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***How to cope with a cognitive attack:
Prototype for detecting propaganda and
manipulation in psychological operations
targeting civilians during a conflict***

Abstract

While it is true that psychological operations are difficult to predict, and that measuring their real impact remains a challenge, it is important to study the origin and course of this type of operation in order to outline harmful actions. This is even more challenging in conflict situations, mainly because of the emotional baggage involved, and because of the high self-interest of both parties. This study proposes a propaganda detection prototype with the following two aims; first, to identify language patterns that may influence an individual's perception (increasing the polarisation of those involved), and second, to uphold the protection of citizens' rights and freedoms (avoiding extreme censorship). Future research lines propose training an AI language system, to obtain an objective and reliable detection tool, and subsequently be able to analyse information in a conscious and active way.

Keywords

Psy-ops, defence, bias, Russia, Ukraine.

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I. Introduction

This work is framed within multi-domain operations, specifically the cognitive domain, whose importance throughout history within the operational environment has led to its prominent use in cross-disciplinary operations through unconventional warfare strategies. Although it is a very important component, it does not have a scientific theoretical framework. This underscores the lack of protection against it, because uncertainty about the actual impact of its potential effects is a vulnerability indicator.

Unconventional strategies are particularly relevant when directly involving the population, and they predominate in asymmetrical conflicts, elements of which have been progressively incorporated into conflicts, leading to hybrid threats¹. This shift in focus comes in the aftermath of the envisaged breakdown of the Westphalian system, leaving global actors such as Al Qaeda or ISIS capable of challenging states. The difference between military and civilians in the theatre could disappear, substantially changing the paradigm of warfare to one where resources, and intended objectives and interests, would encompass both public and private interests. The main idea is that the state has lost its monopoly on warfare and, at the tactical level, this includes everything from armaments to psychology². The Gerasimov Doctrine sets out an interesting approach to the use of these unconventional strategies, reflecting non-military measures whose value in achieving political and strategic ends is even greater than the effectiveness of weapons in some cases³.

This project aims to identify the keys to a cognitive attack, while taking into account the complications for defence that this entails at an individual and social level. The main objectives are to:

- Understand how we process external information, how important this is in conflict situations, how these processes can be disrupted, and what defensive responses can be adopted.
- Contrast the positions of two conflicting parties, and identify common factors used by both that may be manipulating civilians' beliefs and attitudes towards the situation.

1 “One that simultaneously and adaptively employs all kinds of instruments of power; conventional procedures alongside irregular tactics and terrorist activities; organised crime; new technologies; cyberspace attacks; political pressure; and multiple types of information and disinformation tools, including fake news and lies themselves.” PDC-00 (2021) Glossary of commonly used terminology. Ministry of Defence: https://emad.defensa.gob.es/Galerias/CCDC/files/PDC-00_Glosario_de_Terminologia_de_uso_Conjunto_xJUL21x.pdf.

2 URRÁ, Francisco Javier (2021). Las operaciones militares de decepción: un enfoque desde psicología. *Revista Ensayos militares*: <https://revistaensayosmilitares.cl/index.php/acague/article/view/351/232>.

3 Colom, Guillem (2019). La doctrina Gerasimov y el pensamiento estratégico ruso contemporáneo. *Revista Ejército* no. 933: <https://www.ugr.es/~gesi/Doctrina-Gerasimov.pdf>.

- Obtain a well-reasoned propaganda detection prototype that determines the quality of the information presented in terms of deceptive intent (i.e. whether or not it contains manipulative elements). And, highlight the possible psychological processes that this produces.

Propaganda is taken to mean “the systematic application of set of techniques to spread partial or biased opinions or ideas among the masses, with their own, often political, intent.”⁴ It was the predecessor of current procedures for acting in the cognitive field of operations, and this study is specifically interested in analysing its manipulative significance.

In terms of the applied part, a comparative analysis of two opposing positions in the same conflict will be carried out. For the study, we have chosen the Russia-Ukraine war, and have analysed it using a prototype for detecting war propaganda.

