

DIGITAL AND MEDIA DIMENSIONS OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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RUSSIAN PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS IN THE WAR IN UKRAINE

The purpose of the article is a comprehensive study of the Russian psychological operations in the war in Ukraine. The article provides the definition, the main directions, narratives and mechanisms of Russian PSY-ops in the war in Ukraine. The article provides a description of a target audience of Russian PSY-ops during the conflict in Ukraine. In particular, it was established that the main target audiences of the Russian PSY-ops were: population of the Russian Federation; servicemen and military persons of the Russian Federation; the population of Ukraine, controlled by the Government of Ukraine; the population of the occupied Crimea, population of the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions (so-called «Donetsk People's Republic», «Luhansk People's Republic»); military servicemen, prisoners of war, representatives of law enforcement agencies of the occupied territories; servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine; international community. Also, the author of the article identified the main reasons for the effectiveness of Russian psychological operations.

Keywords: psychological war, psychological operations (PSY-ops), the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Donbass, Crimea, propaganda, target audience, narratives.

The Russian military intervention in Ukraine (2014-present) is a unique conflict of the present. Scientists call it a «hybrid-type conflict». In addition to the classical methods of warfare, Russia applies non-state irregular militants and conducts psychological operations.

Leaders of leading countries emphasize that the annexation of the Crimea and the occupation of the Donbas by the Russian Federation are the result of well-planned and well-conducted psychological operations.

Russia has chosen a strategy of psychological warfare in Ukraine for a number of reasons. Firstly, this tool for achieving goals is relatively cheap. Secondly, and perhaps this is the most important reason – this is a high level of secrecy of psychological operations and the possibility of avoiding international responsibility. International law provides for responsibility for the conduct of a conflict only if the state exercises its regular armed forces. The use of irregular mercenaries and the use of psychological operations in conflicts of the hybrid type not imply international liability. Thirdly, with proper planning and taking into account all circumstances, the use of psychological operations brings one hundred percent result. Fourthly, ease of use. Fifthly, the possibility to influence Ukrainian people without a physical crossing of the Ukrainian border. And last, the main reason why the Russian Federation chose the strategy of psychological operations is the unpreparedness of the Ukrainian authorities and citizens to such type of war.

An analysis of Russian psychological operations shows that the main reason of the effectiveness of Russian psychological operations against Ukraine was the successful target audience analysis (all factors are taken into account – geographical, socio-demographic, historical-cultural, psychological and behavioural).

Ukrainian scientist V. Gusarov highlights six stages of Russian psychological operations conducted against Ukrainian people:

- mid 1990 – July 2013 – phase of preparation and «information sensing of the situation»;
- August 2013 – November 2013 – the phase of creating an «information bridgehead» in Ukraine;
- December 2013 – February 2014 – the phase of psychological aggression in the Crimea and the loosening of the situation in the Donbass;

– March 2014 – May 2014 – the phase of large-scale pressing;
 – June 2014 – January 2015 – phase of consolidation of information and psychological dominance in the Donbass;

– July 2015 – to date – the phase of stable psychological impact. The current phase of psychological operations of the Russian Federation against Ukraine is concentrated in two directions: on the annexed Crimea and in the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions¹.

Another Ukrainian scientist Malik I. suggested that psychological operations of the Russian Federation were carried out in five stages:

1. Preparatory stage – creating conditions for a full-scale information and psychological warfare (cultivating the myths of «fraternal peoples», «Great victory», the fears of the Cold War and the inadmissibility of Western values for Orthodox believers).

2. Creation of an information and psychological aggression. The turning point was the events of the Revolution of Dignity (2013-2014).

3. Forming the image of the enemy and attributing this image to the newly elected authorities in Ukraine, the Ukrainian people, the countries of the West.

4. Distribution of calls for violence, promotion of war.

5. Legitimize the activities of «LPR» and «DPR».

6. Transfer responsibility for the conflict to the official Kyiv.

7. Destabilization of the Ukrainian front and rear.²

During the conflict the main target audiences of Russian psychological operations were:

1. Population of the Russian Federation.

2. Servicemen and military persons of the Russian Federation.

3. The population of Ukraine, controlled by the Government of Ukraine.

4. The population of the occupied Crimea.

5. Population of the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions (so-called «Donetsk People's Republic», «Luhansk People's Republic»).

6. Military servicemen, prisoners of war, representatives of law enforcement agencies of the occupied territories.

7. Servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

8. International community.

To influence on target audiences, the Russian Federation applied a differentiated approach – individually planned and conducted psychological operations for each audience.

Thus, informational and psychological operations concerning the Crimea were aimed at:

1. Strengthening the consolidation of the population of Crimea around pro-Russian values.

2. Organization of support of pseudo-referendum results by the Crimea population.

3. Passive legitimization of occupation authorities.

4. Incitement of hostility and hatred to Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars.

5. Distribution of the idea of the historical affiliation of the Crimea to Russia. The spread of this narrative was carried out by Russia in order to justify the annexation of the peninsula in the eyes of the Russian population and to reduce the resistance of the Crimean population.

