Weaponized Information and Narratives on the South Caucasus Landscapes of Narratives

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The emergence of social media and networks led to the transformation of the information space into an ecosystem operating on the principles of the theory of complex adaptive systems, complex thinking and science of complexity. Consequently, deep structural changes in the way society is informed and interacts within itself took place. The emergence of the information ecosystem, economic and financial uncertainty, and instability created prerequisites for the weaponization of information in ways that can be destructive on a global scale.

The US presidential elections of 2016 showed how influential social and informational activity in the ecosystem can be. Many politicians and analysts were surprised at the decisive impact that targeting the flow of information and news, including misinformation and false information (fake news), can have on the results of political struggle.

Attempts to create a response to new challenges showed that misinformation and false information are only elements of a wider problem of weaponized narratives. Viewing the South Caucasus from the point of view of creating a common landscape of narratives, allows to speak of a serious challenge, which demands revision of fundamental concepts and regional borders in order to respond to it.

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1. Stages of Development of Mass Media and the Information Ecosystem

Development of Mass Media until the Middle of the 20th Century

More than five centuries ago the emergence of publishing in Europe created the necessary conditions for the involvement of the general public in the process of exchanging ideas, theories and views. In turn, this formed the phenomenon of "public opinion," which became an important political factor and an attribute of the democratic form of government over time. By the middle of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century the newspapers became bodies of political parties. The "freedom of speech" was interpreted as the right to prepare practically any content serving the political goals of a party and criticizing the views of its opponents.

However, during the 19th century the party press gradually gave way to another press, which was funded by advertising. Journalism gradually separated from the patronage of parties, and the formed content was dictated by the market. Journalism's purpose became drawing the attention of the readers and increasing sales. As a result, the materials devoted to crimes, scandals and so forth became the most demanded. A phenomenon which was named "sensationalism". According to a number of researchers, press was substantially compromised due to sensationalism, which led to the reduction of its efficiency as an indicator of authority and power.[2]

In the 19th century, besides the paper press, the telegraph was invented which had a huge impact on the formation of mass media. In 1838, Sidney Morse congratulated his brother Samuel on the creation of the telegraph, which he called "not only the greatest invention of this age, but the greatest invention of any age."

With the appearance of the telegraph the public suddenly had an opportunity to be informed about events, which previously only the governments were privy. Political and informational arenas became densely connected

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[2]   Kaplan, Richard L. (2002). *Politics and the American Press: The Rise of Objectivity, 1865-1920*. Cambridge University Press.

via many communication channels, which increased the connectivity of the world political system. Supported by other changes of the industrial age, the qualitatively increased tempo of processes in the international arena created new and unfamiliar threats, which would have been called "black swan"- like events today.

In the 20th century, mass media turned into corporations which were actively guided by the ideal of "social responsibility." Receiving profit still remained the main motive and driver of the mass media industry; however, lessons of the past and the aspiration to maintain their reputation made the conscientious covering of events favourable. As a result, towards the second half of the 20th century mass media formed the public agenda, defining which events and facts were important and "real". They also established the parameters of normalcy, "appointing" dissidents and deviant behaviour.

It allowed the leading mass media corporations to accumulate considerable power, turning them into the "fourth estate". There were even fears that the domination of mass media, above all electronic, would reduce the volume of discussions of strategic questions between political forces and politicians when a reaction to the current events was decisive. Concentration of power in the hands of several large corporations will lead to a situation where charismatic or "telegenic" candidates get advantage over more prepared and qualified ones.[3]

Thus, by the end of the 20th century, mass media applied for complete corporate control and concentration of property, allowing them to limit diversity of interpretations which are present in a public discourse.

Electronic Mass Media and Networks. The Birth of the Information Ecosystem

The emergence of social media and networks led to profound structural changes in the ways that society is informed and organizes the interactions within itself. While having a great influence on public consciousness, social

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[3] Bagdikian, Ben. (1983). *The Media Monopoly.* Beacon Press, also Lang, Kurt and Gladys Engel-Lang. (2002). *Television and Politics.* NJ: Transaction Publishers.

media and networks do not form their own content, but are the environment which provides social and informational communications.

Users of social media and networks had the opportunity to actively search and filter the information, without relying on journalists, by creating and editing new content independently. That, in turn, has led to an erosion of the role of professional journalists and editors who carried out the role of intermediaries and "guardians", controlling the information products before they got to the end users.[4] That, in turn, led to emergence of new forms of creation of information by ordinary citizens and "a democratization of news production"[5] challenging the control of information, including by the government. Nevertheless, social media and networks became a valuable platform of public life, based on which many citizens consume news and even define their political identity.

Thus, information space in the 20th century represented a complicated hierarchical system. The basic elements of which were the mass media, possessing global scope, influence, and power. Formation of social media and networks led to the transformation of the information space into a complex adaptive system and, now, an information ecosystem, which functions on the principles of complex thinking and complexity science.[6]

In general, an information ecosystem and in particular social media and networks, challenge the traditional power of the journalists and editors. A trend which is followed by an increase in the mistrust of the dominating mass media, thanks to the widespread violations of the standards of ethics, and corruption.[7] As a result, many readers consider the news sites more genuine and truthful than the dominating traditional mass media, which

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[4]   Bruns, A. "Gatewatching, not gatekeeping: Collaborative online news," *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture and Policy*, Vol. 107(1), pp. 31-44. 2003.

[5]   Gillmor, Dan. "We the media: The rise of citizen journalists," *National Civic Review*, Vol. 93(3), pp. 58-63, 2004.

[6]   Tuchman, Barbara W. (1962). *The Guns of August*. New York: Dell Publishing.

[7]   Siles, Ignasio, and Boczkowski, Pablo J. "Making sense of the newspaper crisis: A critical assessment of existing research and an agenda for future work," *New Media & Society*, Vol. 14(8), 2012. pp. 1375-1394.

correlates with the increasing mistrust in the latter.[8] In the 21st century the formed public discourse becomes the subject of the continuous fight, which develops in all segments of public life. A situation, which the philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend calls "epistemological anarchy."[9]

However, the blurring and even the loss of the standards of preparation and dissemination of information, with the absence of the criteria allowing to keep the trust, led to the fact that the information ecosystem was vulnerable to mutations and the distribution of misinformation and false information.[10] The information ecosystem, social media and networks turned into a mirror which reflects all the ranges of human interests and ideas, all spheres of the life of the society. The duality of human nature, its tendency of both peace, and violence and war, reflects in the ecosystem, turning it, sometimes, into a shattered[11] or even "a black mirror."

The Misinformation, False Information, and Mutations in the Information Ecosystem

The U.S. presidential elections of 2016 showed how influential social and informational activity in an ecosystem can be. Many politicians and political strategists were surprised at the fact, that the targeted use of the news and the flow of information, including misinformation and false information, in social media and networks, can have a decisive impact on the results of a political struggle. An immediate response to the "fake news" narrative was born, which became fashionable, and also a large number of papers on the subject were written.