A bilateral conflict analysis is used to: 1) avoid a biased position, and 2) draw out common principles of influence that are independent from the message content. However, a prior analysis of the conflict and its chronology will be included, as it is necessary to take into account the background and characteristics of the scenario under analysis.

2. Key factors in psychological operations and their role in armed conflict.

2.1. Cognitive warfare and psychological operations

Cognitive warfare is part of the information environment, specifically the cognitive domain, which is “the non-physical space of operations that encompasses actions, processes and effects that affect the perceptions of human beings, individually or as a group, and is inherent to their capacity for judgement, group awareness and decision-making”⁵. Cognitive warfare therefore aims to change what people think and how they act. It aims to sow dissonance, instigate conflicting narratives, polarise opinions and radicalise groups. It draws on technological advances and focuses on the human environment as the target of cognitive manipulation.

According to Ottewell⁶ the information environment is composed of three dimensions: the physical (infrastructure and systems), the informational (data and algorithms), and

4 IEEE (2020). Implicaciones del ámbito cognitivo en las Operaciones Militares. Revista IEEE, 01/2020: https://emad.defensa.gob.es/Galerias/CCDC/files/IMPLICACIONES_DEL_AMBITO_COGNITIVO_EN_LAS_OPERACIONES_MILITARES.pdf.

5 PDC-00 (2021). Glossary of commonly used terminology. Ministry of Defence: https://emad.defensa.gob.es/Galerias/CCDC/files/PDC-00_Glosario_de_Terminologia_de_uso_Conjunto_xJUL21x.pdf.

6 OTTEWELL, Paul (2020). Defining the Cognitive Domain. Over the Horizon: <https://othjournal.com/2020/12/07/defining-the-cognitive-domain/>.

the human (mental faculties that influence the perception of information). It is therefore important to understand the socio-political, economic and cultural context of the area where it will be applied to be successful in the third dimension.

This confluence between dimensions leads authors such as Cluzel to propose the *human domain* (instead of the cognitive domain)⁷. It aims to understand the phenomenon by encompassing not only cognition, but the individual and their relationship with their social environment - based on as many disciplines as human beings act in - which are what ultimately define our specific centres of gravity⁸ (which is what our adversaries will fixate on when preparing an offensive).

Influence Operations (IO) are used to carry out this form of warfare, and of these, this study focuses on Psychological Operations (PSYOPS), disregarding the remaining components of Information Operations (INFOOPS). According to the definition proposed by NATO in *Military Committee 402*, PSYOPS are: “planned psychological activities using communication methods and other means directed at specific audiences to influence perceptions, attitudes and behaviour, affecting the achievement of political and military objectives”⁹.

2.2. Main tools used in PSYOPS

The main tools used in PSYOPS are still either material or virtual, because cognition is a product of perception and therefore cannot be reached directly, it is subject to interpreting projections on other planes.

The means employed have always been at the forefront of the technology of the time, adapting to the need to explore new ways of mass influence: the use of the press in the First World War, radio in the Second World War, audio-visual media during the Cold War and, finally - in the present day - the incorporation of the digital era and the use of the Internet; allowing the real time transmission of information that can be accessed by anyone with a connection¹⁰.

However, this constant and currently innovative use of the virtual plane must not make us forget that we are still subject to the material plane, which is the only guaranteed

7 Note that the Anglo-Saxon term *domain* has been adapted into Spanish as “ámbito” and not as “dominio” (CCDC, 2020. Concept note “multi-domain operations”. Joint Concept Development Centre. CESEDEN: https://emad.defensa.gob.es/Galerias/CCDC/files/OPERACIONES_MULTI-DOMINIO.PDF). Cluzel’s original proposal was “human domain”.

8 “The main source of power that gives an actor his or her strength, freedom of action or will to fight.” Own translation based on NATO AJP-5 (2019). Allied Joint Doctrine for the Planning of Operations. North Atlantic Treaty Organization: https://www.coemed.org/files/stanags/01_AJP/AJP-5_EDA_V2_E_2526.pdf.

9 NATO (2013). AAP-06. NATO glossary of terms and definitions: https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/Other_Pubs/aap6.pdf. Own translation.

