

NATIONAL SECURITY AND PUBLIC OPINION

Cristian-Gabriel SABĂU, Virgil ION, Mihai NEAG
“Nicolae Bălcescu” Land Forces Academy, Sibiu, Romania

DOI: 10.19062/2247-3173.2016.18.2.23

Abstract: *The changes that took place after World War II and, namely, the globalization, have changed the states' perspective of national security insurance and conservation of survival in the anarchic and competitive environment of which the realists were talking about.*

The international environment is modeled after and influenced by the power, a concept around which the security politics, public agendas, foreign policies, military strategies and all of the government's belongings are being built.

In this situation, a new threat appeared - the informational warfare - which designates, essentially, the theft, destruction or distortion of information, from intellectual knowledge to computer databases.

In order to assimilate the power and strategic advantage, in the context of informational war manifestation, political leaders resort to the support of public opinion, the variable that bears the greatest importance, through its quality of being a propaganda attacks target on the unseen front of the homo homini lupus manifestation form.

To review the stage of public trust in state institutions and to assess the level of security inherent in this analysis, I consider that it is required to analyze an institution with national security achievement attributions, namely the Romanian Intelligence Service. The Romanian Intelligence Service has exploited, in a convenient way, the advantages of virtual communication environments and has attracted, through information materials, the skills testing quiz, testimonies of employees, tens of thousands of new visitors who take part in open dialogue launched by the institution and who contact directly the Service's professional achievements and the operational successes.

Keywords: *public opinion, public agenda, informational war, soft power, Romanian Intelligence Service*

The changes that supervened in the international relationships after the collapsing of the Soviet Union and the inherent transformations of the globalisation have also changed the states' perspective of national security insurance and conservation of survival in the anarchic and competitive environment of which the realists were talking about.

In the world described by them, the behavior of states is driven by human nature, characterized by Hobbes's *Leviathan*, who believes that people's lives are full of cruelty and brutal selfishness, states transposed into insecurity and mistrust on the scale of international relations¹. People's tendency to attack the opponent is justified by the need to ensure the existence in an environment that offers limited resources which, once ensured, launches the conflict in order to win the wellbeing.

Morgenthau continues Hobbes's assertions by discerning the two forces that generate the individual's selfish behavior. On one hand, he believes that his attitude comes from his inner insecurity, from the desire for power to eliminate this uncertainty; on the other hand he assigns the human behavior to the competitiveness specific selfishness and

¹ Hobbes, Thomas: *Leviathan*, 1651, www.gutenberg.org source

supremacy². It can be easily noticed that the scope which causes the international environment is the power, a concept around which the security politics, public agendas, foreign policies, military strategies and all of the government's belongings are being built.

Whatever the reason underlying the purpose is, all countries seek to gain a certain percentage of power. But in this existence where *Homo Homini Lupus*, existence being possessed by an *animus dominandi*, where the opponent's intentions are difficult to predict, where trust is not attributed to the parties engaged in a conflict and where skepticism dominates the prospects, the traditional power maximizing and, inherently, security ensuring levers are insufficient and redundant for the states. Because the necessity of innovation is taking place, the use of force and military power have left the privilege of primacy, giving way to a new concept, *soft power*.

The complexity of the concept is the reason why nobody can give an exhaustive and comprehensive definition, which is why I will give a definition that is appropriate in the present research. Francois Bernard Huyghe perceives *soft power* as the allurements of the rest of the world towards adopting your own opinions without reaching out to coercion. It means, in his view, a balanced usage of influence. As presented to the world for the first time by Joseph Nye, the *soft power* concept is constituted by several domains that can either interact or be independent, such as the economic, political, cultural, diplomatic and even military domain. A diplomacy component is established by the public diplomacy, whose importance was firstly revealed by Woodrow Wilson, who debated about "winning of hearts and spirit."³

The target aimed at is the public opinion, the society, which has, as it will be seen later, an important contribution in ensuring national security by removing the existing vulnerabilities on an institutional level, that one level who compresses the entire governmental mechanism.

Ideas are the foundation on which states strengthen their coherence, their purpose and their characteristics, providing at the same time the means through which citizens are being subordinated to the state's authority.

The materialization of the ideas, of the ideology is realized through institutions which, because of their tangibility, have become more vulnerable to threats, vulnerability born because of the lack of partisans and supporters of their constituent principles.⁴

As a result, the national security insurance is dependent on institutional strengthening, on attracting the public's opinion support in order to eliminate the vulnerabilities.