As for the public and the academic world, it became obvious that the information ecosystem raises questions of its own vulnerability and the vul-

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8   Tsfati, Yarif. "Online news exposure and trust in the mainstream media: Exploring possible associations," *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 54(1), 2010. pp. 22-42.

9   Feyerabend, Paul K. (2010). *Against Method. London: Verso (4th edition)*.

10   Benkler, Y. et al. "Study: Breitbart-led right-wing media ecosystem altered broader media agenda," *Columbia Journalism Review*, March 3, 2017. 27 October 2017. http://www.cjr.org/analysis/breitbart-media-trump-harvard-study.php.

11   Public Policy Forum. "The Shattered Mirror: News, Democracy and Trust in the Digital Age," January 2017, p. 56. 27 October 2017. http://www.newsmediauk.org/write/ MediaUploads/Fakepercent20News/theShatteredMirror.pdf.

nerability of modern societies to various forms of false or misinformation, such as "fake news", disinformation, propaganda, etc.

There are some reasons why social media and networks are so vulnerable to manipulations with information;

1) the fixed expenses for the access to the network and the market of content production appear to be the lowest;

2) it is extremely difficult to make judgments concerning the correctness of information materials in social media and networks, in virtue of the large number of sources of information and its fast distribution;

3) fake news and other forms of misinformation or false information, when gaining viral character, can bring in a significant advertising income;

4) social media and networks facilitate the formation of ideologically divided closed micro networks. The wide diversity of the points of view facilitates the creation of "echo chambers" or "filter bubbles" by similarly conceiving citizens, where they are isolated from opposite opinions;[12]

5) the amplifying polarization and the increasing negative emotions of each of the parties of the political range towards each other takes place. As a result, each of the parties is inclined to trust the negative news, including the distorted and false information, concerning the other;

6) the polls conducted by Gallup's institute revealed the proceeding decrease in "trust and confidence" towards the traditional mass media, "when it concerns the reporting of full, exact and objective news."[13]

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[12] Sunstein, Cass R. (2001). *Echo chambers: Bush v. Gore, impeachment, and beyond.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Pariser, Eli. (2011). *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding from You.* Penguin Press UK.

[13] Allcott, Hunt and Matthew Gentzkow. "Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election," *NBER Working Paper*, No. 23089, January 2017, Revised April 2017. p. 6. 27 October 2017. http://www.nber.org/papers/w23089.

Despite the actualization of the problem of using misinformation or false information as a means of influencing the public opinion and behavior in 2016, these methods were always used. Moreover, "fake news" is not a new term. In the 1925 article of the *Harper* magazine, "Fake news and the public," the increase in the quantity of similar news is condemned: "Once the news faker obtains access to the press wires, all the honest editors alive will not be able to repair the mischief he can do. An editor receiving a news item over the wire has no opportunity to test its authenticity as he would in the case of a local report."[14]

Some researchers are of the opinion that the influence of misinformation or fake news in the information ecosystem is overestimated. Moreover, the speculations on the subject of "fake news" and the requirements to strengthen control over networks are used for the prosecution of other purposes. According to "The Guardian," fake news is "becoming a […] phrase for anything people happen to disagree with"[15]. Under these circumstances, the pressure forcing companies owning social media and networks to remove materials which are considered "fake", can lead to the suppression of the "alternative voices" and "the weeding out of viewpoints that are in conflict with established interests."[16]

The citizen's knowledge of the actual information regarding the politics and political life is important for the functioning democracy.[17] Factual information is the "currency of democratic citizenship" providing common grounds within the political debate. It allows citizens to estimate a public policy and take a conscious participation in the political life.[18]

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[14] McKernon, E. "Fake News and the Public: How the Press Combats Rumor, The Market Rigger, and The Propagandist," *Harper's Magazine,* 1925. Citations from: Lazer, David et al. *Combating Fake News.*

[15] Allbright, Jonathan. "Stop Worrying about Fake News. What Comes Next Will Be Much Worse." *The Guardian*, December 9, 2016. 27 October 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/dec/09/fake-news-technology-filters.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Carpini, Delli, Michael and Scott Keeter. (1996). *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters.* Yale University Press.

[18] Kuklinski, J. et al. (2000) "Misinformation and the Currency of Democratic Citizenship," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 623, pp. 790-816.

2. Forms, Classification and Distribution of the Misinformation and False Information

Forms and Classification of the False Information and Misinformation

Though the term "fake news" became popular in 2016, concepts of false information and misinformation are widely presented in the academic literature on economy, psychology, political science and informatics.[19]

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[19] It is possible to give the following sources as an example. The review of political false perceptions:

Flynn, D. J., Brendan Nyhan, and Jason Reifler. "The Nature and Origins of Misperceptions: Understanding False and Unsupported Beliefs about Politics," *Advances in Political Psychology,* Vol 38(S1), 2017, pp. 127-50. 27 October 2017. https://www.dartmouth.edu/~nyhan/nature-origins-misperceptions.pdf.
The impact of new information on political beliefs:

Berinsky, Adam J. "Rumors and Health Care Reform: Experiments in Political Misinformation," *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 47(2), 2017, pp. 241-62;

DiFonzo, Nicholas, and Prashant Bordia. (2007) *Rumor Psychology: Social and Organizational Approaches*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association;

Taber, Charles S. and Milton Lodge. "Motivated Skepticism in the Evaluation of Political Beliefs," *American Journal of Political Science*," Vol. 50(3), 2006, pp. 755-69. 27 October 2017. https://www.unc.edu/~fbaum/teaching/articles/AJPS-2006-Taber.pdf.
The mechanisms of rumours distribution of hearings:

Friggeri, Adrien et al. "Rumour Cascades," *Proceedings of the Eighth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*, 2014. 27 October 2017. https://www.aaai.org/ocs/index.php/ICWSM/ICWSM14/paper/viewFile/8122/811.
The effects of exposures in mass media:

Bartels, Larry M. "Messages received: the political impact of media exposure," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 87(2), 1993, pp. 267-285; 27 October 2017. https://my.vanderbilt.edu/larrybartels/files/2011/12/Messages_received.pdf;

DellaVigna, Stefano and Ethan Kaplan. "The Fox News effect: media bias and voting," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 122(3), 2007, pp. 1187-1234;

Enikolopov, Ruben et al. "Media and political persuasion: evidence from Russia," *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 101(7), 2011, pp. 3253-3285. 27 October 2017. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41408737;

Gerber, Alan S. et al. "How large and long-lasting are the persuasive effects of televised campaign ads? Results from a randomized field experiment," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 105(1), 2011, pp. 135-150; 27 October 2017. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/231827675_How_Large_and_Long-Lasting_Are_the_Persuasive_Effects_of_Televised_Campaign_Ads;

Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow, researchers at Stanford University, have defined fake news as "news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false", particularly with political implications,[20] and especially those, that gain "enormous traction" in the popular imagination.[21]

Fake news must be differentiated from other types of false information or misinformation. One can define the following forms of such information;

1) unintentional reporting of mistakes;
2) satire as a news story that has purposefully false content, is financially motivated, and is not intended by its author to deceive readers;
3) trolling is presenting news or information that has biased or fake content, is motivated by an attempt to get personal humor value, and is intended by its author to deceive the reader;
4) rumors that do not originate from a particular news article;
5) false statements by politicians;
6) reports that are slanted or misleading but not outright false;
7) disinformation;
8) active measures;

DellaVigna, Stefano and Matthew Gentzkow. "*Persuasion: empirical evidence*," *Annual Review of Economics*, Vol. 2(1), 2010, pp. 643-669. 27 October 2017. http://www.nber.org/papers/w15298.
The ideological segregation in consumption of news:
Bakshy, Eytan et al. "Exposure to ideologically diverse news and opinion on Facebook," *Science*, Vol. 348(6239), 2015, pp. 1130-1132. 27 October 2017. http://education.biu.ac.il/files/education/shared/science-2015-bakshy-1130-2.pdf;
Gentzkow, Matthew and Jesse M. Shapiro. "Ideological segregation online and offline," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 126(4), 2011, pp. 1799-1839. 27 October 2017. http://www.nber.org/papers/w15916;
Flaxman, Seth et al. "Filter bubbles, echo chambers, and online news consumption," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 80(1), 2016, pp. 298-320. 27 October 2017. https://5harad.com/papers/bubbles.pdf.

[20] Allcott and Gentzkow, *Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election*, p. 4.
[21] CBS News. "What's 'Fake News?' 60 Minutes Producers Investigate," 26 March 2017. 27 October 2017. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/whats-fake-news-60-minutes-producers-investigate/.

9) conspiracy theories (these are, by definition, difficult to verify as true or false, and they are typically originated by people who believe them to be true).

Disinformation. Disinformation is not a new phenomenon and extensive literature exists, which describes and critically investigates its methods. Disinformation was widely used by both superpowers for propaganda purposes in order to mobilize society and influence the public opinion during the Cold War. Lothar Metzel from the CIA defines disinformation (or *dezinformatsiya)*, as "operations aiming at pollution of the opinion-making processes in the West," a crucial component of which is "producing a lack of faith in traditional media."[22]

Unlike the majority of other types of false information and misinformation, disinformation is "the question of truth"[23] and aims at "intentional deception."[24] Some researchers expand this definition as, "'misinformation' can be simply defined as false, mistaken, or misleading information, 'disinformation' entails the distribution, assertion, or dissemination of false, mistaken, or misleading information in an intentional, deliberate, or purposeful effort to mislead, deceive or confuse."[25] As a result, the neutralization of disinformation appears extremely problematic as its purpose is changing the perception of audience.

With the formation of the information ecosystem it became "easier for people to create and disseminate inaccurate and misleading information," disinformation expanded its opportunities and efficiency.[26] In the 21st century, the state and non-state actors apply disinformation methods to solve a wide range of tasks from the destabilization of the society, to the solving of

[22] Dornan, *Dezinformatsiya.*
[23] Stahl, Bernd Carsten. "On the Difference or Equality of Information, Misinformation, and Disinformation: A Critical Research Perspective," *Informing Science Journal*, Vol. 9, 2006, pp. 83-96. 27 October 2017. http://inform.nu/Articles/Vol9/v9p083-096 Stahl65.pdf.
[24] Fallis, *What Is Disinformation.*
[25] Fetzer, James H. "Disinformation: The Use of False Information," *Minds and Machines*, Vol. 14(2), 2004, pp. 231-240.
[26] Fallis, *What Is Disinformation.*

important tasks in regional and geopolitical arenas. Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss, investigating the Russian campaigns for disinformation two years before the American presidential elections of 2016, claimed that the western countries were vulnerable to the threats of the information ecosystem. Russia "weaponized" disinformation and "the West has no institutional or analytical tools to deal with it."[27] "Today's Kremlin … might perhaps be viewed as an avant-garde of malevolent globalization. The methods it pursues will be taken up by others."[28]

Active measures. The emergence of the information ecosystem allowed Russia to adapt the Soviet strategy of active measures in order to carry out propaganda campaigns. And, if during the Cold War the USSR, overcoming the countermeasures of the counterintelligence, had to develop a network of agents of influence in the West, leaning on the communist parties and the left movements, then today the possibilities of the information ecosystem provides a cheap and effective access to the audience of the Western countries. According to a number of researchers, since the end of 2014 Russia developed and operates the most effective campaign of influence in the world history by relying on the updated strategy of active measures[29] through "the force of politics as opposed to the politics of force."[30]

How can the mass media and the other actors of the information ecosystem resist the propaganda methods relying on the strategy of active measures, disinformation and other types of false information and misin-

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[27] Pomerantsev, Peter and Michael Weiss. "The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money." *The Interpreter*, Institute of Modern Russia. November 22, 2014. 27 October 2017. https://www.stratcomcoe.org/peter-pomerantsev-michael-weiss-menace-unreality-how-kremlin-weaponizes-information-culture-and.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Frankovic, Kathy. "Americans and Trump part ways over Russia," *YouGov*, December 14, 2016. 27 October 2017. https://today.yougov.com/news/2016/12/14/americans-and-trump-part-ways-over-russia/.

[30] U.S. Information Agency. *Soviet Active Measures in the "Post-Cold War" Era 1988-1991*. U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations, June 1992. 27 October 2017. http://intellit.muskingum.edu/russia_folder/pcw_era/exec_sum.htm.

formation? To answer that question it is necessary to pay attention to the psychology and the mechanisms of the distribution of false information and misinformation.

The Distribution of False Information and Misinformation

The sovereign states and politically motivated organizations long remained almost the only founders and distributors of the false information and misinformation. Historical research shows that the distribution of false information and misinformation rarely happens because of misunderstandings, but is a result of organized and strategic campaigns pursuing political or military aims. For example, Great Britain carried out an effective propaganda campaign around the alleged German crimes during World War I to mobilize the internal and global public opinion against Germany. However, its efforts returned as a boomerang during World War II, when the memories of this campaign resulted in public scepticism towards the messages of carnages in Nazi Germany.[31]

The features of the information ecosystem, which make it attractive, include the ease of division of the interested content with other users (sharing), the creation and the breakage of social communications, and the facilitation of manipulation from the concerned parties. Thus, various tools, including the distribution of false information and misinformation are used.[32]

The mechanisms of distribution of the false information and misinformation are connected with the physiological and psychological restrictions of a person. Even if the users prefer to share the verified information, the limitation of attention and the information overdose interfere with the distinction of the qualitative content on the systemic level. As a result, the false information or misinformation can extend virally, using the same mechanisms and opportunities, as the verified information.

