# NON-KINETIC WARFARE CHALLENGES OF THE INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM'S PHENOMENOLOGY – THE PATTERN TO A NEW BATTLEGROUND

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**Abstract:** *A new technological paradigm often leads to a new societal paradigm, and not vice versa. Challenges faced are not only related to technology, it is the human consciousness that determines the role and influences the outcome of these tools. A comprehensive approach is desirable to understand the regular and irregular interdependence between social ecosystems and information ecosystems. The phenomenon offers the facility to induce short-term attitudes, and long-term mutations from the perspective of societal security, informational actions shapes collective attitudes, and influences people's critical choices. Deciphering, exposing and counteracting information aggressions may be possible by developing a mechanism of processes understanding, based on a support of multidisciplinary acceptance. The present research paper, provides an overview by what method the relationship between Non-Kinetic warfare and information ecosystems can be approached.*

**Keywords: Non-Kinetic, disinformation, intelligence, propaganda, cyber space, society.**

## 1. Introduction

Besides the classic military dimension, the actions of the modern war include active measures, able to penetrate into the opponent's political and psychological environment. Although there was a skepticism of Russian power after the Cold War, it did not give up its "arsenal" to adapt to the new technological and media patterns. It has also developed capabilities to control its own Russian informational ecosystem. Interference created often lead to altering the power of collective judgment and generate additional concerns to the effectiveness of these disinformation campaigns that have already shaped a recent propaganda history in the case of the Baltic States, Ukraine or Georgia. The purpose of information attacks, follows at least three areas of impact: discrediting of democratic institutions and public demoralization, shattering political and economic system, create public agitation and produce a heterogeneous social environment.

Kinetic war is violent and decisive, but limited in its effectiveness, while non-kinetic warfare is largely nonviolent physically, but not less effective. Using a combination of economic, cybernetic and computer warfare, its purpose is to promote psychological subversion and increase uncertainty or weariness in a target country or region.

Each of these tactics can contribute to the impact of others. The threat of kinetic war, for example, can intimidate and demoralize. The use of economic weapons can make corruption more attractive. A special advantage for Russia lies in the fact that the

hybrid war achieves the same objectives as a traditional military operation.

The undeclared media campaigns' goal is to promote information and to keep it credible for as long as it is an advantage for the aggressor, with the ambition of developing attitudes and collective beliefs, of shaping perceptions that will ensure the tactical game of the aggressor. Consequently, the effect is an alternative reality, which is being used by the aggressor to create a social resonance capable of public incitement. The result is depicted as a collective pattern that operates with myths, urban legends, conspiracies and innuendos, and creates a superpower perception of the aggressor. Typically, these campaigns are characterized by inertia, and after their completion they continue to produce effects.

Mainstream media often commit mistakes for multiple reasons that do not have a direct relationship with the propaganda phenomenon, but it sometimes comes to support several propaganda narratives unconsciously. Media outlets are characterized as for-profit enterprises, and often speculate sensational topics which are emotionally charged. When this approach is combined with the lack of ethical journalism or unprofessionalism, the objective reality is strongly distorted and inevitably contributes to the development of diluted collective perceptions.

Studying and understanding this phenomenon requires a transdisciplinary approach, involving experts from the fields of political science, intelligence, IT, mathematics, communication and behavioral sciences, psychology, neuroscience, etc.

## 2. Information Warfare Phenomenology

According to a study published by RAND Corporation[1], the contemporary model of Russian propaganda has four distinct features. The high amount of information can consume the audience by drowning competing messages, and their large volume may overwhelm competing messages leading to a collective agreement. Multiple information propagation channels increase the chances of exposure to the public, and the reception of a message from different sources and from multiple sources increases its perceived credibility.