Gustave le Bon was talking about "*the law of crowds' mental unity*"⁵ which shows that the individuals from a social gathering adopt the thinking manifested at the group's level, denying their own individuality in the favor of crowd psychology. The social group is the environment of spreading the mental contagion, a phenomenon of unconscious origin operating without reasoning, the cornerstone of opinion assimilation and beliefs through enhancement of mass communication. The opinion trainer has the duty to know in detail the mechanism of crowd judgment and to try not to change it, but rather to exploit it through the persuasion generator factor, namely the suggestion⁶.

² Morgenthau, Hans: *Politics among nations. The struggle for power and peace*, McGraw Hill, VII edition

³ Huyghe, Francois-Bernard: *Anthologie de Texte sur l'Influence*, <http://www.huyghe.fr> source, 2008, ag 161

⁴ Buzan, Barry: *People, States and Fear. The National Security Problem in International Relations*, Wheatshef Books Ltd., 1983

⁵ Le Bon, Gustave: *The Crowd. Study of the Popular Mind*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/>, 1996

⁶ Le Bon, Gustave: *Psihology of new times*, ANTET, 2010

1. THE POWER IN THE CONTEXT OF INFORMATIONAL WAR

A concept generated by modern society, by the diversity and asymmetry of new threats - the informational warfare - designates, essentially, the theft, destruction or distortion of information, from intellectual knowledge to computer databases. The purpose of conducting such a war confirms the ideas acknowledged by realists and authenticates that *animus dominandi* which Morgenthau wrote about, by exclusively tracking the causing of damage to opponents or by ensuring influence in an area of interest.

In this context, Francois Huyghe said that the informational society is jointly exploited by the two instances of threat: on the one hand, the traditional, recurrent violence, which torments the bodies, and on the other side, the current violence, "that bedevils and alters the brains of humans and computers."⁷

Computer sabotage maneuvers, media manipulation, all forms of psychological and ideological action exerted on the human spirit within a conflictual framework or a framework that depicts rivalry relations are considered ways of informational war manifestation. Its catalyst, the information, is manufactured, it appears from a review process to serve the aims of the one who spreads it.

The public relations agent is a connoisseur of collective psychology and takes into consideration the mental contagion impact on the crowd. The integration of this information in the informational circuit has special significance since it is capitalized when it is assimilated and accepted by the social mass.

One way whereby opinion makers can ensure the success of strategic influence operations is propaganda, to whom Manuel Castells attributed the manufacturing and broadcasting of messages that distort facts and include false information in order to promote government interests.⁸ Similar definitions conferred to the propaganda have outlined a negative charge to this concept, being perceived as the practice of circumstance modeling and image designing in the minds of individuals, the manner without whom the events, the significant initiatives, whether political, cultural, religious or economic, cannot take place, cannot implement.⁹

In reality, propaganda is no advertising, nor disinformation; it is a process of communication in which the transmitter persuades the receiver, the distinction from other forms of communication being that propaganda is associated with a preset goal.

The existence of propaganda is determined by that of a system, represented by civil society and that of the transmitter, made out of public opinion makers. The interaction between civil society and opinion leaders, who influence each other, is the cause of public agenda on a national level appearance.

This new conflictual climate gives the power prerogatives to the public opinion trainer, the one who owns the information and spreads it to the society to such an extent that it provides support to some values or visions evoked by itself. The assertion can be easily demonstrated through the examples offered by the mass-media world, and by the press trusts in their professional conduct. Sir Roderick Jones, general manager of Reuter news agency, said, in 1930, that "no other factor has contributed to the increase of the British prestige on an international scale more than the agency"¹⁰, proving that journalistic objectivity is a concept quite difficult to achieve.

⁷ Huyghe, Francois: *Comprendre le pouvoir strategique des medias*, Eyrolles, 2005

⁸ Castells; Manuel: *Communication power*, Oxford University Press, 2009

⁹ Bernays, Eduard: *Propaganda*, 1928

¹⁰ Char, Antoine: *La Guerre Mondiale de L'Information*, University of Quebec, 1999, pag 40

In order to assimilate the power and strategic advantage, in the context of informational war manifestation, political leaders resort to the support of public opinion, the variable that bears the greatest importance, through its quality of being a propaganda attacks target on the unseen front of this *homo homini lupus* manifestation form.