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[31] *Ibid.*
[32] Menczer, F. "The spread of misinformation in social media," in *Proceedings of the 25th International Conference Companion on World Wide Web*, International World Wide Web Conferences Steering Committee, 2016, pp. 717-717.

Polarization and filter bubbles. Research shows a strong correlation between the polarization of the opinion and the charges of distribution of "fake news" in social media and networks, when the users of a network mark any information or sources which they do not support as "fake".[33] The increase in the polarization for a long time leads to a division of the social group into two subgroups adhering to the clashing and antagonistic points of view on a subject.[34]

Online discussions impact the polarization of opinions and the segregation in social media and networks, which leads to the isolation of people with various points of view into homogeneous "echo chambers".[35] Such "filter bubbles", which are a result of the principles of the functioning of the social media and networks, limit the possibilities of the users to access ideologically diverse content and causes an increasing concern.[36] The polarized and segregated structure of the social media and networks is a result of the operation of the two main mechanisms of the sharing – the social influence and the unfriending, - creates ideal conditions for selective influence.[37] The high connectivity of the filter bubbles allows the content to extend effectively and quickly when each user receives the very same content from many sources.[38] In such an environment the false information and misinformation have high chances of becoming viral.

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[33] Oremus, Will. "Stop Calling Everything 'Fake News,'" *Slate Magazine*, December 6, 2016. 27 October 2017. http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/2016/12/stop_calling_everything_fake_news.html.

[34] Sunstein, Cass R. "Law of Group Polarization," *Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 10(2), 2002, pp. 175-195. 27 October 2017. http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1541&context=law_and_economics.

[35] Flaxman, *Filter bubbles, echo chambers, and online news consumption*. 27 October 2017. https://5harad.com/papers/bubbles.pdf.

[36] Lazer, David. "The rise of the social algorithm," *Science*, Vol. 348(6239), 2015, pp. 1090-1091. 27 October 2017. http://education.biu.ac.il/files/education/shared/science-2015-lazer-1090-1.pdf.

[37] Flaxman, *Filter bubbles, echo chambers, and online news consumption*.

[38] Conover, M. et al. "Partisan asymmetries in online political activity," *EPJ Data Science*, Vol. 1(6), 2012. 27 October 2017. https://epjdatascience.springeropen.com/articles/10.1140/epjds6.

Bots. The mechanisms of distribution of the false information and misinformation use special programs (bots), which control the content or the accounts in an ecosystem. Bots facilitate and make the management of the network activity, the exploitation of the weakest points connected with the cognitive and social shifts of the user, more effective. Research shows that the bots can be quite influential.[39] They can create a visibility of an active exchange of content, controlling the attention of influential users and inducing them to share the false information and misinformation.[40]

Psychology of a fake news. The decision-making of a person is substantially carried out not on the basis of individual rationality, but on the general narrative of a social group.[41] As a result, a person's perception of verified, false or misinformation depends not so much on the personal rational assessment, but the heuristics and social processes. First of all, it should be noted that the reliability of a source has a deep impact on the social interpretation of information.[42] People trust the information given by known or familiar sources, adhering to a similar outlook and confirming their own views more. In other words, people are inclined to perceive the information non-critically, and can be considered asymmetric devices that correct the arriving information based on their political preferences.[43]

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[39] Ferrara, E., et al. "The rise of social bots," *Communication of the ACM*, Vol. 59(7), 2016 pp. 96-104. 27 October 2017. https://cacm.acm.org/magazines/2016/7/204021-the-rise-of-social-bots/fulltext.

[40] Ratkiewicz, J., et al. "Detecting and tracking political abuse in social media," in Processing of 5th International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media, July 2011. 27 October 2017. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/221297912_Detecting_and_Tracking_Political_Abuse_in_Social_Media.

[41] Sloman, S., and Fernbach P. *The Knowledge Illusion: Why We Never Think Alone*. Riverhead Books, March 2017.

[42] Swire, B., et al. "Processing political misinformation: comprehending the Trump phenomenon," *Royal Society Open Science*, Vol. 4(3), 160802, March 2017. 27 October 2017. http://rsos.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/4/3/160802;
Baum, M.A. and Groeling T. "Shot by the messenger: Partisan cues and public opinion regarding national security and war, *Political Behavior* Vol. 31(2), 2009, pp. 157-186. 27 October 2017. https://sites.hks.harvard.edu/fs/mbaum/documents/ShotByThe Messenger_POBH.pdf.

[43] Sunstein, Cass R., et al. "How People Update Beliefs about Climate Change: Good News and Bad News," *Cornell Law Review*, Vol. 102, 2017, pp.1431-1444 27 October 2017. http://cornelllawreview.org/files/2017/10/Sunsteinetal.final_.pdf.

The reaction to false information or misinformation is also hard and ambiguous, when its subsequent adjustment does not necessarily change the beliefs of people.[44] Susceptibility to the influence of false information during a long period of time forms a distorted perception and a stable internal model of the world. The correction of the model on the basis of new information appears to be an unstable process and is a subject of remission. A more stable factor, that influences the perception of information, is the social pressure - when the behaviour of the people depends on the estimates of the public and is dictated by the aspiration to save the reputation. The problem of the influence of the false information or misinformation is inseparable from the problems of perception, compelling to spend considerable amounts of effort and resources to understand how alternative and false perceptions are formed and the ways they influence the political relations.[45]

3. Weaponization of False Information and Misinformation. Methods of Counteraction to the False Information and Misinformation

Weaponization of False Information and Misinformation

The emergence of the information ecosystem, the economic and financial uncertainty and instability create the prerequisites for the use of information in ways which can be destructive on a global scale. Under conditions of amplifying confrontation in the geopolitical arena, that is becoming more and more complicated, "both elite and public opinion has proved ill-prepared about how to react to policy change", as a result, "state propaganda agencies step in the breach, making…the 'weaponization of information' a central facet of international conflict."[46]

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[44] Nyhan, B. and Reifler, J. "When corrections fail: The persistence of political misperceptions," *Political Behavior*, Vol. 32(2), 2010, pp. 303–330. 27 October 2017. https://www.dartmouth.edu/~nyhan/nyhan-reifler.pdf.

[45] Nyhan and Reifler, *When corrections fail.*

[46] MacFarquhar, Neil. "A Powerful Russian Weapon: The Spread Of False Stories," *New York Times*, August 28, 2016. 27 October 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/29/world/europe/russia-sweden-disinformation.html.