10 Álvarez, Pablo (2019). Propaganda y manipulación de masas en el siglo XX. Revista IEEE: Documento Opinión, no. 40: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7264337>.

to be stable in the future. The point here is that old tactics such as “propaganda of the deed”¹¹ or the effects of a terrorist attack - whose psychological impact is intrinsic to its definition¹²- remind us that a cognitive impact is produced by perceptions, and that these can be generated by the reality with which we come into contact. In this particular case, reality will be mainly projected by both planes: material and virtual.

It is important to stress that, as individuals, we should not overestimate what we perceive through the virtual world because, if it is already complex to perceive cause-consequence relationships in the material plane, handling perceptions in the virtual plane involves an infinite combination of possibilities that are used to create a scenario that is adapted to the target subject of influence.

3. The coexistence of three interrelated planes: physical, cognitive, and virtual.

There is a complex relationship between the three planes, and ultimately between decision-making and behaviour in these planes (see Figure 1).

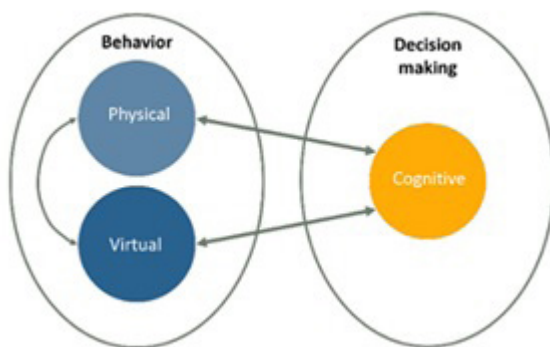


Image 1. Interrelation of the three levels of defence .

It is extremely important to emphasise that today our external stimuli come almost equally from both physical and virtual planes, and they are so integrated that we do not consciously make a distinction. However, it should not be forgotten that the virtual is determined by the physical, and not the other way around, as it may seem in certain situations (see Figure 2). After all, the

virtual plane is physically created by material objects and without them it would cease to exist (such as before it had been developed). This perceptual overlap can often lead us to feel that what happens in the virtual plane has direct/immediate effects in the physical plane; in reality, this is not the case, because the cognitive plane will always mediate between the virtual and physical planes.

11 Strategy that seeks to generate impact and convey a message through actions rather than through speeches or verbal messages. It is typical to anarchist terrorism; one of the earliest examples is the 1892 Ravachol bombing in Paris. AVILÉS, Juan (2009). El terrorismo anarquista como propaganda por el hecho. *Historia y Política*, Jan-June, pp. 169-190: <https://recyt.fecyt.es/index.php/Hyp/article/download/44489/26066/0>.

12 “An act of violence is a terrorist act if the psychological impact it has on a society or some segment of it, in terms of anxiety and fear, far exceeds its material consequences, i.e. intentional physical damage to persons or things.” REINARES, Fernando (2006). *Conceptualizando el terrorismo internacional*. Cuadernos de estrategia IEEA 133: https://www.ieea.es/en/Galerias/fichero/cuadernos/CE_133_LuchaContraTerrorismoDchoInternacional.pdf.

13 The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (2021). *Behaviour-Oriented Operations in the Military Context*: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep29549.8>.

