

ORIGINAL ARTICLES

Article received on February 12, 2017 and accepted for publishing on June 15, 2017.

Media, medical intelligence and hybrid war

Oana M. Ciobanu¹

Abstract: Contemporary hybrid war is a novelty in that it is taken to populated conflict zones, with the participation of the population, under the eyes of the international community. Thus, according to many authors, the most serious threats to the United States, including to its NATO dimension and to its partnership with Europe, would come from extremist groups and their ideology, fueled by poor urban areas of the world, where youth faces great economic and social problems, and is militating for a change. These unconventional actors can operate beyond state control by circumventing international borders, norms and agreements. Some of these belong to global terrorist networks, and others co-operate with criminal elements to destabilize certain areas. The hybrid confrontation with these groups will become "a clash beyond the physical elements of the conflict, in which media manipulation, the use of the internet and the integration of information operations with strategic communication programs are as important as weapon systems on the battlefield."

Crises generated in the context of a hybrid war are events characterized by low probability and important consequences that threaten an organization for its most profound purposes. Because of their low probability, these events defy any interpretation and require a sustained effort to understand and adapt the reactions. Crises affecting social groups differ in their causes and duration. Obviously, because of the multitude of types of crises, human reason can only play a limited role in their development. However, they trigger human action, which can turn small deviations into major crises.

Crisis and conflict management involves very complex systems of political, diplomatic, social, economic, cultural, international, military and other actions.

Such a system could be structured on political, diplomatic, social, economic, informational, military, psychological and cultural components and could include the following types of action: on the causes; on effects; on the phenomenon; on value systems; on crisis-generating strongpoints (critical areas); on vulnerable sites; on the leaders.

METHODS

The analysis of open sources of information and of the experience gained during the activity in the field of communication and public relations, concretized through the elaboration and implementation of both the communication management strategies and of the projects included in the field of defense and national security.

In hybrid war, opponents (states, state-supported or independent movements) will exploit access to

modern military capabilities and support insurgent, terrorist and criminal movements as well as the intervention of states that can combine high-tech military capabilities with terrorist actions and cyberwar operations against financial targets.

The analysis of available sour-

¹ Carol Davila University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Bucharest

ces suggests that the likelihood of a hybrid warfare is in direct connection with local population's satisfaction and the stability of states. Experts believe that, in failed or failing states, population security and services are often provided by dissident groups, armed factions, and criminal gangs. These areas become a fertile ground for terrorist, fundamentalist, extremist groups with regional or global influence and seriously affect the world economic system by facilitating illegal activities.

Contemporary hybrid war is a novelty in that it is taken to populated conflict zones, with the participation of the population, under the eyes of the international community. Thus, according to many authors, the most serious threats to the United States, including to its NATO dimension and to its partnership with Europe, would come from extremist groups and their ideology, fueled by poor urban areas of the world, where youth faces great economic and social problems, and is militating for a change. These unconventional actors can operate beyond state control by circumventing international borders, norms and agreements. Some of these belong to global terrorist networks, and others co-operate with criminal elements to destabilize certain areas. The hybrid confrontation with these groups will become "a clash beyond the physical elements of the conflict, in which media manipulation, the use of the internet and the integration of information operations with strategic communication programs are as important as weapon systems on the battlefield."

The issue emerging in the hybrid war resides in the fact that the enemy is trying to circumvent the military victory by focusing on long-term political victory by encouraging and maintaining tensions, crises and conflicts on a small scale, with implications at regional and sub-regional level, using the media handling concept with increasing intensity. Almost every person has come to have their own perception about manipulation, but without a complete conscious understanding of its content.

In the public debate, confusion is often made between information, adhesion, influence and manipulation.

Through the means of mass communication, the

meaning of the war creates, metaphorically, a war of the meaning, of information, that conveys and / or prevents opponents from accessing information to influence their emotions, motives or goals, aiming at obtaining behaviors and actions favoring initiators.

The influencing action – whether by coercive or non-coercive strategies – has the purpose of altering the behavior of the people it is exercising upon. Regardless of the type of influence exerted on the individual, it produces its effects only through the human psyche.

In other words, any action of influence on an individual – be it propaganda, threat, promise, persuasion, intimidation, blackmail, noise, annoyance, surprise or harassment, etc. – it achieves its effects through the human psyche.

All definitions given to communication, regardless of the schools of thought to which they belong or the guidelines they enclose, present at least the following common elements: communication is the process of transmitting information, ideas, opinions, opinions from one individual to another, or from one group to another; conscious communication is an attribute of the human species; activities, events, processes and decisions involving people cannot be conceived beyond communication.

Any communication process has the following components (Zorlentan, T., 2001): Issuer; Receiver; Message; Context; Communication channels. An efficient communication process calls for both categories of channels to be considered, knowledge of how they operate, and the benefits and drawbacks that exist in their use and control [1].

Any human behavior, however, cannot be determined directly, but indirectly by actions on the elements that determine its appearance.