Weaponization of information means that the actions of the state and non-state actors aim to have an impact on and change the public perception, and the agenda concerning any crisis, problem or the countries and the people. The weaponization of the information allows the ability and the skill of the state and non-state actors to "use the tools of a free society, including the media and social media, to distort reality, and defend the indefensible," in a complex, creative and rather cheap way, which was not available in the years of the Cold War.[47]

The weaponization of the information pursues two aims. The first is to destroy the narratives of the internal and external opponents, challenging the very basis of their existence. The second is to mobilize its own citizens and supporters, having the public energy and attention directed to support the steps taken by the state. Today practically every politician, public official, and national leader strikes blows using Twitter, and the war of the hashtags attracts attention of the world community. Public moods are created and directed, also by using viral contents, the name (viral) of which supposes the possibility of losing control over the processes.[48]

Weaponization of information by ISIS. When thinking about the ways in which the weaponized information and narratives are used to involve people around the globe in a remote conflict, one can consider the example of ISIS, as the efficiency of its propaganda machine looks quite frightening. The group did not invent anything new in the propaganda methods, but it adapted the tested strategies and tactics to the global world and the information ecosystem.

The research of 1300 propaganda videos of ISIS by Javier Lesaca showed that 20 percent of the propagandist production of ISIS was directly inspired by Western entertainment. Destiny sometimes is full of irony, and

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[47] Paul, Christopher and William Courtney. (2016) "Russian Propaganda Is Pervasive, And America Is Behind The Power Curve In Countering It." Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. 27 October 2017. https://www.rand.org/blog/2016/09/russian-propaganda-is-pervasive-and-america-is-behind.html.

[48] Brooking T. Emerson and P. W. Singer. "War Goes Viral: How social media is being weaponized across the world," *The Atlantic*, November 2016. 27 October 2017. https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/11/war-goes-viral/501125/.

the terrorist group, which arose from Al-Qaeda in Iraq, copies in its clips the shots from the movie of Clint Eastwood devoted to an American soldier fighting against Al-Qaeda in Iraq. A careful audio-visual study of the content from ISIS allows to judge the general tendencies of the war in the information ecosystem. It is always based on symbols and images, historical references, and memoirs united into weaponized narratives.[49]

Qatar crisis. The Qatar crisis shows how false information and misinformation can be used for the escalation of a diplomatic crisis or even a retraction into a war. The crisis began on May 23, when the statements attributed to the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad al-Thani started being distributed in social media and networks. They appeared on Qatar News Agency – the main state mass media, working for the outside world. Later, it became known that 20 percent of the pages that sent hashtags "Anti-Qatar" on Twitter, were bots.

Statements were concerning the extremely sensitive problems for the Arab world – Iran and HAMAS, and caused an immediate and rigid reaction from Saudi Arabia, the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the other Arab countries. Though Qatar denied the statements, reporting about a hacker attack of the state mass media, they were ignored by the mass media of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. On June 7, the FBI reported that there were Russian hackers behind the attack of the Qatar News Agency and the statements attributed to the Qatar Emir were false. Nevertheless, the situation continued to be heated which compelled Turkey to give direct military support by adopting a bill which was quickly carried out through parliament and allowed to deploy increment troops in Qatar.[50]

Reaction of the Authoritative States to the Wars in the Information Ecosystem

The publications about the problem can give the impression that the democratic states are more vulnerable to the weaponized information. There

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[49] Ibid.
[50] Unver H. Akin. "Can Fake News Lead to War? What the Gulf Crisis Tell Us," *War on the Rocks*, June 13, 2017. 27 October 2017. https://warontherocks.com/2017/06/can-fake-news-lead-to-war-what-the-gulf-crisis-tells-us/.

are opinions that the threats of the information ecosystem make the democratic policy "impossible" and even endanger the democracy. However, there is not enough research referring the influence of the weaponized information on the authoritarian regimes.

The above mentioned Qatar crisis allows to speak about a much wider vulnerability of such regimes to the attacks in the information ecosystem. And, if in free political systems the restriction of information is a more complex challenge than in an authoritative one, the quantity and diversity of actors which could be involved in the confrontation in an ecosystem is qualitatively less in the latter. Although the democratic states are really vulnerable to the strategic information campaigns, the diversity of sources, the opportunities to check the information and so forth; democracies do create the necessary prerequisites for the adaptation and the preparation of a response, while using the abilities and resources of not only the states, but also of the society. Activity on social media and networks became a part of the political culture of the democratic states, and the information ecosystem – the tool of public policy. Authoritarian regimes do not possess such an asset.[51]

The situation in the authoritative countries is aggravated by the structuring of the policy around an authoritative leader or a narrow circle of politicians who can be excessively emotional during decision-making. The cult of the leader, that is particular to authoritarian regimes, creates the rich soil for excessive emotional reaction to the external crises. And the danger grows exponentially with the increase in numbers of the authoritative states involved in the crisis.

In this case, the external forces, whether it be the state or non-state actors, can promote the crisis escalation rather easily using the instruments of war in the information ecosystem. Under conditions with a lack of the necessary infrastructure for counteraction, a mature civil society and a free press, the danger of the crisis sliding into an armed conflict is incomparably higher in authoritarian regimes, than in the democratic states.

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[51] Ibid.

The higher vulnerability of authoritarian regimes to attacks in the information ecosystem during the crises provides leaders with two alternatives;

- to create mechanisms of self-restrictions and self-control to interfere with the emotional reaction, which is extremely doubtful, considering the authoritarianism psychology; or
- to start adapting to the realities of the ecosystem and the new aspects of world politics, giving the civil society a chance to form and create mechanisms of social control of the information.[52]

In order to get a chance to adapt to the information ecosystem, the countries, though it sounds paradoxical, will have to open and not be closed in the face of challenges and threats. A response has to be the inclusion of technological expert knowledge in the structure of the government and political institutions, and also the contribution to form a civil society and its instruments of control over socially significant information. Such tools are extremely painful for authoritarian regimes, but, nevertheless, offer reliable mechanisms of control and containment which cannot be provided by the governmental bodies in conditions with high rates of crisis escalation.

Methods of Counteraction to False Information and Misinformation

The comprehension of the intentions behind a certain action is an extremely complex problem. The majority of theories agree that the psychological state of a person has a great influence on the formation of intentions. The attempts to comprehend the formation of intentions not as a problem of a person, but as a social phenomenon in political-military decision-making by a group of people, institutions, leads to the separation of the cognitive domain of war, within which these processes are considered.[53]

Another problem is the use of both truthful and false information and misinformation within one narrative. The considered above disinformation methods, the strategy of active measures and other forms of propaganda intentionally create a narrative, the stability and power of which relies on

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[52] Ibid.
[53] Арзуманян Р.В. (2012). *Кромка хаоса: Парадигма нелинейности и среда безопасности 21 века.* М.: ИД «Регнум», Серия «Selecta XIX».

the use of mixed information. As a result, there is a situation when some or even the majority of elements of a narrative are right; however, a narrative as whole, as well as the ways of its representation in an ecosystem mislead and lead to false perceptions and conclusions.[54]

One can speak of about four ways of the counteraction and restriction of the influence of the false information and misinformation in an ecosystem; legislative and other of the state's activities;
- exploitation of the market mechanisms;
- exploitation of the structures and functions (architecture) of the information ecosystem; and
- adaptation of the social institutes and norms.

