# FROM WW2 TO WWW
# HOW TO WIN INFORMATION WAR?

TINATIN KHIDASHELI

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## EXPERT OPINION

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*"On the Internet, nobody knows you are a dog"*

*Peter Steiner, New Yorker, 1993*



*"On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog."*

## Introduction

The 21st century is the era of Internet addiction. We live in a world in which citizens, governments and companies, individually and collectively, often make their activities, finances and personal information freely available and accessible via the World Wide Web. The Internet erased language and geographical barriers and offers constantly expanding opportunities. There exists almost no information that is not available with the click of a computer mouse. Thanks to the Internet, news, scientific achievements and innovations are fully accessible to any interested people.

The Internet was invented for more freedom, prosperity, security, to make hard work easier and for quick idea sharing. Those individuals who were determined to rapidly exchange innovations and ideas between continents, who came up with the ideas on how to decrease the physical and geographical barriers, are the ones who brought us to our current level of communications and connectivity development.

However, history repeated itself. These scientific achievements, as a rule, served both good and evil, and they simultaneously built and destroyed. The Internet appeared to have a similar potential. In some cases, the endless possibilities for an unlimited and accessible cyberspace served the managed evil and Internet progress created a completely new reality: attacks on the banking sector and businesses, and the use of the Internet for blackmail and manipulation. Regretfully, the use of cyber attacks for political fights and the Internet as a tool for hybrid warfare have become a dominant trend in today's world. This applies not only to the cyber industry but also to the world of politics and international relations.

The speculations around the US presidential election, the interim investigation reports and President Trump's statements on the activities of US intelligence agencies have completely overshadowed all earlier cases and examples. This is not a cyber attack on Georgia or Ukraine or any expected attack on the Poles or the Baltic nations. We are talking about the United States and its presidential election: "It is the assessment of the

intelligence community that Russia's goal here was to favor one candidate over the other, to help Trump get elected."

The existing threats and the changing reality define our expectations and objectives. Accordingly, new objectives were determined for the cyber industry: (1) a higher level of technical security and (2) the Internet to again serve freedom.

This paper intends to analyze the use of the Internet in hybrid warfare, identify possible solutions and offer an alternative strategy. You will read about the use of the cyber in the preparation of warfare, large-scale information campaigns and psychological operations.

Our purpose is to analyze modern trends and find alternatives towards achieving two main goals:

1. Protect states from any possible aggression.
2. Maintain the loyalty and unity of our own citizens under the conditions of asymmetric information warfare.

> **Information has become a high-risk weapon. It is cheap and universal. It has unlimited coverage area and can travel with no control. It is often of low quality and based on lies. It crosses state borders without any permission and is accessible to everyone.**

## 1. Why Information Warfare?

Information warfare is cheap and asymmetric. At the same time, it is effective, both during peace times and in a phase of intense warfare. The main tools used by the enemy are comprehensive, large-scale combat actions that cannot be seen and against which you cannot use your military superiority. It does not destroy buildings, organize ethnic cleansing or genocide or ruin cities. It conducts specific psychological operations developed as a result of long-term observation and analysis of the population and elites.

The effectiveness and success of information warfare is determined by a combination of several factors:

- The adversary has a vague political foundation and inadequately developed political system or value bases.
- The perpetrator of hybrid warfare manages to damage the institutional system and the foundation of the basic values of the opponent.
- Society starts to discuss topics that were agreed and finalized a long time ago.
- Truth and lies, and reality and illusions are blurred and it is impossible to draw the line between them.
- Critical opinion is weakened and there is a lack of rational thinking and analysis in society as the military aggression, its grave consequences and the emotional images and reality are presented over and over again as regular answers to questions asked.

> **Hybrid warfare primarily means the use of resources, weaknesses, and the sensitive and ineffective sides of the adversaries against themselves. It questions fundamental values and institutional order and respectively, destroys from inside.**

The task is further simplified if the adversary is a poor, largely starved country of a transitional democracy where the population has hitherto not fully agreed on any important pillars of state-building, institutional development and fundamental values, and where the political elite is weak and the socio-cultural elite does not have any authority.