Misinformation consists of any intervention on the basic elements of a communicative process that deliberately modifies the messages being circulated in order to trigger in the target groups certain attitudes, reactions, actions desired by the opponent.

Vladimir Volkoff [2] defines misinformation as a "manipulation of public opinion for political purposes, using information subjected to hijacked means", as

well as several ways in which it could be used: discrediting; undermining leaders' reputation; ridiculing traditions.

He also sets out twelve ways of effectively using misinformation to change the attitude of public opinion and to force it to act in the proposed direction of the manipulators: denial of deeds; reversing the facts; the mixture of truth and lies; changing the motif; changing circumstances; blurring; camouflage; interpretation; generalization; illustration; unequal parts; equal parts. [3]

Disinformation as a weapon carefully conceals its origin and camouflages its intention of transforming the target into a manipulated object, refusing its right to specific traits and behaviors.

"Manipulation is the action of determining a social actor (person, group, community) to think and act in a way that is compatible with the interests of the initiator, instead of his interests, by using persuasion techniques that deliberately distort the truth, leaving the impression of freedom of thought and decision (...) The true intentions of the person who conveys the message remain insidious to the recipient. From a political point of view, manipulation is a form of imposing the interests of this class, group, community, not by means of coercion, power, but by ideological ones, by deception." [4]

In defining the notion of manipulation, it is necessary to specify a few specific elements [5]:

- The dissemination of a large amount of detailed information that cannot be verified while also concealing the real aspects of a case;
- The obsessive repetition of information with a negative trend, to be fixed in the memory of the listeners;
- <embargo> on the real information;
- Exploiting the fact that people are hungry with rumors.

New information technologies often separate the information as such from the identity of the person who initiated the news, and thus from the particular social context that would give it a certain credibility

and a certain meaning. From this point of view, the power is directed towards credible communicators, towards those who can also offer a frame in an understandable context, easily recognizable by public opinion.

The context in which the news is located is very important – the reputation and credibility of the communicator matters. Type/brand becomes extremely important as a result. If 50 years ago, the battle was to gain control over the means of transmitting information, today the battle is being done to build/destroy credibility. The illusion of the need for information to be provided "readily interpreted" has been created, that is why the credibility of the source is a guarantee of a good interpretation. Global transparency, driven by new media opportunities and low-priced technologies, is now setting the stage for media outreach.

Thus, it is necessary to communicate very clearly to the target which will be its personal benefit by adopting a certain behavior or attitude, instead of the national, pan-national or regional benefit it will receive. The promised benefit in the future for that person must be personalized.

As for the brand image (it can be, for example, the US one), particular attention should be paid to the five basic dimensions of a brand: presence; relevance; differentiation; credibility; image and target. [6,7]

Crises are events characterized by low probability and important consequences that threaten an organization in its most profound purposes. Because of their low probability, these events defy any interpretation and require a sustained effort to understand and adapt reactions.

As a consequence, we can state that the crisis is an acute phenomenon which, left uncontrolled, can become chronic – that is, it can degenerate into conflict, therefore the dynamics of the decision-making process is particularly complex and it is carried out in most situations under uncertainty and stress.

Analyzing the phenomenon of crisis, we express the opinion that any crisis of any nature, has certain

characteristics, such as: Threat; Expedite; Surprise; Time pressure; increased uncertainty and intensity.

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Case Study: Ebola, Romania, 2015 [8]

The hypothesis of biological warfare, using the hemorrhagic fever virus, Ebola, as a weapon, was brought to the attention of the specialized public by military intelligence analysts, but also by the medical academics.

Although insignificant in size and proportions, the media crisis caused by the presence of Ebola virus in Romania raised concern at the level of state structures actively involved in the early detection, isolation and treatment of these patients, which led to the development of an action and communication strategy, following the premises mentioned in this article, which has also been concretized through an evaluation mission of the European Union experts.

Thus, during March 19-21, 2015, at the invitation of Dr. Raed Arafat, State Secretary and Head of the Emergency Situations Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, an expert team led by ECDC visited Romania. The main objectives of the visit were to provide specialized support to public institutions with tasks and responsibilities in the field of health, in order to review and verify the effectiveness of operational emergency intervention procedures, to verify the mechanisms of national inter-institutional cooperation in the context of management, under maximum safety and security conditions, of the cases imported by Ebola.

The main finding of the report was that Romania took the threat of Ebola seriously and initiated and

established a wide range of measures as soon as possible, being able to ensure the rapid detection of infected persons, transport and specialized medical care, under conditions of maximum security for the staff involved in this procedural chain. Immediately after the World Health Organization Statement of October 2014 disclosing the threat to the Ebola virus, which was categorized as an emergency of international public health, the National Emergency Situation Committee of Romania created a national network, dedicated to managing this threat.

The role of the Ebola National Committee is to coordinate the interventions and measures needed to prevent and combat Ebola virus infections. It is chaired by the Head of the Department for Emergency Situations (Secretary of State within the Ministry of Internal Affairs), Vice-President - Secretary of State within the Ministry of Health.