The state operates through violence or the threat of sanctions and its decisions have an exclusive character and are obligatory. Some researchers state against direct intervention of the state in the information ecosystem. The state decisions are undesirable as they are based on experimental mechanisms which did not pass broad approbation and potentially have unpredictable collateral effects. Nevertheless, it is true for all other ways of regulation of the information ecosystem too, which is complex and unpredictable by the nature of the system.

The decisions based on market mechanisms act through the information products delivered to the market, advertising and other services. There were already reports stating that social media and networks, the industry of web searching, are urged to take steps to reduce the distribution of false information and misinformation in the search results.

The structure and function of the information ecosystem, which are invisible and not controllable by the users, give an opportunity to advance a certain system of values and to suppress the others, protecting the corporate or national interests. The knowledge of the architecture of the ecosystem, the algorithms of its functioning and its vulnerable points can be used by

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[54] Verstraete, Mark et al. "Identifying and Countering fake news", University of Arizona, James E. Rogers College of Law, August 1, 2017. 27 October 2017. https://andyblackassociates.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/fakenewsfinal.pdf.

the advanced users, corporations, social and political groups for the extraction of financial or political benefit. According to Sir Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the World Wide Web, the organizations wishing to "game the system to spread misinformation for financial or political gain",[55] could use the knowledge of the algorithms for their own purposes.

The social norms within social institutes limit the behaviour of people through encouragement and/or rendering pressure, with the purpose of forcing them to conform to certain standards. Social institutes and norms structure how the members of the society communicate with each other, which can be used to indirectly regulate the false information and misinformation.[56]

Nevertheless, it is necessary to realize that all measures offered above are necessary, but are not sufficient to speak about overcoming the challenges of false information and misinformation in the ecosystem. Moreover, the formation of an exhaustive response to such challenges is impossible when taking into account that the false information and misinformation are only elements of a broad problem. The person receives information from an ecosystem not in an isolated manner, but within some narratives within which it is perceived, comprehended and interpreted. The problem of the false information and misinformation is a part of a broader problem of the weaponized narratives.

4. The Principles, Strategy of Application and Counteraction by the Weaponized Narratives

Weaponized Narratives

For the most part, the information that people face every day is presented in the form of a story or a narrative. People are creatures that tell stories and look for patterns and meanings allowing them to explain and to restrain chaos in themselves, society and the objective reality. The person

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[55] Lee, *Three Challenges for the Web, According to its Inventor.*
[56] Shiffrin, Seana Valentine. (2014). *Speech Matters: On Lying, Morality, and the Law.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

cannot take the absence of a sense and of a meaning and has an internal requirement to create narratives. The ability to weaponize the narratives turns them into dangerous weapons of extraordinary power. Such weapons attack the world's perception and ability to sense, the myths and legends of the society, the group identity and criteria that allow to distinguish between self and "others."[57] Throughout the world's history, the religious leaders, philosophers, politicians considered narratives a powerful tool to change the beliefs and behaviour of the audience.[58]

All the institutions of the society, – from the government and political parties to the organizations and corporations, – continuously develop and support their own narratives called to overshadow the contradictions, to structure debates and to make the interests of the institutions acceptable for the society.[59] By bringing the social groups and the whole society to a condition where they cease to trust their own narratives, the words of the spiritual and political leaders, the mass media, the scientific and moral authorities, you gain an impact on the society similar to the impact of a traditional intervention. The history shows that the confrontation of narratives is a natural context of world history and can lead to a victory in centenary wars, which belongs to the side that was able to create and tell the most convincing stories.[60]

The emerging of post-secular age and narratives problem. The system of the nation-states is based on the principles of applied rationality, the

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[57] Garreau, Joel. (2017). "Attacking Who We Are as Humans," in Brad Allenby and Joel Garreau (Eds.) *Weaponized Narrative: The New Battlespace*. Center on the Future War, Washington DC: The Weaponized Narrative Initiative, pp. 10-14. 27 October 2017. https://weaponizednarrative.asu.edu/publications/weaponized-narrative-new-battlespace-0.

[58] Green, M. C. and Brock, T. C. (2002). "In the mind's eye: Transportation-imagery model of narrative persuasion," in M. C. Green, J. J. Strange, & T. C. Brock (eds.). *Narrative impact: Social and cognitive foundations*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, pp. 315-342.

[59] Ruston, Scott. (2017). "Defending: Awareness and Protection," in Brad Allenby and Joel Garreau (Eds.) *Weaponized Narrative: The New Battlespace*. Center on the Future War, Washington DC: The Weaponized Narrative Initiative, pp. 36-40. 27 October 2017. https://weaponizednarrative.asu.edu/publications/weaponized-narrative-new-battlespace-0.

[60] Garreau, *Attacking Who We Are as Humans*.

balance of power, human rights and the freedoms of the Modern age. The emergence of post-secular ages made the Westphalian system vulnerable to already emerged and future challenges and threats.[61] The world turns to the state of "a long disorder" and an explosive mix of religions, ideologies, clans, governments, armed groups of the new Middle Ages more and more.[62] The new age is not a consequence of the inefficiency of the previous, rather it is the contrary. Only due to the success of the Modern and the postmodern, when scientific forms of knowledge and technology were in focus, allowed to achieve present levels of societal developments and complexity.

After the Modern and postmodern, came an age where the main characteristics were complexity and unpredictability, which gives the narrative an advantage over the applied rationality and the policy that appeals to the facts and knowledge. The commitment to the greater state and social identities weakens in such conditions, the geopolitical arena and the security environment become more complex while the operating power centres and institutions slide off to the simplified narrative.

What is going on is not something new and the same took place when the Westphalian system was being formed, when the secularization of the political system and the state were considered catastrophic by the Catholic Church and the traditional empires. One can say with a great deal of confidence that currently there is a similar turning point. The understanding of the coming (approaching) times, gives hope for a rather quiet transition from a postmodern to more complex and less ordered age and its values.[63]

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[61] Арзуманян Р.В. Центры власти в 21 веке. Взаимоотношения между политическим и религиозным на современном этапе. – М.: АНО ЦСОиП, 2015. – 136 с. (Новая стратегия, 5).

[62] McFate, Sean. (2014). *The Modern Mercenary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 74.

[63] Allenby, Brad. (2017). "The End of Enlightenment 1.0: Why Weaponized Narrative Won't Go Away," in Brad Allenby and Joel Garreau (Eds.) *Weaponized Narrative: The New Battlespace*. Center on the Future War, Washington DC: The Weaponized Narrative Initiative, pp. 15-19. 27 October 2017. https://weaponizednarrative.asu.edu/publications/weaponized-narrative-new-battlespace-0.