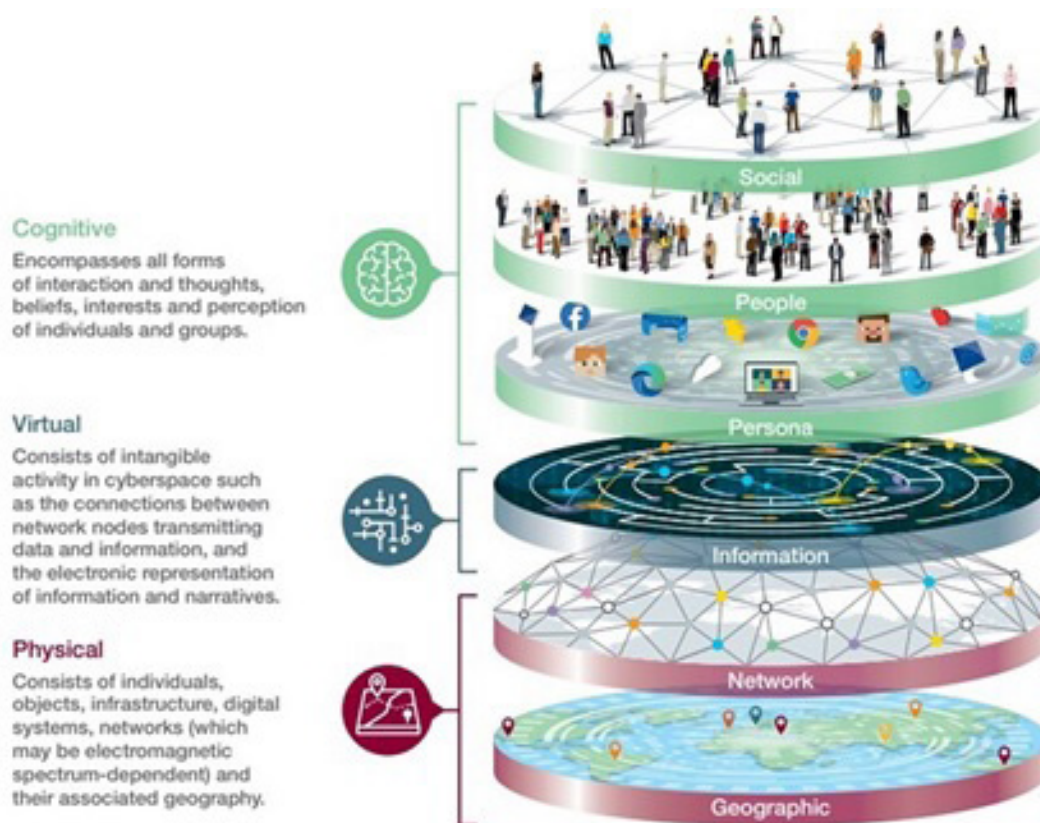


Image 2. The six layers of cyberspace¹⁴.

This is why it is of utmost importance to understand that the cognitive plane: 1) is created based on the combination of both, through perception, and 2) in turn triggers decision-making that may lead to actions (behaviour in the physical and virtual plane). “May” is used here because intention without action does not involve an impact, given that it is not performed, i.e. it is not translated into its final state: materialisation, and therefore will not be accessible, measurable or controllable.

3.1. Strategic offence and defence at the cognitive level

The previous point demonstrates that accessing the cognitive plane is difficult because it is simultaneously a channel of inputs and outputs of what happens on the other two planes: the material and virtual.

As in all warfare, the established dynamic is based on two fundamental pillars: tactical and strategic offence and defence¹⁵. This is where an anomaly in the cognitive plane is observed: following the logic of the physical and virtual planes, both defence

¹⁴ UK DCDC (2018). UK Cyber Primer. Defence Academy of the United Kingdom: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1115061/Cyber_Primer_Edition_3.pdf.

¹⁵ Von Clausewitz, Carl (2005). On War. La esfera de los libros.

and offence have a theatre of operations that is more or less delimited, or at least has an action-reaction dynamic (see Image 3).

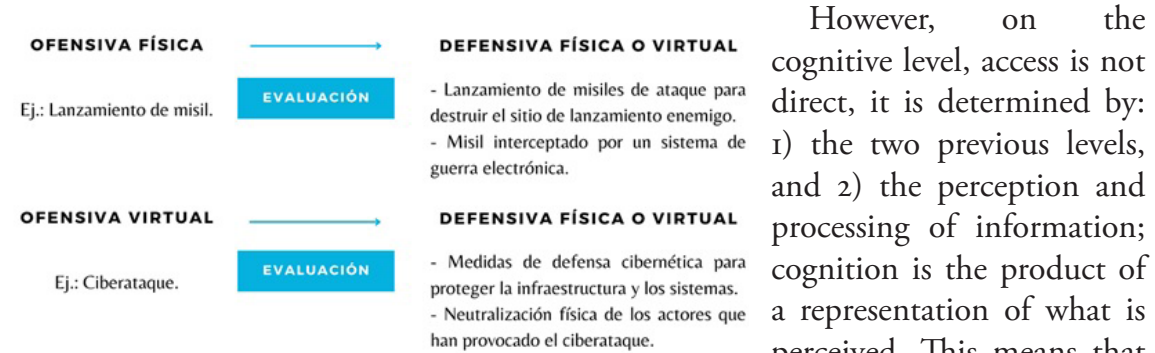


Image 3. Offensive-defensive dynamics with examples on the physical and virtual level. Source: Author's own work.