In the Committee there are governmental decision making actors, namely within the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Department for Emergency Situations), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of National Defense, the Ministry of Education and Research, the Ministry of Transport, as well as key institutions, subordinated to these ministries, such as the Public Health Institute, the National Institute of Infectious Diseases "Matei Balș" and the Central Military Hospital "Dr. Carol Davila".

Throughout this period, the Ebola National Committee has worked intensively to develop a coherent national strategy for preparing for the safe identification and management of possible cases of Ebola and has consequently adopted seven decisions in this area, covering various issues related to early detection, triage, management and prevention of future spread of the Ebola hemorrhagic fever virus, as well as the creation of a dedicated budget to support this activity.

According to the Report, public health activity at the local level is carried out at the level of 42 public health authorities (VATA), and centralized data are provided to the National Public Health Institute (NPHI), which works under the aegis of the Ministry of Health. The Institute has five branches in the main cities:

Timișoara, Iași, Cluj-Napoca, Târgu-Mureș and Sibiu, and monitors all epidemiological situations with potential for national and international impact, along with other relevant institutions, being involved in activities aimed at increasing the degree of awareness. The site of the institute is the most complete and complex source of information, updated for both professionals and the general public. Although not mentioned in the Ebola National Committee's decisions, the NPHI also has the role of conducting and implementing population training campaigns, while maintaining institutional dialogue with regional public health authorities (VATA) as regards the evolution of relevant epidemiological issues, as well as contributing to the training and professional development of public health specialists.

In addition, CNAS and the Ministry of Health provide the early warning and response system to threats to national and, implicitly, European health security, assuming its responsibilities and commitments to WHO to address issues related to the implementation of the International Health Regulation (IHR).

At European level, key actors from other sectors of activity (e.g.: international affairs, civil protection, etc.) have been actively involved in discussions and in the start of inter-sector collaboration protocols that have taken place. In addition, a number of EU/EEA Member States have extensively participated in international efforts to counter the African epidemic by providing expertise, logistical and financial support.

Although for many countries the danger has passed, some European countries may still be at risk of exposure to the Ebola threat, given the migration phenomenon of residents from countries on the African continent, especially those in the West, severely affected by this disease.

The EU Health Security Committee continues to work to ensure effective communication at Member State level, in particular as regards the development and establishment of a joint action plan of addressing this challenge, further enhancing the dimension of the concept of preventing the spread of the disease by examining cross-sectoral and cross-border issues, as well as by checking capacities and capabilities for

responding to biological incidents and accidents with extremely violent public health impact.

The lessons learned by Romania in this context have brought back a number of issues on the public agenda, such as the fragility of the healthcare and public health infrastructure; the high exposure to infection, given that our country is a gateway to Europe for the African population.

National vulnerabilities: lack of specialized medical personnel (in 2007 out of a total of 45 000 doctors, only 16 000 remained in Romania, others preferring other Member States, the phenomenon of labor migration is acutely felt in the intensive care, epidemiology and infectious diseases departments), the management of bio-waste, the lack of joint training drills in case of biological danger, the possible difficulties in the organization of medical evacuation - at this moment in Romania, there is no generic preparedness plan for a rapid response to eradication of outbreaks of infectious diseases, although it would be relatively easy to establish one as a result of the Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Plan used during 2009-2010-, the blocking of public procurement for advanced products/devices to support activities in the medical field as well as research-innovation and health system development.

An important aspect is also the need to ensure the functionality of a public health lab, of vital importance both for the national preparedness to respond to the threat of infectious diseases and for mandatory reporting at EU level through the ECDC. Not even today did the analyzes carried out by the Ion Cantacuzino National Research and Development Institute for Microbiology and Immunology surpass the threat of the uncertainty of activity financing, a key component of the public health system, which entails a whole chain of vulnerabilities that converge significantly to creating a state of health insecurity.

CONCLUSIONS

That is why medical intelligence, defined in Joint Pub 1-02 as "a type of information products resulting from the collection, evaluation, analysis and interpretation of medical, biological and scientific data as well as

from the climate-related data, represent a special category, essential to national strategic planning, whether we are talking about the military or civilian environment, the planning of the fighting force conservation operations or the performance of medical capabilities assessments of rapid intervention."

"The role of medical intelligence structures is often confused with that of preventive medicine. Although the two disciplines have no common ground, they have become complementary over time, even in a relationship of interdependence.

While preventive medicine attempts to identify those events that constitute medical threats to subsequently

assess the risks posed by exposure to such threats, while ensuring at the same time that decision-makers are advised on the adoption of preventive strategies, the medical intelligence is the component which ensures the permanent upgrading of the prevention process by identifying new types of non-conventional medical risks and threats, described in the published literature, in the possession of potential aggressors, depending on the changes in the security climate and the geostrategic map of influence (state actors or terrorist militarized formations), assesses new trends and medical technologies, especially in the dual-use industry." [9]

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