Traditional vs. weaponized narratives. What is the difference between the weaponized narratives and the traditional ones? The fundamental principle of psychology proceeds from the fact that people comprehend themselves in terms of narratives when the future is perceived as a continuation of still unfinished stories. Society perceives and comprehends itself and its identity through the stories that connect in a system of narratives (a landscape of narratives), the structure of which provides patterns for the design of the future, understanding of other societies and so forth.[64]

If the new stories that appear in the landscape of the narratives of the society are perceived and are estimated based on the formed patterns, then how do the weaponized narratives attack its identity and collective will? The first method is reduced to the attempts to "flood" the landscape of the narratives with alternative patterns. The second strives to enter numerous new components (stories, events, symbols and signs) into the existing narratives, which tear up the integrity of the landscape and destroy the coherence of the system of the narratives. The breach of trust towards the fundamental narratives of the society results in a corrosion of the public identity, faith in the collective will and divided values.[65]

Methods of Release and Strategy of Weaponized Narratives

Methods of the release of the weaponized narratives. The weaponized narratives can be used tactically, as part of the military or geopolitical conflict, or strategically, as a method of weakening, neutralizing and winning over the civilization, the state or the organization. The attack towards the fundamental narratives of the society can reduce it to simpler and even primitive narratives, concentrating on the distinction of "aliens" that must be attacked.[66] Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt called "terrible simplifiers," the demagogues who seek power by exploiting the frustration of the society and making appealing but "terribly simplified" and, ultimately, deceitful promises.[67]

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[64] Ruston, *Defending: Awareness and Protection.*
[65] Ibid.
[66] Garreau, *Attacking Who We Are as Humans.*
[67] Burckhardt, Jacob. (1999). *The Greeks and Greek Civilization.* New York, NY: St. Martin's.

Thus, the weaponized narrative becomes a response to the globalization and emergence of the information ecosystem. Weaponized narratives give the person and the society the emotional confidence that relies on clear, rational understanding of the events by offering a simplified view on the world that is becoming more and more complex. When in the hands of professionals, strong emotions like anger and fear, used as a part of weaponized narratives, become a unique form of soft power capable of influencing the behaviour of the opponent, limiting and destroying the functionality of his social institutes and systems. Moreover, the validity of the information plays a secondary role. Contrary to popular belief, the truth not necessarily prevails when it faces weaponized narratives.

The use of weaponized narratives leads to regimes which can be called soft authoritarianism. And, unlike classical authoritarianism which demands the deployment of the oppressive power of the State and the providing of un-limited control over the information, soft authoritarianism can achieve the necessary results by less violent and expensive methods and without the need of deployment of the broad oppressive power apparatus of the tradi-tional authoritarianism.[68]

Methods of neutralization of hostile narratives. The neutralization of the hostile narratives has to include two types of countermeasures. The first is similar to the development and use of an antidote allowing the so-ciety to resist the sharp phase of the attack. However, such methods have to be supplemented with measures that increase the resilience of the im-mune system of the society, allowing it to resist the "pathogenic" narra-tives. Measures of the first type allow the dangerous destruction of a land-scape of narratives of the society to stop while the second - to prepare the society for the possible attacks through strengthening of the resilience and increasing the effectiveness of the national security system. And if the methods of the first type are functions of the classified units of strategic

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[68] Allenby, Brad and Joel Garreau. (2017). "Weaponized Narrative Is the New Bat-tlespace: And the U.S. is in the unaccustomed position of being seriously behind its adversaries," in Brad Allenby and Joel Garreau (Eds.) *Weaponized Narrative: The New Battlespace.* Center on the Future War, Washington DC: The Weaponized Narrative Ini-tiative, pp. 5-9. 27 October 2017. https://weaponizednarrative.asu.edu/publications/weaponized-narrative-new-battlespace-0.

communication, information and psi-operations in the military and the national security system, the intelligence services, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, etc., the methods of the second are realized with the support of the social institutes of the society.[69]

Strategies of weaponized narratives. The emergence of the nuclear weapon after World War II demanded to develop a strategy, which would operate with the weapon of an earlier inconceivable power. In the 21st century, the unprecedented power of the weaponized narrative also demands to develop appropriate strategies. And as it is impossible to compare the striking ability of natural anthrax to the strains developed as a biological weapon, the same way the natural narrative cannot be compared with the weaponized one developed to defeat the reasoning and will of a person and the cognitive domain of the society.[70]

The weaponized narrative combines the achievements of the cognitive neuroscience, the theory of communications, and the achievements of the information technologies. One can speak of six factors which make such narratives so effective: vector, vulnerability, virulence, scope, speed, and synergy.[71]

The Vector is urged to emphasize the reach of the content in an ecosystem. If the physical weapon demands delivery systems and, often, extensive logistics, then the information in an ecosystem is distributed, copied and multiplied practically without restrictions, possessing a global "blast radius."

Vulnerability emphasizes the ability of the weaponized narratives to overcome the resistance of the traditional narratives of the society through a

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[69] Ruston, Scott. (2017). "Defending: Awareness and Protection," in Brad Allenby and Joel Garreau (Eds.) *Weaponized Narrative: The New Battlespace.* Center on the Future War, Washington DC: The Weaponized Narrative Initiative, pp. 36-40. 27 October 2017. https://weaponizednarrative.asu.edu/publications/weaponized-narrative-new-battlespace-0.

[70] Herrmann, Jon. "Nine Links in the Chain: The Weaponized Narrative, Sun Tzu, and the Essence of War," *The Bridge*, July 7, 2017. 27 October 2017. https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2017/7/27/nine-links-in-the-chain-the-weaponized-narrative-sun-tzu-and-the-essence-of-war.

[71] Ibid.

series of organized serial attack-events. Eventually, the process similar to the way the stresses, pathogenic microbes and viruses are able to lower the immunity of an organism to an illness.

Virulence reflects the fact that the knowledge of cognitive weakness and the vulnerable points of the narratives of the society allows to develop attack methods, which are difficult to resist.

Scope is used to reflect a large number of actors that can be engaged in the organization of the attack of the cognitive domain of the society. The low cost of creation of actors in the information ecosystem allows to organize attacks in which millions of users and a network of bots participate.

Speed is necessary to emphasize the "rate of fire" in the information ecosystem. The weaponized false and misinformation can "flood" the cognitive domain of the attacked society within seconds and minutes, gaining virus character and apply the ideas, meanings and values necessary to an attacking party. A process, which can be compared to a flood caused by a fire hose.[72]

The Synergy means that all the above-mentioned factors, applied together or in some sequence, can be used to achieve a synergetic effect which is qualitatively strengthening the action of each one of them.
The weaponized narrative gives an advantage to the attacking party and differs from forms of propaganda of the old school the same way that the nuclear weapon differs from the conventional.[73] Nevertheless, the principles of the strategy of such narratives can be found in the treasury of strategic thought, for example, in the principles of war of Sun Tzu.

