin's interests. It was published during a difficult moment of cease-fire suggesting that the West should have agreed to provision of occupied lands to Russia. At the same time it showed Ukraine that the West abandoned it. Denigrating actions towards Ukraine in newspapers, social media or during diplomatic meetings have influenced the part of international officials and societies.

Russian psychological and informational actions have been aimed at decreasing Western sympathies to Ukraine by:

1. Repeating and constant updating with details information about illegal, appalling, full of violence and aggression Ukrainian combat activities in Donbas
2. Disseminating content suggesting links between Ukraine and Syrian war, especially relations with DAESH
3. Repeating already existing and widespread narratives about illegal Majdan and fascist government in Ukraine.[7]

Additionally the goals of all these campaigns have been set to show and emphasize:

- refugees and migrants as a threat,
- radical Islam as a threat,
- the lack of unity within EU,
- threat from Russia as an illusion,
- discrimination of Russian minorities,
- Ukraine as a corrupted country of chaos.[8]

In the case of Western countries, Russia senses the social emotions and has sent the message: we are not aggressive, we just try to control our sphere of influence, do business with us, get rich, we are not the enemy, live in peace like good neighbors. In the situation of tiredness of conflict and the

lack of perspective to solve it, the part of EU and NATO countries has treated these signals as positive signs. Asa a result many of western communities have not seen that Russian hybrid warfare is aggressive and its main goal is to divide international countries. The part of European leaders has preferred the economic benefits above European security. Some countries have not primarily treated the conflict in Ukraine, focusing on threats coming from the South.

Similar campaigns have been targeted at Poland. Polish positive attitude towards the transformations in Ukraine during the Revolution of Dignity prompted Russians to concerted propaganda and misinformation actions. These activities have been taken by different societies and media and have been aimed to divide Poland and Ukraine. Hostile actions have been present in form of providing manipulated information content usually built on emotional component. The narrative presented in this specific way is used to create in recipients' belief the anticipated messages which are coincide with Russian political or economic objectives.[9] As far as Poland is concerned, Russia have achieved this by inspiring or creating content concerning country's and nation's destabilization and isolation on an international stage. Russians has been trying to reach these goals by:

- creating negative image of Poland and Poles,
- building the insecurity among Russians by showing Poland and its allies hostile behavior towards Russia,
- building the sense of insecurity among Poles,
- inspiring and maintaining the antagonisms between Poland and its neighbors and allies which resulted in conflicts at global level.

Hostile content about Poland, depending on requirements, has occurred in different configurations: in Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, Western European information space. All actions applied have been closely linked and coordinated. In propaganda and misinformation messages Russians have highlighted untrue Polish territorial claims towards Ukraine. They have also presented that Poland despite its support for European aspiration in Ukraine, wanted Lviv return. One of the tasks was to strengthen the content promoted by several organizations in Poland which have publicly advocated revisionist demands towards Polish-Ukrainian borders under the slogan "Polish Lviv"[10]. In a very similar way Russians have stressed that Ukraine is interested in getting some Polish towns such as Chełm or Przemyśl back. The main Russian goal in this situation is to create, maintain and incite the atmosphere of conflict and enmity between Poland and Ukraine. Furthermore it has been applied to raise in Ukrainians fear that they could not count on Poland in their efforts to become closer to EU and what is more to show them that Warsaw could agree with Moscow in further dividing Ukrainian lands.

Russians also tries to build negative image of Ukrainians and Ukraine in Poland. They present the idea that unstable Ukraine could be a threat to Poland. This content was distributed in order to turn Poland's back on Ukraine and to stop Poland to support Ukraine. It rested on historically-oriented policy and tragic events in Wolyn during World War II.[11] It was possible to carry out because of following factors:

1. Strong emotions triggered by armed actions in Ukraine and leaving the historic policy to people connected with Wiktor Juszczenko.
2. Increase of economic immigration from Ukraine to Poland.
3. The results of parliamentary election and the victory of right-wing in Poland.

All these actions were strengthened by events such as destroying cemeteries, devastations of memorials in Ukraine and Poland which were carried out by marginal groups of radicals. Polish elite

seems to understand the objectives of Russian actions. However, activities planned in long-term perspective could lead to unaware conflict deepening between Poland and Ukraine.

Much real evidence confirming such actions can be pointed out. In May 2018 Polish Internal Security Agency informed about detention of Jekaterina C., Russian citizen, who came to Poland in 2013 to study at one of universities. She mainly operated in different associations and organizations, which are suspected of indirect and direct links with Kremlin and for a long time antagonises Polish-Ukrainian relations. In Poland Jekaterina C. performed as Katarzyna Cywilska. She conducted widespread actions firstly to incite Polish-Ukrainian animosity at the social and political level and secondly to question and undermine Polish historical policy and replace it with Russian narrative. What is more her aim was to unite pro-Russian communities in Poland. Secondly, in May 2018 Polish Border Guard detained Russian and Cyprus citizen, Anastazja Z. who was carrying out activities to promote Russian version of history and to hamper Polish historical policy. The detained woman was in touch with pro-Russian organizations in Poland. According to official statement, detention of these women is the result of Polish Internal Security Agency actions neutralizing the activity of two net-structures involved in Russian hybrid and informational warfare against Poland.[12] These actions were treated as a threat to state security in Poland. Lots of similar examples can be found in Ukraine and other European countries. Majority of them will never be discovered. Especially those, which are held in cyberspace - it has been proved that Russia applies the whole range of troll factories which produce the determined content in Internet.[13] All in all Russia using its informational capabilities can easily influence others.

Russian activity in Ukraine and the rest of the world has been extensive. In response to Russian actions not only Poland and Ukraine, but also NATO and EU should have made efforts to combat deceitful propaganda and should have conducted widespread information actions, especially since the West did a little to stop Russian information warfare. It should be stressed that Ukrainians, for a long time, did not handle its enemy's informational actions. But after some time they started their own campaigns targeted mainly at raising awareness among Western societies and authorities about the risks coming from aggressive Russia. Ukrainians tried also to get the support for their actions. As a part of campaign showing the real Russian engagement (equipment, forces, money) in anti-Ukrainian operations Ukrainians prepared whistleblowing content by publishing pictures of so called „little green men", soldiers, equipment. All these measures were taken in order not only to show Russian engagement in Ukraine, but also to psychologically affect Russian soldiers' and their families' morale. Exposing their names and addresses was the clear message: you are fighting against us and we know who you are and where you live, we will find you. Ukraine has been improving its techniques of combating Russian psych-informational activities. However on its own it might be difficult. Poland and Ukraine should carry out joint actions but with permanent EU and NATO engagement. Russian militarism should be treated as a real danger to rest of Europe. Hybrid tools have become the fantastic means to conduct aggressive policy and it should be envisaged that in the next years Russian will intensify its efforts in the area of psycho-informational war against West. We shouldn't ignore it because it cannot be excluded that the situation would be more intense. It is necessary to adjust the security system to new challenges and it is needed to amend the current military strategies capable to counter new threats. We are witnesses of slow transformation in strategic concepts. Realizing the power of the new tools in conducting conflicts is the basis to start adapting all system solutions to new era of threats.

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