Contemporary Russian propaganda is continuous and very receptive to events. Because of the lack of commitment to objective reality, Russian propagandists should not wait to verify the facts or verify their claims; they only disseminate an interpretation of emerging events that seems to best favors themes and goals. This allows them to be remarkably receptive and agile, by transmitting the first "news" of events, with a focus on distrust or things that have not actually happened. They will also repeat and recycle misinformation.

When people are less interested in a topic, they are more likely to accept the familiarity caused by repetition as an indicator, which would demonstrate that the information, repeated to the point of familiarity, is correct. In processing the received information, the receivers can save time and energy by using a heuristic frequency, by favoring in their judgment the information they have heard more often.

In conclusion, Russian propaganda has the agility of being the first, thus giving the propagandists the opportunity to create the first impression. Then, the combination of high-volume messages, channel diversity, and ongoing message diffusion make propagandist themes better integrated with their audiences, giving impetus to perceived credibility.

Russian contemporary propaganda does little or no reference to the truth. It does not mean that everything is false, on the contrary, it often contains a significant part of the truth. Sometimes, however, the events reported in Russian propaganda are entirely fabricated.

An important element that is part of the Soviet tactical arsenal represents the direct intervention by clandestine means in the

policy of another country. Active measures can pursue: influencing the policies of another government; undermining confidence in its leaders and institutions; the interruption of its relations with other nations; discrediting and weakening governmental and non-governmental opponents. Sometimes, the widespread presence of Kremlin media operates in coordination with on-site activists, including direct payment.

One of the features of the media ecosystems is that they are constantly interwoven and overlapping with each other[2]. Mainstream media ecosystem is perceived as legitimate and is guided by its own set of conduct, but it is perfectible, and not very much empathizes with conspiracy side, it is more focused on breaking news.

The conspiratorial media systematically labels state institutions as illegitimate or corrupt, its analysts are guided by paranoia and radical views, and claim to be defenders of national values. Rather it is positioned within a framework of missionary roles and rescuers of the nation. The famous subject about Russia's attempt to impose an alternative leadership in the US, amplifies the conspiracy-based discourse of this public information's propagation vector.

Disclosers are few in number, they use media platforms and hubs, have a reputation for releasing restricted/classified information but tend to influence the headline of general media. At the same time, they can choose selectively and emotionally charged subjects to lead public perceptions towards certain narratives. They are usually focused on subjects of the Western world and show unfavorable topics exclusively from this geographic space.

## 3. Information Cycle Laundering

Russian information campaigns are designed to create confusion, therefore eloquent is the case of Lisa in Germany[3].

The example is expressive because it fuels social psychosis, tends to discredit the force of public institutions and accentuates collective dissatisfaction. The narrative leads to the idea that the government is incapable of protecting its citizens and exploits semantically the big picture of an endless catastrophic scenario.

In order to enforce narratives, the aggressor can use sponsored groups to manage and launch storylines using occasionally compromising data from clandestine sources. Then the alleged evidence of leakage becomes viral by using an actor like WikiLeaks to generate public attractiveness. Activity itself may be more important than the poor content itself. To keep the storyline in mind, the aggressor uses his own echo chamber. This media ecosystem helps affiliates and trolls to establish ties with independent media. Affiliates capture attention by revealing several subjects, while the local media begins to digest the story and gain life on its own and is laundered by its traces and origins of interference. At this time, the aggressor's ghost-media system amplifies the attention and gives the storyline authenticity by citing ingenious media in the target country. This is where high intensity and volume negative messages appear, which rascally reinterpret the story and give it the desired direction.

In the social media, where collective agitation leads to virality, an army of trolls and bots promotes catastrophic interpretations of events[4]. They only need to play the role of an echo chamber at the command of the aggressor, and the informational spiral will stand easily on the vulnerability of the aggressed media ecosystem. Consequently, this logic describes how interference tools can penetrate a target media ecosystem and use it as an echo chamber.