## 2. Stages of Information Warfare

In the 21st century, borders between peace and warfare have become blurred. Warfare does not have a start date and it is no longer announced in accordance with the pre-established rules. Actual combat, if it becomes at all necessary, is preceded by a long-lasting and systematic information warfare that has two main stages:

- An information-psychological period that constantly and consistently takes place under the conditions of information rivalry and intends to influence the armed forces, the population and the elites.

- An information-technological period that is activated before the actual combat phase of the military operation. At this point of time, information is gathered, developed, processed and transferred to achieve concrete objectives, *inter alia,* by illegal methods.

The technological forms and tools necessary to properly implement these two stages of information warfare do not significantly differ from each other.

- Psychological operations and psychological pressure
- Strategic communication with properly selected groups on topics chosen and tailored specifically for them
- Gaining influence
- Disguise/camouflage
- Massive disinformation using all forms of electronic communication
- Manipulation with the enemy's social media, trolls
- Destroying of computer systems, viruses
- Intelligence/counter-intelligence

It is important to remember that one-time actions do not bring results. The system should operate continuously for years and serve the main objective. Years are necessary to develop an information product on sensitive topics identified by intelligence services for the properly selected groups. Each specific piece of information is intended for a psychological operation and tasked to influence people either collectively or target groups. It is distributed through electronic media resources controlled by intelligence services. At the same time, it is very important to provide the particular piece of information to the Western media via reliable and well-disguised sources in order to ensure dissemination and create a credible multiplier effect. At the same time, it is disseminated as a virus in cyber space and becomes a part of our information reality. This is the very stage, when a large part of society is under significant psychological influence and, therefore, truth is mixed with lies and it becomes impossible to tell the difference between reality and fiction or what is ethically right and wrong. This is the moment when we start making decisions that are against our best interests.

We should also remember that technological support alone is not enough for success. It is necessary to have effective support from diplomats, politicians, experts, analysts, academia and our cultural elite. The key is to maintain message discipline. All similar interventions should convey

a single, clear and easy-to-understand message tailored to the relevant context, audience and forums.

During an active phase of information warfare, it is crucial to:

1. Have a strong "enemy image;" this may be NATO, Washington or their puppet governments.

2. Show that the threat is greater than it actually is and spread panic and fear; accordingly, we have a stage of hesitation: "If we still lose, is it worth the risk?"

3. Develop a belief that the enemy is unbeatable; even when the evil is perceived correctly, there is still a preference for surrender owing to thoughts that again the enemy is unbeatable, as well as a fear of war.

If the abovementioned action plan fails, there are other possibilities. During the so-called Maidan events in Kyiv, Russia was forced to use additional resources for achieveing its goals notwithstanding the fact that practically all stages of its information warfare had been implemented: (1) political and socio-cultural sabotage, (2) provocations both at the site of the protest and in other parts of Ukraine, (3) diplomatic warfare and (4) a physical confrontation between opponents. The task was clear; that is, put pressure on the Ukrainian government to change its policy in favor of a pro-Russian orientation with a view to keeping Ukraine in Russia's orbit of influence for an indefinite period of time.

Textbook cases dealing with information warfare have been developed based on the events that took place in Kyiv and Chisinau in the recent years. Ukraine clearly demonstrated that in spite of enormous efforts, the readiness of the political class and under the conditions of public integrity, the enemy does not achieve its final outcome and, accordingly, success.


## 3.  Content of Information Warfare and Manipulation of Public Opinion


Information warfare needs clear content and properly selected target groups. In all times and epochs, people were easily manipulated by culture, false patriotism and "national values." In some cases, content is also patriotic and sentimental while in other cases, it is personalized and enriched by the stories and histories of real people. It is always supported by graphic visualization and photo and video materials in order to be more convincing and dramatic. The task is simple - it relates to you, it is about you and it reflects your emotions and feelings.