However, on the cognitive level, access is not direct, it is determined by: 1) the two previous levels, and 2) the perception and processing of information; cognition is the product of a representation of what is perceived. This means that both input and output in the cognitive plane have to

be represented a priori and a posteriori in the material or virtual planes. There is no direct way to achieve cognition. Therefore, the tools used to reach the cognitive plane must first be modified on the physical and/or virtual planes (Figure 4), as the exchange of information and processing is bidirectional (cause-consequence of what is perceived and how it is acted upon).

It should be remembered that the offensive has been launched after a prior analysis of the situation/context by the aggressor, based on their own perceptions drawn from the physical and virtual planes (which in turn may differ to some extent from the perceptions generated a posteriori by the affected person).

It is also important to note that today a dissociation has been observed between the will to fight, and victory or defeat in conflicts, with the will persisting despite physical defeat¹⁶. Although this dissociation is not exclusive to modern conflicts, it must be taken into account as these subjective elements (susceptible to influence) take on a more relevant role on the stage.



Image 4. Offensive-defensive dynamics in the cognitive plane. Non-direct relationship: 1) subject to the physical and/or virtual plane, and 2) subject to perceptions of impact. Source: Author's own work.

¹⁶ This was the case in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict (despite the Azeri defeat of Armenia in the First Nagorno-Karabakh War in 1988-1994), or the reactivation of terrorist cells and organisations, often resulting in frozen conflicts. Bárcenas, Luis Andrés and López, José Ángel (2011). Los conflictos congelados de la antigua Unión Soviética. UC3M: https://publicaciones.defensa.gob.es/media/downloadable/files/links/c/o/conflictos_congelados_union_soviética.pdf.

4. The contribution of psychology as a discipline for the study of human behaviour

4.1 External information processing

In order to understand the applications of PSYOPS, as well as to situate the cognitive plane in the interrelationship between the physical and virtual plane, it is necessary to have an overview of how humans process information. This explanation will refer to two major theories of information processing by Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck, both widely established in psychology, which can be very useful when adapted to a non-clinical context. I believe that both theories can be combined in a way that gives a broad overview of the issue, so I have tried to put them together in a single diagram (see Figure 5).



Image 5. Information processing flow. Own work based on the information processing models of Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck.

Albert Ellis argued that our negative emotions are not caused directly by external events, but by our interpretations and beliefs about those events. He proposed that by replacing irrational thoughts with more rational and realistic thoughts, we can improve our perception of the real world in a less distorted and more controllable way¹⁷.

In turn, Aaron Beck's theory is based on the idea that our emotions and behaviours are influenced by our automatic thought patterns (biases and heuristics). It suggests

¹⁷ Ellis, Albert (2003). Rational Emotive Therapy Manual. Editorial Desclee.

that certain cognitive biases, such as negative interpretation of events or polarised thinking (extremisms), may contribute to dysfunctional thinking and generate adaptive problems¹⁸.

Both approaches have elements in common, such as an emphasis on identifying and modifying dysfunctional thoughts and promoting a more realistic and adaptive perspective. Therefore, they propose using techniques and strategies to improve rational thinking and encourage focusing on the controllable aspects of events.

A breakdown of the above model is better explained when adapted to conflict (see figure 6).