The elitism is assigning to itself the historic mission to coagulate a nation and to direct it in a positive sense, appropriate for development. Thus, the degradation of the elite concept becomes a negative indicator of the national security state diagnosis, designating lack of public support and citizens' trust in the governing action.¹¹ Charles Wright Mills spoke about elites as a more complex reality, which coagulates in order to gain the power through which it dominates the society.¹²

The elite's characteristic ideas' abstractness materializes through institutions, since state institutions compress the whole machinery of government, including the legislative, administrative and judicial apparatus. The ideology organization, who provides a social mechanism able to persuade citizens to obey state authority, is closely related to the machinery of government, in this case to the institutions.

Because of the inherent tangibility, the institutions become a prolific environment of vulnerabilities, being exposed to threats. One of the vulnerabilities is exactly the lack of public support, translated by elites' inability to attract the citizens towards consenting to state authority.¹³ Without pretending or assuming novelty, being mentioned since the '50s, the institutional vulnerability concept was synthesized by Selznick as "a situation where institutions are prone to social change."¹⁴ Considering these assertions, I find that public opinion is the decisive variable of ensuring institutional sustainability and eliminating vulnerabilities, based on which the opponent's offensive can be countered. Before discussing about institutions popularization methods, I need to define the public opinion, whose importance has been decided.

Research on propaganda and manipulation postulates that public opinion refers to crowds, defined as "a state of mind, a mental condition that occurs when people think and act together"¹⁵, crowds found inside a whole, designated by the society term, equivalent to a "congregation of people who sacrificed their individual freedom to be part of the group".¹⁶

In summary, institutions build their power by attracting public opinion, besides the physical security measures against violent attacks, support that will prevent their internal erosion in case of ideational offensives.

The political existence of a state, the activity of the elites appears to the citizens in the form of debates, themes that define the national identity and the current concerns, set up by the generic term public agenda. The public agenda is responsible for presenting the leaders' visions, the foreign policy of the state, the characteristic values, the strategies to achieve the assumed targets, being presented to citizens to ensure their participation in a democracy and security culture.

Talking of the interaction between the public's opinion and the result of producing this set of ideas, it has been well debated in the relevant literature, researchers being tempted

¹¹ Puiu, Adriana: *Russian political elite crisis*, *Intelligence magazine*, nr 26, march-may, 2014;

¹² Mills, Charles Wright: *The Power Elite*, Oxford University Press, 1956

¹³ Buzan, Barry: *People, States and Fear. The National Security Problem in International Relations*, WHEATSHEAF BOOKS LTD, 1983

¹⁴ Selznick, Philip: *Institutional Vulnerability in Mass Society*, published in *American Journal of Sociology*, vol 114, 1951

¹⁵ Dean Martin, Everett: *The Behavior of Crowds. A Psychological Study*, Kessinger Publishing, 2010, pag 45

¹⁶ *Ibidem* 12

to discern the influence's dilemma. When and how much does public opinion matter? On one hand, some argue vehemently that elites shape the preferences and opinions of the masses by presenting current topics interspersed with others that stir interest, novelty, using propaganda, manipulation.

Combatants of this statement plead to the idea that public opinion dictates the main guidelines for drawing up the public agenda by expressing priorities to certain areas of argumentation.¹⁷ In reality, none of the visions is not deprived of truth; there are some circumstances, particularly the issues related to domestic politics, when citizens are noteworthy involved in the clotting of public agenda and there are certain sensitive decisions that require an attractive presentation in order to be legitimized by the public opinion.

Consequently, the impact of one variable on another one is immeasurable and characterized by instability, but the certainty of the existence of influence cannot be challenged, and the chain of presented concepts - elites, institutions, public opinion, public agenda - follows a circular pattern, emitting idea of continuity and repeatability.

2. ELEMENTS OF ROMANIAN INTELLIGENCE SERVICE PUBLIC PERCEPTION - ANALYSIS –

Romanian people are, according to Mihaela Nicola's concept, a nation of "natural born storytellers", for whom "discretion appears rather as an inability to communicate, as a lack of inspiration or as an obsolete accessory" compressing suspicion and inability to capture trust.¹⁸

Public protection of an institution is not a superficial objective because it is the cover on which perceptions that subsequently lead to its acceptance or disapproval by citizens rely. The elites are in a position to offer increasingly more consideration to the communication alongside the emergence of informational war, a communication done consistently and coherently.

The same CEO of The Group company, Mihaela Nicola, argues that the concerns for improving prestige, for a better delineation of the prestige of an institution, for gaining public confidence in the institution's mission and activities are as important as the interest in the activity itself¹⁹.