Accordingly, one of the functions of intelligence services is to analyze the individual and collective weaknesses of a nation. Typically, information warfare continuously and systematically attacks the following:

- Cultural behavior of the population
- "Patriotism" narrative
- Nostalgia
- Taboos and stereotypes
- Risk scale undertaken by partners
- Capabilities of international support

For example, before the start of the aggression in Ukraine, Moscow knew that the West was not ready to respond to information warfare and that NATO's collective security concept never envisaged information warfare as an area of any interest. The cyber attacks did not lead to the invocation of Article 5. This is why Russia acted fearlessly in Estonia and NATO's Eastern European members. We should not forget that in spite of the scale, power and importance of a cyber attack, NATO members still cannot agree on how to name it or define cyber or information warfare. The confusion regarding the definition prevents a full-scale and clear understanding of the problem and, accordingly, the response is either inadequate or delayed. If we call warfare by a different name, then we will respond relevantly mildly and this is something which gives an instant advantage to the enemy.

It is for the same reasons that the West was not ready for any military actions in Ukraine. Moscow knew that the EU, NATO and the United States would react to their actions but officials in the Kremlin also knew that they did not have a strategy, enough intelligence or the legal arguments necessary for a quick response and a demonstration of real power. Moscow gained a lot of experience during the 2008 Russia-Georgia war. The Kremlin was convinced that the response to their Ukrainian operation would not be different. This state of affairs provided unique conditions for Russia and so President Putin used the opportunity. He correctly calculated that he would buy time and win the first stage of the confrontation by launching a massive, large-scale and comprehensive information campaign. In the worst scenario for Ukraine, this would give him the advantage for a military attack. As a result, his first objective of halting Ukraine's rapid progress towards European integration was achieved. Sadly, the decisions that may have been adopted two or three years ago are on today's agenda for the European institutions.

As for stereotypical patriotism, President Putin's address to Russian ambassadors in 2014 may serve as the best example: "We cannot allow NATO forces to enter Crimea and Sevastopol as this is a land of Russian military glory and this will radically change the balance on the Black Sea. This means to forget everything Russia fought for starting from Peter the Great and maybe in even more distant times." The statement is so comprehensive that everything is said in one paragraph:

• He protects historical achievements of the Russian people, the legacy of Peter the Great, that somebody is trying to take away.

• There is a clear enemy image of NATO forces trying to enter their land.

• He assures the Russian mother that her son fights for the idea of a «great Russia» in Crimea and that the motherland sometimes needs sacrifice.

• He is the only worthy leader who tries to retain what is historically theirs and he does not want anything that belongs to others.

• He is strong and confident and threatens not to allow a change of the balance on the Black Sea.

• The probability that the world media will cover President Putin's speech is high and, accordingly, the dissemination of his propaganda message among key world media is secured.

The content is *popular, patriotic and raises sentiments that are a good alternative for the poor and largely uneducated population under conditions of non-existent "bread."* The story to save Russian achievements is very valuable in the Russian Federation and is enough of a reason for an average Russian mother to send his child to fight anywhere, including Crimea.

When a good idea and the associated information campaign is supported by a well-defined strategic action plan that uses the weaknesses of its partners for its favor, the first results are guaranteed. The only thing that can usefully and effectively counterbalance such a state of affairs is a strong society united by a fundamental idea on the other side of the battle line. A society that is confident in its power and its truth, therefore, cannot be broken or influenced by enemy propaganda.

## 4. How to Win against Information Warfare?

The most correct, short and simple answer to this question is that we should act exactly as the opponent does; that is, use the same technological means and tribune, and teach our leaders to strategically communicate our own lies, say no to the laws of morality and govern by the principle that the "end justifies the means," and so on in a similar fashion.

But then comes the immediate question as to whether or not such an approach is the correct one. Will it bring the desired results or not? Do we become the same as our opponents? Maybe it is what they want – to get us on their track, destroy our morale and make us accept their lifestyle and governance practices as normal.

