

The Role of Conflicts of the New Type in the Formation of the Information Space of a Post-Industrial World

Alexander Balayan, PhD

Associate Professor

Department of Applied Political Science

National Research University - Higher School of Economics

Russia

Abstract

By the end of the 20th century, conflicts of a new type, came to the forefront. Subjects of conflicts have changed and this influences their dynamics directly. The article is aimed at revelation of the interaction between the conflicts of "network" and "hierarchy" and expansion of the information background of their presentation.

Key Words: network, hierarchy, network war, non-state actors, cyber wars.

Introduction

From the moment the Western countries entered the post-industrial stage, information have been playing more and more crucial role. This is connected, first and foremost, with technological development. According to Alvin Toffler, period of the «third wave» is characterized with an increased role of information streams, their complication and differentiation (Toffler, 1999). At the same time, we can speak about the phenomenon of an informational trauma: the society's inability to perceive and process large amounts of information which, unlike to how it was in the first half of the 20th century, are now coming from a large number of sources.

A consumer society has formed in the developed countries. As Jean Baudrillard has pointed out, in the modern world, unlike other ages, a man is surrounded primarily not by other people, but by objects of consumption. The man dedicates less time to communication and spends more time satisfying his material needs, which are constantly growing (Baudrillard, 2006). In such system, television channels are openly modelling reality. This is what Baudrillard meant when he said that mass media themselves are creating images and simulacra which easily become reality. Later, he called it *hyperreality*, which is often more real than reality itself (Baudrillard, 1995). Such strong influence of mass media on the society made them a kind of weapon.

Challenges and Threats

With the development of information technologies, conflicts of network and hierarchy have come to the forefront. These are conflicts of a new type which have manifested themselves most clearly in the 1990s. The American «Think Tanks» have made the greatest contribution to the recognition and study of such conflicts. Thus, J. Arquilla and D. Ronfeldt, analysts in the RAND Corporation, in a number of their works pointed out that the information revolution had changed the nature of conflicts. As a result of this revolution, network forms of organisation are coming to the forefront. These forms have a number of advantages over hierarchical forms. Social unrest and guerrilla wars are gradually transforming into the form of a social network war. *A network war is a special organisation of a society's social structure, as a result of which it acquires the ability to quickly unite and solve specific tasks* (Arquilla, Ronfeldt, 2003). The power is transferred to non-state actors, as they are able to organise an expanded multi-organisational network which is often much more efficient than traditional hierarchical structures. As informational revolution infiltrates the structure of the society, the behaviour of parties during modern military and ideological conflicts depends on the level of information and communication. In connection with this, such «soft power» strategies as «informational operations» and «perception management» are becoming very significant. Their main aim is to attract and disorient the enemy, not coerce him. Thus, a conflict's psychological aspect can be as important a goal as physical destruction of the enemy.

Types of Conflicts

Modern conflicts of network and hierarchy can be divided, by their level of intensification, into «*hot*» and «*cold*». The Seattle Riots of 1999, when anti-globalists disrupted the WTO summit and made the world talk about them as a real force for the first time can serve as an example of a «moderately hot conflict». A large group of people united by a common goal was able to disrupt a summit of a large international organisation by organising mass riots and fights with police. WTO, as well as NATO and IMF, were considered responsible for the hunger and poverty of the third world countries, so the Seattle action was perceived by the world's left public as a rebellion against the most developed countries. After that, anti-globalist clubs started to grow all over the world, all the more so that the boom of information and digital technologies contributed to that. Moreover, «The Seattle events, in their turn, lead to the creation in 2001 of the World Social Forum (WSF), which has become the main hub for anti-globalist forces» (Wallerstein, 2008). It should be noted that at first, anti-globalists were losing the information war, but after the active development of the Internet and, as a result, a leveling of the global world field, anti-globalists are winning information wars more often, which is confirmed by the increase in the number of their supporters.

The revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, in which a mob consisting of mobile and fastly moving groups participated, are yet another example of a «moderately hot conflict». To alert and coordinate the protesters, social networks and Twitter were actively used. The Internet was used to publish photos, videos, and articles from direct participants of the events, which influenced the information colouring of these events outside the countries. And the Internet did not play a key role in these events, one should not overestimate it. The protesters' side was supported by the leading Western and Arabic mass-media (The Qatar Al Jazeera TV channel, in particular, which harshly criticised the regimes in which the riots were taking place. As a result, these were both internal and external pressure on the leaders of the countries in which the revolutions were taking place, and the result of that was their demoralisation.

The brightest modern example of a «hot» conflict within the boundaries of a military confrontation is the armed conflict between Israel and the Hezbollah radical Shi'a militant group on July 12, 2006, as a result of which Israel's army could not achieve the set goals. This was connected with the fact that Hezbollah's armed forces, consisting of different specialised groups, were constructed on the basis of a network principle. These groups infiltrated territories occupied by the enemy and conducted separate sabotage attacks and military operations. Moreover, one group knew nothing about the actions of another, there was no coordination between them. Obviously, the hierarchical army structure was unable to eliminate the enemy's highly branched and pin-point groups. Mass bombardments killed Lebanon's civilians, and this, in its turn, led to replenishments of Hezbollah's forces. One of the consequences was Israel's defeat in the information war. In the world mass-media, the image of an aggressor state invading a foreign territory and killing civilians became the prevailing one. Thus, a network structure proved to be more effective both in informational and military confrontation with a hierarchy.

The so-called «cyber wars» are one of the key «cold conflicts». In this connection, the publication in 1996 of *A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace*, written and published on the Internet by John Perry Barlow, founder and vice chairman of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, an organisation dedicated to research of social and legal issues connected with the cyberspace and protection of freedom in the Internet. It was a countermeasure caused by the attempt to introduce Internet censorship made by the American government. Almost immediately, this text was reposted in thousand of blogs in dozens of countries. Consciously using sharp expressions in the address of the authorities, Barlow wanted to show how easily any information can be spread on the net. And whereas the authorities can cut short the dissemination of unwanted information in any mass-media, it is virtually impossible to do on the net. The declaration's essential idea is the proclamation of Internet's independence from state structures. As Barlow points out, cyberspace acts as an alternative to society as such, because it is not what we have come to consider the social reality.

But cyber wars truly escalated in the course of the WikiLeaks scandal. And here a two-front conflict is obvious. First, it is a conflict with the USA as a hierarchic state. Julian Assange, WikiLeaks founder, again and again found and published the government's confidential data, despite the preventive measures being taken. Second, here we observe a conflict of a network mass-media (which is what WikiLeaks truly is) and the traditional Western hierarchic mass-media. This is the reason why, on the one hand, most of the Western mass-media were divided in their attitude towards Assange's actions, and on the other hand, they clearly used the tactics of switching from his professional activity to his moral make-up (spy, rapist, a greedy man).

In fact, in a very short time a network mass-media became the chief newsmaker, having pushed the leading mass-media back from this position. Of course, these are only episodes of the informational confrontation, but the tendency shall continue to grow.

Speaking of yet another type of “cold” conflict, which often develops as a result of interaction between non-profit and non-state organisation with the state, we should note that their activity is often multilevel, conflicting with hierarchic state structures. Such conflict is especially important for transient political systems, where network non-profit and non-state organisations are often perceived by the state with distrust and hostility. Their role can vary, depending on the character of regime changes and the presence or absence of public discontent with the regime. In particular, J. Arquilla and D. Ronfeldt called the role of such structures ‘swarming’, paralleling the network to a swarm of insects (Arquilla, Ronfeldt, 2003). The ruling hierarchy sees such structures as a threat to its existence, and therefore opposes their functioning.

We can ascertain that conflicts of the new type have seriously changed the world media space of the last 20 years and have led to the creation of specific structures whose activity significantly influences the formation of an alternative agenda. At the same time, such conflict threatens the world stability, because the network principle of organisation building is actively borrowed by terrorist and criminal groups. This is why many states are trying to develop optimal strategies against network structures. But it is already clear that the tendency towards the growth of controversy in the network/hierarchy interaction will only intensify, which will lead to further expansion of such conflicts.

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