As we discussed in the conceptual delimitation of this analysis, the public institutions' brand is an indicator, although minimal, of power. The image influences, substantiates certain economic, strategic, political based decisions, taken about the institution.²⁰

It is said that the bigger the organizations are and the more major activities they display, the better the connections they can create influence their situation, and the image of the organization becomes more able to influence, subtly, the performance²¹. Winning the public support deletes from the institutional structure a vulnerability that can easily be exploited by threats launched by the opponents who aim at internal destabilization and at the discovery of the weaknesses in order to create the right manipulation environment.

The institutional power blocks these malicious initiatives and gives the state a strategic advantage in external crises, as well as international prestige. A pertinent

¹⁷ Christian, Jennifer: *When does public opinion matter?*, Indiana University, 2007

¹⁸ *Interview with Mihaela Nicola*, published in "Intelligence", nr 26, march-may 2014, pag 100

¹⁹ *Ibidem* 18

²⁰ Negrescu, Mihaela: *Image of institutions from national security sphere*, , National Academy of Informatic "Mihai Viteazul", 2011

²¹ Chiciudean, Ion, Ţoneş, Valeriu *Gestionarea crizelor de imagine*, editura Comunicare 2002

justification for this assertion lies in the concreteness of disadvantages that a negative image would bring to the Romanian Intelligence Service, image that would cause the decreasing of the cooperation degree between citizens and operative officers, thereby generating a decreasing in the efficiency of itself. Extrapolating, the examples may continue with the institution's ability to counter propaganda attacks through the support of the citizens, condition in which trust and prestige, found in gear collective thinking, remain the most important means of censure against the actions of foreign influence and manipulation.

It has been also clarified the issue regarding the interdependence between national security and power - a state having the lowest level of vulnerabilities and, inherently, a high level of security is a state with full rights to embrace the power. To review the stage of public trust in state institutions and to assess the level of security inherent in this analysis, I consider that it is required to analyze an institution with national security achievement attributions, namely the Romanian Intelligence Service.

The study will consist of a comparative analysis of opinion polls on time coordinate, taking into consideration general concepts related to awareness, confidence, prestige, communication, performance and vulnerability to risks. Currently, in public space, regarding the Romanian Intelligence Service, there lies a mixture of respect and trust, of "appreciation and gratitude for the professional intelligence officers, for their effectiveness"²².

Importance of the results of public opinion polls lies in the intelligence community's need to be understood as a social mission, to gain support and acceptance from society. As a result of this revelation, it has been noted a revival of the institution's brand in recent years, due to the new strategic vision which the institution has proposed in the Information Age. So, in 2015, 46% of citizens consider themselves quite informed about the activity of the Romanian Intelligence Service, and 57% know the powers of this institution.²³ If in 2012 about 37% of the population had very much and much trust in the Romanian Intelligence Service²⁴, some three years later it has been noticed a growth of the institution's public diplomacy, which resulted in achieving 52% in terms of public confidence.²⁵

This trend is the result of institutional identity elements refreshment, launching a new website and also launching its own Facebook account. The Romanian Intelligence Service has exploited, in a convenient way, the advantages of virtual communication environments and has attracted, through information materials, the skills testing quiz, testimonies of employees, tens of thousands of new visitors who take part in open dialogue launched by the institution and who contact directly the Service's professional achievements and the operational successes.

Therefore, in 2015, 77% of citizens believe that the activity of the Romanian Intelligence Service is very important, while 40% believe that the institution is very much performant²⁶.

The prestige that Francois Huyghe considered to be one of the catalysts of the influence²⁷, is a feature that the Romanian Intelligence Service can be proud of, as shown from the survey responses offered by the subjects. Since 2011, the intelligence officer

²² Ibidem 18

²³ ROMANIAN INSTITUTE FOR EVALUATION AND STRATEGY

²⁴ INSCOP Research

²⁵ Ibidem 21

²⁶ Ibidem 23

²⁷ Huyghe, francois-Bernard: *L'influence ou le pouvoir de signes*, revista "Societe de strategie", nr 14 "Puissance et influence"

was ranked third in terms of prestige, followed by the president of the state, about 43% of citizens believing that such a job is very prestigious. The attractiveness of the Romanian Intelligence Service is also demonstrated by the performance factor, depending on which the institution was ranked fourth in the polls in 2011, with a percentage of 57.7%.²⁸