In this case, the key "problem" is the natural and institutional system of the democratic state. Freedom of speech and transparent governance excludes the existence of a unified controlled message and the order established in accordance with this message. There will always be a real or potential *New York Times* that will ask questions, disclose propaganda and lies, conduct journalistic investigations and initiate discussions. The democratic state conceptually excludes the use of intelligence services for blackmail and manipulation. The democratic state is a community of informed citizens where decisions are made on the base of general public consensus and where governors are in constant communication with their voters. Accordingly, the democratic world needs a different strategy and tactical operations to win against information warfare.

The basic observation of the information warfare that takes place in today's world reveals that the initial condition for propaganda warfare is that we do not look for the truth. Perpetrators of information warfare look for, create and invent stories that can easily be sold and are easy to believe for justifying their goal. The strategy of a democratic country is different. It can only be a combination of actions based on the truth and facts.

The only correct answer to the now frequently asked question on how to win against information warfare is to cement our own values and strengthen our institutional foundation and liberal democratic state system which will fight against modern hybrid warfare. The most effective weapon of which a totalitarian and aggressive country is most scared are the surviving democracies on its borders and a strengthening of the democratic band surrounding it.

> **The purpose of warfare is to damage a liberal democracy, weaken institutional democracy, and make a decisive attack on Western moral values.**

## 5. Dilemma and Objectives of the State of Georgia

When did you last see material about Russia on Georgian TV? Not about it as an international superpower but Russian local news? When did our media cover ordinary Russian stories about the difficulties faced by ordinary people, poverty, the devaluation of the ruble, the situation in Russian prisons, murders in the streets of Russia, problems of Georgians living in Russia and so on? When did the Georgian media last give the opportunity to its audience to think about the modern Russian reality? Especially for those who feel nostalgic for the calm and predictability of the 1970s that they believe may still be found in today's Russia.

The Georgian media, vice versa, is full of stories about Russia's superiority. News that comes directly from the battlefield - from Syria, Ukraine, Moldova and today from the United States and the EU. This is the news that Russia is aggressive and an occupant but it fight for its interests, for what is theirs and nobody dares to interfere, nobody can resist and everyone has to concede.

Today, we are in the situation where truth and lies are mixed where many people cannot tell the difference between the two and have lost the ability to make rational judgments, exactly as stated by Russia's strategic communication goals. When the flow of propaganda is that massive, you follow the dominant trends as the alternative, reliable information flow runs low.

Almost all features of information warfare as described in various sections of this paper have successfully worked in Georgia. The main reason for its success is not so much the flawlessness of the Russian campaign but the inability of all Georgian ruling elites since independence to design and implement an effective counter strategic policy to Russia's propaganda and gain the support of its own population. None of the Georgian governments has done anything to find a complex, systematic and long-term solution.

By its characteristics, Georgia is a country that can be discussed according to textbook definitions:

1. Poor
2. Transitional democracy
3. Where the population has not reached a final agreement on any important segment of institutional building and/or system of values
4. Where the political elite is weak
5. Where the socio-cultural elite's authority simply does not exist
6. Where majority of people have experienced the horrors of warfare
7. Where the opponent effectively uses the "carrot and stick" policy
8. Where opening of the Russian market for Georgian products is welcomed without any reservation while the EU market remains unnoticed
9. Where a concept of a common religion can still be sold in spite of dozens of burned and bombed churches and monasteries
10. Where nothing is known about modern Russia but the "fact" that nobody can confront it and all the "anti-cultural" and "devilish" ideas come from the West
11. Where 30% of the population cannot only imagine being together with Russia but is ready to abandon the EU and NATO in exchange for a good neighborhood with Moscow.

This is just a brief list of the circumstances in which we live and have to act. Our weaknesses and deeply-rooted stereotypes create the most fertile ground for the opponent's attack. To win against this warfare, first of all, it is necessary to identify the problem exactly and then to recognize the existence of these problems, eliminate the stereotypes and dogmas and implement a consistent and systematic policy to eradicate our own weaknesses.

The main goal of the state of Georgia should not be to allow fraud penetration. Our main tool is the truth and it is necessary to engage all actors and use all technological means in order to disseminate it widely.