6. The spread of the idea that «Ukraine is an anti-Semitic state» was used to substantiate the need for «reunification of the Crimea with Russia».

7. Integration of Crimea into Russian political, legal, economic and information spaces.

8. Imitation of international recognition of the annexation of the Crimea, demonstration of the absence of international isolation, intensification of economic and cultural relations with unrecognized «republics» – «LPR», «DPR», «South Ossetia» and «Abkhazia»³.

9. Distribution of information about the prosperity of the Crimea after joining the Russian Federation.

¹ Гусаров, В. (2015). Информационная война России на Донбассе: новая фаза <https://antikor.com.ua/articles/57293informatcionnaja_vojna_rossii_na_donbasse_novaja_faza>.

² Малик, І. (2015). Механізми протидії негативним впливам інформаційної пропаганди. *Політичні науки*, 2.

³ Предприятия ДНР, ЛНР и Крыма подписали официальные соглашения об экономическом сотрудничестве. <http://ugyalta.com/news/predpriyatiya_dnr_lnr_i_kryma_podpisali_oficialnye_sogl/>.

Russian psychological operations concerning the population of the occupied territories were concentrated on:

1. Formation of beliefs that ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine are in danger¹.
2. Formation of the image of Russia as «the elder brother», which «will protect the Russian-speaking population of Donbass».
3. Preparation and information support of pseudo-elections on the occupied territories.
4. Legitimizing of the occupation power.
5. Promoting the idea of separatism, spreading calls for radical actions, overthrowing the constitutional order in Ukraine and violating its territorial integrity.
6. Escalation of the conflict, justification of violence, propagation of the idea of war.
7. Advocating violence against children, involving children in children's military patriotic camps and hostilities.
8. Heroification of Russian military forces in order to increase the level of trust of the population of the occupied territories («polite people»).
9. The imposition of the idea that «Ukraine is an aggressor».
10. The imposition of the idea that «neo-nazism, neo-fascism, radicalism» flourish in Ukraine.
11. Formation of a negative perception of events in Ukraine by the target audience.
12. Imitations of international recognition and international legal personality of the pseudo-republics, demonstration of the absence of its international isolation.
13. Formation of distrust towards the highest political leadership of Ukraine, its internal and foreign policy course.
14. Popularization of the idea that «Ukraine is a failed state»².
15. Popularization of the idea of Ukraine's international isolation and the unrealistic nature of its accession to NATO and the European Union.
16. Popularization of the idea that «in Ukraine is a civil war» and that «Ukraine carrying out genocide against its own people».
17. The spread of the idea that «war in the Donbas is a US strategy and is carried out by the authorities of Ukraine in the interests of the United States»³.
18. Formation of hatred and distrust to the servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine
19. Strengthening hatred for European values.
20. Increasing beliefs that the mercenaries from Europe and the United States are involved in the conflict in the Donbass.
21. Simulation of economic prosperity and economic independence of pseudo-formations of «LPR» and «DPR».
31. Spreading the idea of «Novorossiia» and the idea of «Russian World» in order to create artificial linguistic and civilizational unity of the Russian speaking Ukrainians with the citizens of the Russian Federation.

The next category of Russian psychological operations is operations, the target audience of whose is the territory of Ukraine, controlled by the Government of Ukraine. PSY-ops are aimed at:

1. Formation of distrust towards the highest political leadership of Ukraine, its internal and foreign policy course.
2. Stimulating anti-war sentiment in society, reducing the level of patriotism and the desire to protect Ukraine.
3. Formation of the «not our war», «war of the oligarchs», «war between Russia and the United States on the blood of ordinary Ukrainians» images. These images were introduced to undermine the morally-psychological state of servicemen who fought in the ATO zone and to disrupt the mobilization to the Ukrainian Armed Forces.
4. Simulation of intolerance and hatred for migrants from Donbass region.
5. Formation of the split of Ukrainian society on a linguistic basis.

¹ Еляшевська, Н.Ф. (2015). Вразливість України до інформаційної війни. *Теле- та радіожурналістика*, вип. 14.

² Лукаш: Україна (2016). <<https://ukraina.ru/sn/20161130/1017917402.html>>.

³ Стратегія США в війні проти Росії на українській території. <<https://inosmi.ru/world/20150112/225487819.html>>.

6. The spread of the religious schism among the Ukrainians and the disruption of the creation of the Single Local Church in Ukraine.

7. Incitement of Hungarians of Transcarpathia and Romanians of Bukovina to create autonomies¹.

Russian psychological operations on the impact on the leadership and personnel of the Armed Forces of Ukraine are focused on:

1. Reducing the moral and psychological state of the personnel of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in order to increase cases of disobedience to commanders' orders.