An investigation published by Victor Rezunkov from Радио Свобода (Radio Freedom), in March 2015 highlighted the existence of a Kremlin troll center, an

enterprise with a three-year seniority, located in the village of Olgino, near St. Petersburg - and then in the city itself, on Savushkin Street, no. 55, officially called the Internet Research Limited Company, and unofficially called by its employees themselves "Kremlin trolls" – "Ministry of Truth". Officially, the founder and the general director of this organization is the retired police colonel Mikhail Bystrov, and it is financed by the Concorde holding company headed by the friend and cook of President Vladimir Putin - Yevgeny Prigozhin. In the "Ministry of Truth" work approximately 400 people, replacing each other every 12 hours, 24 hours a day sitting at computers and writing in blogs - mostly in the "Live Journal" or "VKontakte". The Agency comprises several departments, in one of them employees are engaged in the blogosphere, in another they prepare TOR - technical tasks, in the third one - they comment on news in Russian and foreign media, in the fourth department – the employees mount in Photoshop images, putting the head of Alexei Navalny and Barack Obama to the bodies of animals, and so on. The main tasks of the Kremlin trolls are to create a positive image of Vladimir Putin, Sergei Shoigu, Dmitry Medvedev and other Russian officials and negative image to Ukraine, US, EU and the Russian opposition.

Conclusions occurred as a result of interviews conducted with several former trolls, shows that they were engaged for a daily work of 12 hours a day, 135 comments per shift, 200 characters per comment, for 45.000 rubles (€615) a month. Immediately after the murder of Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, the trolls were told to stop working on everything else, and to focus on spreading disinformation about assassination' source of the opposition politician – blaming the Ukrainians, the Americans, or the Russian opposition activists themselves. According to Novaya Gazeta, a network of more than five hundred "network fighters" have acted to crush the opposition in the Nemtsov case[5]. The newspaper published a full list of trolls' nicknames living in the St. Petersburg. The assassination of opposition leader was not beneficial to the official authorities; it is obvious that behind this is a provocation. The Novaya Gazeta analysis concludes that the troll army's tactical actions were focused to form a negative attitude towards the representatives of the opposition, who were trying to earn political points on the death of a colleague; to shape the general opinion that Ukrainian figures could be involved in the death of the Russian oppositionist; to criticize Western politicians for interfering in Russia's internal affairs; the murder of Nemtsov was used as an excuse for pressure on the Russian Federation.

Information mercenaries boost the effect of hybrid warfare and paralyze the objective judgement through the creation of "alternative realities". Parallel information ecosystems represent a dangerous challenge in open democracies, as they bring with themselves the risk of social polarization. The information bubbles that have echoed in Europe over the last few years have encouraged on the backdrop of fear and collective mirage, the extreme political right' revival. According to the Belgian magazine La Libre, populist formations have won in Europe the third or fourth place as political influence, and are flirting with the far-right ideology[6]. In France, the National Front and Marine Le Pen, qualified for the second round of the presidential election last May, with a score for the FN (7.6 million votes, 21.3%). In the Nederland, the anti-Islamist Freedom Party (PVV) of Geert Wilders became, in March 2017, the second largest force in the Dutch Parliament, behind the Liberals, with 20 out of 150 seats. The Bulgarian nationalists, who came third in the March 2017 legislative elections in a coalition "The United Patriots", joined the government in May, where they were given two deputy prime ministers, two ministries,