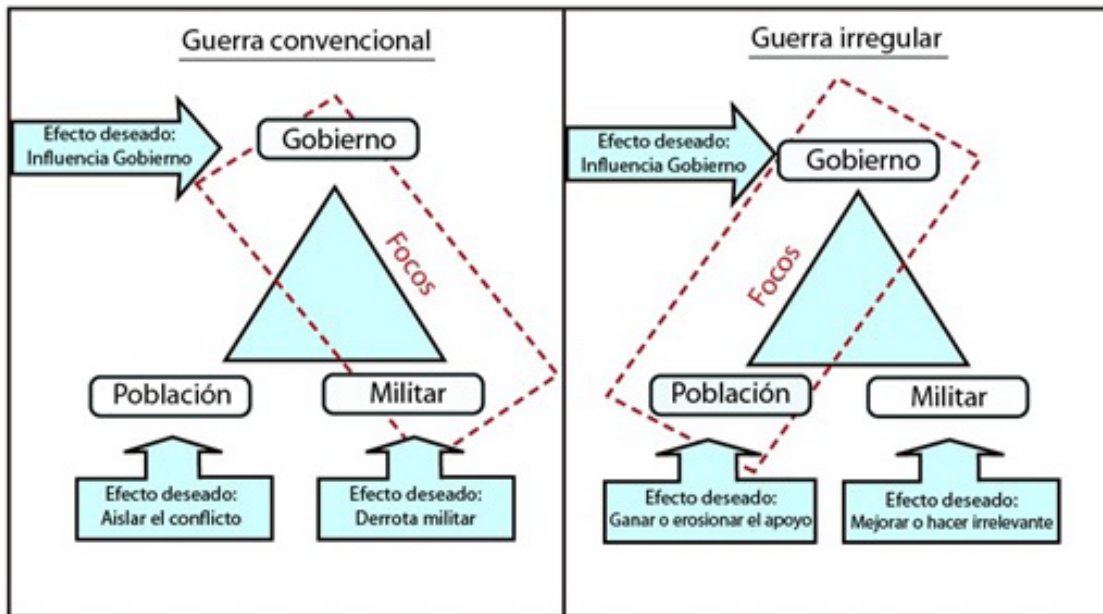
Image 6. Flow of information processing adapted to conflict. Source: Author's own work.

Therefore, the way we communicate: how we receive, process and explain information (both through verbal and non-verbal language) is key to influencing this processing, as the nature of the stimuli will, to some extent, determine the prism through which inputs are processed. The outputs will be determined according to the characteristics of the target to which the information is addressed.

4.2. *The power of communication and attentional control*

At this point, it is important to remember why so much emphasis is placed on the individual, when the scale of a conflict far outweighs the individual dimension. This can be explained by Clausewitz's Trinity and the notable way he shifted the target in irregular warfare, moving the focus of impact to the population instead of linking it only to military power (Figure 7):

¹⁸ Beck, Aaron and Haigh, Emily (2014). Advances in Cognitive Theory and Therapy: The Generic Cognitive Model. Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, vol. 10, pp. 1-24. <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-032813-153734>.

Image 7. Clausewitz' Trinity¹⁹.

The paradigm of conventional warfare has changed at both a population and individual level by incorporating the virtual space. This not only makes the target (individuals) more accessible, but also makes it easier for perpetrators to operate in this space, due to accessibility, high profitability and impunity, and the fact the legal system has not adapted to the virtual environment²⁰.

While attempts to communicate with and influence the population is not new, the way in which it is done is: the Internet and social networks are the perfect medium to generate confusion, misinformation, saturation and mistrust. It is true that it has not yet been possible to demonstrate a cause-consequence relationship between these influence campaigns and their impact on reality. However, as seen in the previous point in relation to the information processing flow, there is a certain framework of perception and attention through which information is processed; this can be more influential when people's vulnerabilities are known, and therefore the published information could be adapted to the processing framework of the target population.

By referring to Plato's classical work "The Allegory of the Cave", it can be demonstrated that showing information captures our attention, but rather than telling us what we should think about, it tells us where to focus our thought (see Figure 8):

¹⁹ US Defence Department (2007). Irregular Warfare. JOC I.O: https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joc_iw_vi.pdf.

²⁰ Robles, Margarita (2016). Amenaza y uso de la fuerza a través del ciberespacio: un cambio de paradigma. LADI: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340581460_Amenaza_y_uso_de_la_fuerza_a_traves_del_ciberespacio_un_cambio_de_paradigma_por_Margarita_Robles_Carrillo_AMENAZA_Y_USO_DE_LA_FUERZA_A_TRAVES_DEL.