Our approach should be systematic and sustainable. Our aim is not to fight with the narrative created by our enemy but to equip Georgian citizens with practical knowledge, accurate information and real facts that grant people self-confidence as a result of which they will be less likely to be influenced by the propaganda. Just imagine the process: it starts with secondary school textbooks and ends with political decision-making. It is highly comprehensive and requires long-term planning and orientation.

> **Our main goal is to defeat our weaknesses, false stereotypes and dogmas imposed by the Soviet ideology. We need to kill the Soviet citizen in ourselves as only free people united around the idea of a democratic and sovereign state can win the war.**

## 6. Winning the War, an Idea that Unites

The war in Georgia is still to be won inside. The majority of the Russian population and the government are on the same side. President Putin's "Crimean" patriotism is a popular endeavor. Russia's task is simple; it fights only outside. Our big dilemma is inside the country. In Georgia, the Russian narrative and Soviet patriotism is still to be defeated.

Today, for one part of Georgians, good neighborly relations are associated with their personal well-being or guaranteed sales of grape harvests, wines and tangerines that means there is no room for putting the restoration and strengthening of sovereignty first as a condition for all future endeavors. It is obvious that the poverty of the Georgian population is an important manipulation tool and instrument for Russia. Accordingly, the first target is identified. That is how we can look through our long list of weaknesses as stated above which means that our action plan is ready to be pursued.

However, for ultimate success, it is essential to find an idea and an objective that unites everyone and for which fighting to achieve is equally important and valuable. This needs to be an idea that is stronger than our enemy or its economic policy towards Georgia. The idea and objective need to show and strengthen our uniqueness, our national pride, our solidarity and our many other good qualities best. In this process, we will return our self-confidence, self-respect and respect for each other. Thus, we will fearlessly fight together and rely on each other.

That is the very idea that a country needs. Not the government standing alone but a whole nation. We need an idea that assures us in our command and that in spite of the lack of human and financial resources, we will consolidate the nation and win the war.

After 25 years since Georgia's restoration of independence, it is of ultimate importance to have a national consensus at least on:

1. What country we build
2. Who our friends and partners are in this process
3. Who we are fighting the war against and why
4. What are the values and morals on which the modern Georgian state is based

It is essential to give a name to the warfare that accompanies the whole history of Georgia's becoming an independent state. It is also important to define the subjects of this warfare and outline benchmarks. It is necessary to perceive this warfare as one war, one continuous cycle that consists of various episodes. This warfare asks us to sacrifice people and causes us to lose territories but it pursues a more serious objective - to force us to give up our sovereignty and freedom of choice. It pushes us back to the Soviet Union.

## Additional Reading:

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3. Vladimir Putin stated in his address to the Russian Duma in 2016: "Our response should be based on our intellectual superiority, it will be asymmetric and cheap. Modern Russia needs an army able to adequately respond to modern threats." President Vladimir Putin, Annual Address to the Federal Assembly, May 10, 2006, Marble Hall, the Kremlin, Moscow, www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23577

4. The current system of propaganda warfare is based on the system of Cold War. Propaganda was the main management tool for the Soviet Union. A special course named Special Propaganda was taught at certain universities. The Soviets used it to maintain the goodwill of its population as well as methodologically teach how to disseminate false information outside the USSR. History remembers many examples of successful Soviet propaganda. The Soviet Union itself did not dissolve for 70 years partly thanks to the well managed propaganda machine when Soviet citizens, "lightheaded" by the propaganda, believed that people outside of the Iron Curtain were regularly tortured and where there was hunger and darkness. At that time, the key objective of the propaganda was to sell Communism as one and only ideological alternative. The objective and purpose changed over time but tactics remained mainly the same.

5. President Vladimir Putin participated in a conference of Russian Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives entitled "Protection and Strengthening of Fundamental Principles of Russia's National Interests and International Relations", Moscow, July 1, 2014, www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46131

6. More than one-third of the Georgian population (31%) supports the idea that Georgia will get more benefits if it says no to EU and NATO integration in exchange for the establishment of better relations with Russia. www.tabula.ge/ge/story/116425-ndi-54-s-prodasavlur-sagareo-politikastan-ertad-rusettan-kargi-urtiertoba-surs