and several portfolios of vice-ministers. The Freedom Party of Austria's candidate Norbert Hofer, who qualified for the second round of the December 2016 presidential election, failed to become the first right-wing president of an EU state. In Italy, the Northern League, an old secessionist movement, has turned into an anti-euro and anti-immigrant party. In early December 2016, it successfully campaigned for the "no" vote in the referendum on a revision of the Constitution, resulting in the fall of the government of Matteo Renzi. The People's Party Our Slovakia, a neo-Nazi movement launched in 2012, has taken advantage of the fear of migrants to enter parliament in March 2016, with 14 out of 150 seats. In Greece, Aube Dorée (AD) has strengthened, thanks to the migratory crisis, its place of third party of the country, to the legislative ones of September 2015, with 6.99% and 18 deputies. AD rejects the term neo-Nazi and is intended as a "nationalist movement" defender of the "white race". The Democrats of Sweden (SD) made a historic breakthrough in September 2014 by becoming the country's third-largest force (13% of the vote). They obtained 48 seats in Parliament out of 349. Established in 1998, this nationalist and anti-immigrant party, whose roots draw on the roots of the neo-Nazi movement, has distanced itself from the racist and violent groups that were very active in the 90's. In Belgium, since June 2014, the Vlaams Belang, which advocates the independence of Flanders, occupies three of the 150 seats in the House of Representatives. In sharp decline, he saw his electorate subtilized by the nationalist party New Flemish Alliance (N-VA). The Jobbik (the Movement for a Better Hungary) is the second largest parliamentary force with 24 deputies. Faced with the harsh anti-immigration and authoritarian line of conservative Prime Minister Viktor Orban, the party put up with the violently racist and anti-Semitic slogans of its beginnings to refocus on corruption, health, education.

**4. Landmarks of the information warfare in Romania**

The Slovak institute GLOBSEC have conducted an opinion poll in seven Central and Eastern European Countries. According to GLOBSEC research report "*Almost 10% of people in Central and Eastern Europe trust online disinformation outlets as relevant sources of information on world affairs*"[7] the authors say. The highest percentage was found in Romania (37%), followed by Slovakia (12%), Poland and the Czech Republic (both 9%).

Like any other European country with democratic aspirations, Romania is not being substituted for information aggressions exposure. Due to the predominant Latin character of the Romanian language, non-kinetic actions have a more subversive side. If in the Slav countries, Russian media broadcasters have easy access and find the wide target audience, both among nostalgic groups and Russian ethnics, in Romania, for example, the social and identity configuration does not allow the same approach. The Romanians' pro-NATO and pro-EU orientation and their predilection of consuming western products, defines a slightly atypical spectrum in contrast with its Slav neighbors.

If there are no major cultural models, except the Orthodox religious space, what does subversive print use Russia?

Mapping the non-kinetic phenomenology and the features of subversive aggression:

- maintaining high levels of corruption and blackmailing politicians;
- discrediting of authentic elites;
- distrusts democratic functionality and connects it to an alternative reality;
- media titles are more important than reality; for example: subliminal misinformation through TV crawlers, avalanche blogs, anonymous social media news channels/ info fabrication;
- cultivate a collective atmosphere characterized by demoralization, ambiguity and apathy; perfect ground for handling;

- inappropriate operation with myths, cliques, symbols and beliefs that destabilize national self-esteem (a cowardly approach);
- calling for historical events when Romanians were dominated or weak - creates the sense of inferiority; inspiring an image of fear and a perception of superiority / aggressive potential by a super-military power;
- speculating frustrations in the collective mentality, symbolic violence, deciphering the reaction matrix of the target group through informational injections in social media, anticipating collective attitudes;
- Putin is portrayed as a salvation hero and protector of the traditional values / defender of a common religious space;
- discrediting / undermining institutional efforts to combat corruption phenomenon;
- counterfeiting / falsifying audio and video, misleading interpretations of official speeches or national policies.

The Russian information war is more subversive in Romania than in the Baltic States or Ukraine, it cannot be persuasive through major cultural associations but operates at the level of collective frustration and lack of confidence; antagonizes relations with neighboring states and intends to destroy the basic pillars of democracy by speculating their own internal vulnerabilities.