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[72] Paul, Chris and Miriam Matthews. (2016). "The Russian "Firehose of Falsehood" Propaganda Model," *Perspective*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

[73] Chessen, Matt. "Artificial intelligence chatbots will overwhelm human speech online; the rise of MADCOMs," *Medium*, March 16, 2017. 27 October 2017. https://medium.com/artificial-intelligence-policy-laws-and-ethics/artificial-intelligence-chatbots-will-overwhelm-human-speech-online-the-rise-of-madcoms-e007818f31a1.

5. South Caucasus Landscape of Narratives

The view of the South Caucasus from the point of view of the system of the narratives shows the uncertainty of this notion. It is possible to speak about the South Caucasus as a region only from the point of view of the regional security system that allows to preserve relative peace and stability of the communication and energy projects, but nothing more. Today there are no narratives on the South Caucasus, which would show a possibility of a joint coexistence and development of the people. In the South Caucasus there are no centripetal vectors, but obviously centrifugal ones are present when the people of the region perceive each other, at best, as neighbours going their own ways.

The second problem is reflected in the name of the region, when in cognitive domain of values and meanings it is attributed to the "Caucasus", which leads to challenges and problems. Whether there will be a landscape of narratives of the South Caucasus as a part of a broader "Unified Caucasus", which also includes the "North Caucasus" and the Caucasian republics of Russia. If this point of view is accepted, the formed landscape inevitably includes the Russian Empire, which structured the geographical, political and cultural space of the Caucasus for the last centuries, as the dominating center.

Thus, the attempts to comprehend the problem of the general landscape of narratives of the South Caucasus leads to the understanding of a deeper challenge, when it is impossible to draw a clear boundary of the region. Should the general landscape around the "Caucasus" to be built or expanded - capturing also the Caspian and Black seas? Or should the developed common landscape of narratives be even wider and guided by the Intermarium project?[74]

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[74] Umland, Andreas and Fedorenko Konstiantyn. "How to solve Ukraine's Security Dilemma? The Idea of an Intermarium Coalition in East-Central Europe," *War on the Rocks*, August 30, 2017. 27 October 2017. https://warontherocks.com/2017/08/how-to-solve-ukraines-security-dilemma-the-idea-of-an-intermarium-coalition-in-east-central-europe/.

Above the possibilities of creation of united narratives and a landscape where Europe or Russia act as a centre of gravity were considered. However, the South Caucasus has a historical and political memory connected with the Persian and Ottoman empires too, which gives the successors (Iran and Turkey) the right to include the region in their own narratives. It leads to challenges, which the people of South Caucasus have no right to wave away. Even more so, when taking into account the influence and the role of Iran in Azerbaijan, and the role of Turkey in Georgia.

Today the people of the South Caucasus develop national narratives which do not assume an inclusion in a common system of narratives of higher order and a common landscape.

Georgia seeks "to leave" the Caucasus and join United Europe alone. Such a breakthrough looks rather doubtful as Georgia was the centre of gravity around which the Russian Empire built the all-Caucasian narrative throughout the last centuries. The breakthrough to Europe is possible if Georgia, carrying on the traditions, remains the centre of gravity of the Caucasus and frames "the United Caucasus" of the 21st century within which it will be able to become a part of the Wider Europe. However the war of 2008, the gap with Abkhazia and South Ossetia postpones the possibility of implementation of such a project, which started to be studied in the 90s of the 20th Century, for indefinite time.

Azerbaijan, being a young multinational state, is at the stage of formation of its identity and national narratives, which are unstable. Azerbaijan declares the intention to become a part of a landscape of the narratives of Europe, Turkey, Iran, and the united Turkic space. Besides, it is necessary to take into account the commitment of the authoritarian regime in Azerbaijan to an extremely aggressive ideology and policy, an element of which is the open *armyanofobiya* as a form of Nazism. The aforementioned international experience shows that such regimes can be rather easily provoked to aggressive actions, which are undermining not only a security system, but are also breaking off the potential future general landscape of narratives of the people of the South Caucasus. The modern narratives of Azerbaijan deny the very right of existence of Armenia and the Armenian people in the region.

Armenia holds a special position in the region, possessing the developed narratives, focused on the restoration of the Armenian statehood on the Armenian Highland throughout centuries. Not the Caucasus, which is considered the periphery, but the Armenian Highland appears to be the centre of gravity of the Armenian narratives. A vector of the Armenian narratives, based on the South Caucasus, is directed from the Caucasus to the Armenian Highland which has to become a part of the United European landscape again. Besides, the narratives of the ancient civilizations and nations of the Middle East are being restored into the European landscape of narratives along with the Armenian Highland, which, together, form the cradle of the unified European civilization. Initiatives to unite the narratives of the ancient nations of the Middle East are already unfolding. The Armenian landscape of narratives in the 21st century is not exclusive, but inclusive.

The Armenian people already managed to build the landscape of national narratives uniting various Christian faiths. At the present time there is an intensive debate on how the parts of the Armenian people belonging to Islamic culture have to be considered within the general Armenian narrative, how the Hamshen Armenians, and the, so-called crypto-Armenians, living in the territory of Turkey, could become elements of the general Armenian landscape of narratives.

In Armenian-centric system of narratives the "Caucasus" and the "South Caucasus" are rather interpreted within the expanded Intermarium project. There is a question. Can the Armenian culture develop a common language of notions, meanings and sense which would be accepted by other people of the region? Are there positive examples of creation of a general cultural platform in the past, which are giving hope for success of such a construction in the 21st century? From this point of view the legacy of Sergei Parajanov, who created a language uniting various cultures and nations, is of interest. The great director tells stories and legends of various cultures and nations, he created narratives, which were accepted and recognized by representatives of these cultures. It is enough to remember such works as "Andriesh" (Moldova), "Shadows of forgotten ancestors" (Ukraine), "The Color of Pomegranates" (Armenia), "The legend of Suram Fortress" (Georgia) "Ashik-Kerib" (Azerbaijan). Parajanov's art is certainly a unique phenomenon of an ingenious master who was born and grew up in Tbilisi

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and was able to connect something that many still find to be unjoinable and even antagonistic.

Yes, he based it on the Armenian culture; however, the synthetic art-language of images and symbols that he created is understood and native not only to the Armenian, but also the European culture in general. Parajanov's view of the Caucasus and wider Intermarium is the European view of the reality, which locates at the intersection of various worlds. Parajanov's view is a view of a European and a possibility of the projection and designing of the Caucasus, the Armenian Highland and the Intermarium in terms, concepts and symbols of the European thinking and culture. Parajanov's legacy shows that the United Caucasus, and a wider Intermarium are possible. We have hope, but the preparation of a response to such a challenge requires efforts of absolutely another scale and scope.

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