Image 8. Representation of Plato's Allegory of the Cave.

While the chained men are distracted by what the shadows are doing, they have little interest in knowing if there is information beyond what they are presented with (e.g. if there are other individuals who are not chained). Their dialogue focuses on the differences they each perceive about the shadows that are cast, but not about what there is beyond that (what being chained implies for them). Each person's interpretation of the shadow guides their mental framework and perception of reality, which in turn determines their behaviour.

A similar situation occurs with the women who hold the figures that cast the shadows, the difference is that their actions have an impact on the men in chains (whether intentional or not), but their function is still limited to what they have to do (hold the figures), making this their reality.

Only those outside the cave can perceive the world, its observable characteristics and how it affects them (basing their perceptions on a complete vision of what they see, feel, observe and do). Note that a person in chains cannot have any effect on the outside world, even if they want to. This is important, because often our perception of reality, together with our desire for "how we think reality should be" generates a distorted picture that makes us responsible for complex situations that we simply cannot handle for physical or hierarchical reasons. Therefore, we feel responsible for things that are beyond our control.

4.3. *Cognitive biases and emotions*

According to Kahneman²¹, to influence an individual it is necessary to appeal to their emotions, because emotional shocks are processed by what he calls System 1, which is fast, intuitive and automatic processing, so the event is not deliberately analysed. However, once an individual has been convinced of something, it is very

21 Kahneman, Daniel (2011). *Think fast, think slow*. Debate.

difficult to change their mind, because other elements of the human psyche come into play, related to the two systems: System 1, described above, and System 2, which is slow, deliberative and conscious processing.

System 1 helps us to economise on the large amount of information we receive throughout the day, as using System 2 to process absolutely all the stimuli we are exposed to would be unmanageable; this is why we require tools such as functional biases. However, these biases can end up distorting our thinking by making us unaware of the automatic inferences we make based on the information we obtain.

Cluzel²² suggests that understanding cognitive biases can help counter persuasion and manipulation, because they pose certain risks such as: the brain's difficulty in discerning the veracity of information, taking short cuts in evaluating messages, believing previously heard statements, and accepting statements supported by evidence without questioning their authenticity. He also notes that confirmation bias is perhaps the most common and damaging bias, as it leads people to look for evidence that confirms their beliefs and ignore evidence to the contrary.

Although we like to see ourselves as emotional beings that are governed by reason, neuropsychologists have shown that, in general, we make decisions emotionally and then justify them rationally²³. Therefore, reason is subordinate to emotion and not the other way around. Emotions drive us to act, but not always in the right way. Emotion often makes it difficult for individuals to reflect logically on their situation²⁴.

Another basic principle that can affect human judgement is the need for cognitive closure²⁵, which is behind the search for definitive and simplistic answers to reduce uncertainty. A simple (albeit uncertain) answer to a complex problem is preferred to no answer at all.

4.4. *The art of manipulation*

In its original sense, the word “manipulate” was used to describe the action of handling, and only objects per se can be handled. However, the term came to be used figuratively to refer to the cunning influence or control over people, situations or

22 Du Cluzel, François (2020). Cognitive Warfare. Innovation Hub: https://www.innovationhub-act.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/20210113_CW%20Final%20v2%20.pdf.

23 Damasio, Antonio (2022). *Descartes' Error*. Ed. Destino: Barcelona.

24 Astorga, Luis (2020). Manipulación cognitiva en el S.XXI. *Revista del Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos* 16, pp. 15-45: https://publicaciones.defensa.gob.es/media/downloadable/files/links/r/e/revista_ieee_16.pdf.

25 Kruglanski, Arie (1990). Lay Epistemic Theory in Social-Cognitive Psychology. *Psychological Inquiry*, Vol. 1(3), pp. 181-197: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1449747>.

information for personal gain or to exercise power and control. In this context, manipulation involves the use of deceptive, persuasive or coercive tactics to influence someone's perception, behaviour or decisions²⁶.