In the information space, we can still find a narrative pattern designed to reach the general information consumers, which is exploited through the specific media, described above. Some of the topics below are closely related to the Russian narrative pattern in the region:

- the Romanian intelligence services are permanently portrayed as successors of the former Securitate;
- Soros is behind all the things (e.g. why Vladimir Putin did not kill George Soros; this narrative support gives "legitimacy" to pro-Kremlin actions, foundation for info-war operations in Eastern Europe);
- Coalition for the Traditional Family (an issue of the Romanian Orthodox Church Eastern branch and the polarization of the liberal society groups versus the traditionalists and conservatives);
- propaganda topics focus on collective frustrations and refer to historical contestations;
- the narrative pattern appeals to the confusion of governmental inefficiency and poor living standards combined with the "injustice" of the West towards Romania, its moral degeneration and betrayal of our national values and interests;
- groups of Western leaders are media framed in the area of the fascist factions;
- referring the EU's global policy, the narrative model appeals to LGBT intrigue; hate-speech; Euro-skepticism, anti-migration;
- "NATO/US Nuclear Bases in Romania" (which were not sufficiently publicly denied generates the risk / cleavage created between alternative reality vs. objective/factual reality);
- "unfair relationship and the bad treatment of ethnic minorities", Hungary, Budapest, Trianon 100;
- media storylines include topics about failed Ukraine, Moldova Mare, Anul Ștefan cel Mare 2018, Romania's neighbors, Turkey;
- propaganda tactics pushes on the rise of the sense of cleavage between communities;
- supporting corrupt, pro-Russian and nationalist parties, unsuccessful association of street protests HG-13 with Euromaidan;
- nostalgic narratives about Ceaușescu's regime effectiveness and achievements;
- conspiracy blogs promote narratives about benevolent or malicious ET races, genetic manipulation of western leaders and their demonization.

## 5. Proposing a model for analyzing the phenomenon of propaganda

What does a propaganda analysis methodology must do in order to develop a strategic communication? A general logic concept is presented below:

- analysis of the social phenomenon in the virtual space (SOCMINT), from the perspective of exposure to propaganda;
- understand collective beliefs and frustrations (possible message targets);
- decipher the cosmetics and direction behind propaganda;
- approach the regional interdependence: understand how Moldova, Hungary, Ukraine and Turkey can be used as platforms against Romania;
- explain the causes that distort reality to attract public attention / awareness;
- monitoring and detecting false / fake-news;
- identification of propaganda sources, channels and people, monitoring and blocking channels;
- develop a machine-learning that adapts to frequencies, narratives and virality (IT);
- deconstruct of propaganda, back to reality, objectivity and specificity;
- developing recommendations and measures for public diplomacy/digital diplomacy/scenario planning; risk analysis and impact analysis;
- offer support for statecraft and decision-making.

Further models could be added and improved to analyze the subliminal neurolinguistics message, content analysis and word density, to identify a measurable scaling of textual manipulation.
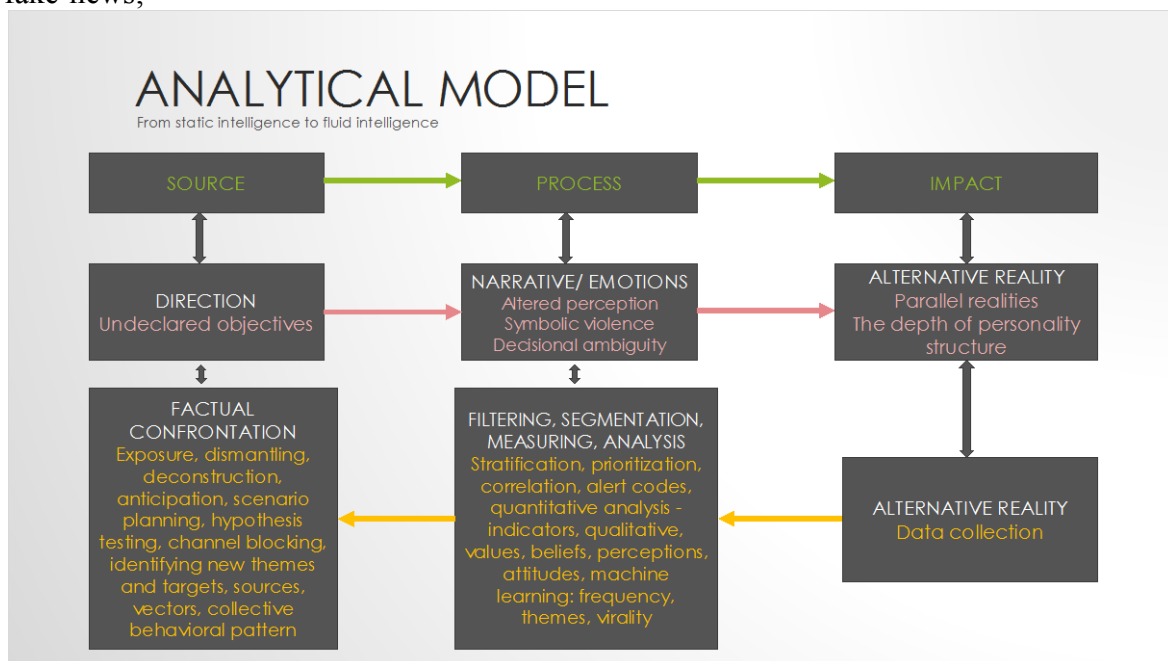