2. Reporting information on understatement of the number of killed in the war in the East of Ukraine.

3. Organization and support of protests of mothers of soldiers fighting in eastern Ukraine.

4. Discrediting military leadership.

5. Intimidation with new types of weapons and resumption of hostilities.

6. The stimulation of desertion, the transition to separatists, and the surrender of servicemen to captivity.

7. Provision of clashes between the military personnel of the Armed Forces and representatives of volunteer battalions (the «Right sector»), servicemen of the Security Service of Ukraine and the National Guard of Ukraine.

Russian psychological operations concerning the international community were aimed at the formation of the negative image of Ukraine in the world. The main directions of Russian psychological operations on the international arena were:

1. The international community's conviction that the President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko came to power through a coup d'état.

2. The spread of the narrative that there is a «civil war» in Ukraine².

3. Influence on the results of the consultative referendum of the Netherlands on the association of Ukraine and the European Union.

4. The international community's conviction that the Malaysian Boeing 777 was shot down by Ukrainian troops and the spread of calls for bringing Ukraine to the international court in this regard.

5. Undermining the trust of the international community in Ukraine, forming a negative attitude of the EU population towards Ukrainians.

6. Incitement of ethnic hatred on a cultural and historical basis in order to worsen Ukrainian relations with Poland, Moldova, Belarus, and Hungary³.

7. Exacerbation of existing and artificial creation of new contradictions between EU countries, between EU and the USA.

Russian psychological operations on the impact on citizens of the Russian Federation are based on:

1. The dissemination of the idea that «Ukraine is a Russophobic country, and all Ukrainians are Banderas».

2. Denial of Russia's involvement in the war on the Donbass, forming the image of Russia as a «peacekeeping country».

3. Creation of the visibility of freedom of speech in Russia.

4. The glorification of the political leadership of the Kremlin and the military might of Russia, the spread of the narrative that «Vladimir Putin is the one politician in the world capable of stopping the war in the east of Ukraine».

5. The active use of the thesis that «the collapse of the USSR is a geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century».

6. The formation of the effect of an external enemy.

7. Supporting the foreign policy of the Kremlin, including the annexation of the Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine.

¹ Вице-премьер Венгрии потребовал от Украины автономии Закарпатья. <<https://vesti-ukr.com/strana/265665-vitse-premer-venhrii-potreboval-ot-ukrainy-avtonomii>>.

² Кеворкян, К. (2017). Гражданская война с последующим геноцидом. <<https://ukraina.ru/opinion/20170627/1018832848.html>>.

³ Росіяни наймають українських громадян для здійснення провокацій», – Геращенко про осквернення польських пам'ятників і могили цадика Нахмана. <https://ua.censor.net.ua/video_news/432393/rosiyany_nayimayut_ukrayinskyh_gromadyan_dlya_zdyisnennya_provokatsiyi_geraschenko_pro_oskvernennya>.

8. Forming in the consciousness of the citizens of the Russian Federation a false vision of the historical past and events of the present.

The analysis of psychological operations conducted by the Russian Federation during the Russian-Ukrainian war shows that the characteristic features of Russian psychological operations are:

- Their destructive, disorganizing and demoralizing influence on the consciousness of the object of influence;

- Professionalism and qualitative planning.

- Continuity of the implementation of psychological impact.

- Multiple repetitions of the same messages.

- An established structure of authoritative channels of information delivery to each separate target audience.

- Centralized management of political leaders, mass media and other actors of psychological operations.

- Formation on artificially created a specific identity (a single «Russian» people, a single language, a single culture, a single church, the common historical past, the common future)¹.

- Multidimensionality.

- The appearance of the same emotions in the recipients of influence – fear and anxiety in order to block the analytical abilities of a person to adequately assess the situation.

- Application of methods of manipulative influence, which cause uncritical perception of information.

- Unconfirmed messages of information and psychological impact on real facts.

- Inattention and intolerance by the target audiences of psychological operations conducted against them.

- Create another reality in the consciousness of the target audience.

- Hiding and anonymity.

Thus, from the above mentioned, the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. The success of annexation of the Crimea and the occupation of Donbass are due to the use of the Russian Federation psychological operations against Ukrainians.

2. The main target audiences of Russian psychological operations are:

- 1) Population of the Russian Federation.

- 2) Servicemen and military persons of the Russian Federation.

- 3) The population of Ukraine, controlled by the Government of Ukraine.

- 4) The population of the occupied Crimea.

- 5) Population of the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions (so-called «Donetsk People's Republic», «Luhansk People's Republic»).

- 6) Military servicemen, prisoners of war, representatives of law enforcement agencies of the occupied territories.

- 7) Servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

- 8) International community.

3. The main aim of PSY-ops conducting is to impose pro-Russian values and to split Ukraine.

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