An important milestone to be considered in the analysis of the institutional brand consists of the spokesperson, namely the representative person of the organization, in this case the director of the Romanian Intelligence Service, George - Cristian Maior who, in 2011, was known by 11% of subjects undergoing survey.²⁹ The rise of the institution's image and the efficiency of the PR department are demonstrated by the 2015 survey results, when 64% of the subjects associated George Cristian Maior with the position of Romanian Intelligence Service director. Besides, in the 2015 survey, conducted by the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy, it has been revealed that 63% of respondents assumed that the reference institution has evolved in the last 10 years³⁰, considering the institutional reform as being real, compared with the year 2011, when only 3.1% of respondents knew what the reform, the transformation of the institution meant.³¹

Regarding the credibility of the institution, if in 2011 about 20% of reviewers were satisfied with how the Romanian Intelligence Service communicated with citizens, in 2015 about 64% of those undergoing the survey considered that the communication between the institution and citizens was credible in a very large and large extent.

3. CONCLUSION

For an efficient use of the collected data from the analysis, I consider that it is necessary to clarify the importance of institutional stability in the context of a state's power and national security. On this subject, Barry Buzan claimed that unstable institutions do not possess mechanisms of organized transfer of power, but they rely primarily on coercion, which is why they become more exposed to manifestation of power, either within them, such as the famous coup d'etat, or outside of them, represented by social tensions, strikes and riots.³²

Security has gained importance through its feature as a power derivate, namely as a purpose and its result. Realists have promoted the idea that an actor who has enough power to achieve a dominant position in international relations will obtain the national security as a result of this *status quo*.³³

Taking into consideration that the power indicators, inherently, the security indicators are the three interdependent elements - vulnerability, threat, risk - it can be argued that a strong state is one that depicts the lowest level of vulnerability. As it has been previously demonstrated, citizens represent an important resort in the democratic exercise and in the process of achieving national security, therefore increasing their confidence in the institutions responsible for ensuring national security proves a real utility.

Analysis of the Romanian Intelligence Service's public perception elements captures an improved public diplomacy institution, an openness to society, their involvement in the effort to protect and promote national values.

²⁸ Ibidem 20

²⁹ Ibidem 20

³⁰ Ibidem 23

³¹ Ibidem 20

³² Ibidem 13

³³ Gellman, Peter: *Hans J. Morgenthau and the legacy of political realism*, Review of International Studies, anul 1988

Under these circumstances, from the institutional vulnerability view, The Romanian Intelligence Service has initiated important steps to eliminate those weaknesses that can be exploited by opponents, at the same time also harnessing the opportunities to maximize the efficiency of the means and methods applied in the process of collecting information and obtaining intelligence.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bernays, Eduard: *Propaganda*, Comunication.ro, 2003;
- [2] Buzan, Barry: *People, States and Fear. The National Security Problem in International Relations*, Wheatsheaf Books Ltd., 1983;
- [3] Castells; Manuel: *Communication power*, Oxford University Press, 2009;
- [4] Char, Antoine: *La Guerre Mondiale de L'Information*, University of Quebec, 1999;
- [5] Christian, Jennifer: *When does public opinion matter?*, Indiana University, 2007;
- [6] Dean Martin, Everett: *The Behavior of Crowds. A Psychological Study*, Kessinger Publishing, 2010;
- [7] Gellman, Peter: *Hans J. Morgenthau and the legacy of political realism*, Review of International Studies, 1988;
- [8] Hobbes, Thomas: *Leviathan*, The Project Gutenberg Ebook,1651;
- [9] Huyghe, Francois-Bernard : *Anthologie de Texte sur l'Influence*, 2008;
- [10] Huyghe, Francois: *Comprendre le pouvoir strategique des medias*, Eyrolles, 2005;
- [11] Huyghe, Francois-Bernard: *L'influence ou le pouvoir de signes*, "Societe de strategie" magazine, nr 14 "Puissance et influence";
- [12] "Intelligence", nr 26, march-may, 2014;
- [13] Le Bon, Gustave: *The Crowd. Study of the Popular Mind*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/>, 1996;
- [14] Mills, Charles Wright: *The Power Elite*, Oxford University Press, 1956;
- [15] Morgenthau, Hans: *Politics among nations. The struggle for power and peace*, McGraw Hill, a VII a edition;
- [16] Negrescu, Mihaela.; *Image of institutions from national security sphere*, National Academy for Information "Mihai Viteazul", 2011;
- [17] Puiu, Adriana.; *Russian political elite crisis*, Intelligence magazine, nr 26, march-may, 2014;
- [18] Selznick, Philip: *Institutional Vulnerability in Mass Society*, published in American Journal of Sociology, vol 114, 1951.