Figure 1: *Proposing a model for analyzing the phenomenon of propaganda*

## 6. Conclusions

Developing a dialogue between institutions and society can decipher, explain and expose the effects of media intoxication, and lead to legitimate participatory mechanisms on both sides to seize system errors and increase mutual trust. At the same time, press freedom is of major importance, and the regulatory effect must be imposed by civil society. This new necessary model implies a social and political re-engineering, based on democratic values of transparency and feedback. The incidence of information warfare fits exactly on the spectrum of

communication vulnerabilities, between political leadership and those who are led.

A dangerous and undermining effect, due to the lack of communication, is gaining the political weight in Europe by the extreme right wing, which is based on collective dissatisfaction and the rhetoric of xenophobia, exacerbation and the preservation of national identity. Actually, these political groups promote a radical message, and by punishing immigrants as a solution, they induce the idea of resolving all the country's economic and political problems. This dangerous soar brings Europe closer to a vulnerable information ecosystem phenomenology, characterized by induced narrative patterns which antagonizes social groups and exposes European society to the ruthless tactics of external actors pursuing political and economic advantages.

In political theory, the power is expressed through the ability of an actor to influence others. We can assume that, in a subtle way, propaganda techniques represent a modern method to establish an occupation regime, this time being characterized by the occupation of the vital information space. This struggle for winning collective minds creates behaviors that are reflected in collective decisions. Assigning of negative connotations to current political leadership usually shatters the trust in the fundamentals of democracy, which are imprinted in the judgment process of the target audience. Consequently, the novice public, conducive to radical hypothetical measures, is directed towards embracing the "visions" promoted by nationalist political groups. Europe is currently undergoing such a process, being exposed to info-aggressions by clandestine means specific to the post-modern era. We are at the beginning of the Information Age, where hybrid misinformation strategies, combined with cyber-attacks, will challenge the maturity of European democracies. Finally, we notice that soft power type of aggression suggests a better relationship of complementarity between civil and political structures to manage the digital phenomenon, but also to develop new functions of public intelligence that are needed to convey a coherent message to society, and vice-versa, in matters of national security. Unfortunately, the absence of a productive societal dialogue cannot meet the need to generate a new technological paradigm. Once we have faced a new industrial era, we acknowledge that a new technological paradigm determined a new societal paradigm, not the other way around. Just because we are at this stage of technology addiction, which is progressing much faster than the collective mentality of our societies, digitization and artificial intelligence will raise more challenges in the future for people and their conscious integrity; understanding phenomena and adapting to transformation are key antibodies that societies need to cultivate.

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