When people are treated as mere objects, as philosopher Alfonso López Quintás²⁴ points out, some end up considering others as abject and repellent beings. This view prevents them from connecting with each other and forming solid structures that could generate an attitude of resistance. For example, putting hundreds of prisoners into train carriages as if they were parcels and making them travel vast distances. The aim was not so much to make them suffer, but to debase them. The same is true of information saturation and distraction by irrelevant topics.

When in this state, people are not aware that their thoughts are unfounded, but repeat (consciously or unconsciously) what they see and believe to be the result of their own thought process²⁷. The invisible nature of manipulation makes it dangerous, because the manipulated subject thinks that his or her actions are not subordinate to any other person or power. Lack of awareness of these tactics, cognitive biases, the perpetrator's good manipulation skills and knowledge of the target's vulnerabilities, as well as the ease with which some people trust, believe or allow themselves to be influenced, play a crucial role.

Logically, we should not be sceptical about our entire environment, as this would not be remotely adaptive. This leads us to assume that what we experience is real and immutable, and therefore manipulation is often not even considered a possibility. It would mean assuming that we do not have full control over our actions, or even that we are being betrayed by someone we trust. As social beings, we may be sceptical in this area, but if we always governed our perceptions in this way, it would result in a state of constant distrust or uncertainty that would make it difficult for us to functionally adapt to our environment, as we need to rely on certain universal truths, structures and people in order to develop.

5. Methodology for analysing propaganda and manipulation in PSYOPS

5.1. Propaganda detection prototype

More than a few authors have looked into the study of propaganda and its effects on mass manipulation. Among others, highlights include the works of Edward Bernays:

²⁶ López, Alfonso (1987). La manipulación del hombre a través del lenguaje. Real Academia de Ciencias Morales y Políticas: <https://www.mercaba.org/Enciclopedia/M/manipulacion.pdf>.

²⁷ Chomsky, Noam (2016). Ten strategies of media manipulation. Archipiélago, 19(73): <https://www.revistas.unam.mx/index.php/archipelago/article/view/55996>.

“*Propaganda*”²⁸, Walter Lippmann in his work “*Public Opinion*”²⁹ and Jacques Ellul in his book “*La propagande: ses techniques, ses métiers*”³⁰. They all investigated how these techniques can shape opinions and behaviour, including Lippmann on the role of the media in the construction of perceived reality, and Ellul on the impact of technology and how propaganda takes advantage of it.

It is difficult to ignore the Nazi era in this area, and authors such as Victor Klemperer with his work “*LTI: The Language of the Third Reich*”³¹, in which he collected numerous examples showing that the Nazi leaders deliberately used certain words and phrases that they constantly repeated in order to manipulate the minds of German citizens. This is reminiscent of “Orwellian neo-language” in George Orwell’s *1984*³². It is also important to appreciate the valuable contributions of linguist and philosopher Noam Chomsky³³ who, together with Edward Herman, argued that the media act as propaganda tools to maintain established power.

This study mainly uses the work of Arthur Ponsonby (1871-1946), a British politician known for his contribution to the field of diplomacy and his critique of war propaganda: “*Falsehood in Wartime: Propaganda Lies of the First World War*”³⁴. His work debunks the most defamatory propaganda lies of the First World War. It explains how creating propaganda worked in wartime and how it affected the population, who received it, absorbed it, recreated it, and who also created new hoaxes, with the encouragement of governments. He used a large number of specific cases in his work, which should be viewed and reflected on. These include the “corpse factory”, where oils were extracted from the bodies of dead soldiers, the Belgian girl whose hands were cut off by German “beasts”, the crucified Canadian soldier, and the sinking of the passenger liner Lusitania.

Specifically, the study will use the decalogue that determined war propaganda slogans as a guide:

- I. We do not want war. To deflect our responsibility for the conflict, we have tried to avoid it by all means.

28 Bernays, Edward (1928). *Propaganda* 2008 edition in Spanish. Ed. Melusina.

29 Lippmann, Walter (1922). *Public Opinion*. Transaction Publishers. USA and London: https://monoskop.org/images/b/bf/Lippman_Walter_Public_Opinion.pdf.

30 Ellul, Jacques (1962). *Propagandes. Les cobayes lettrés*: https://monoskop.org/images/8/84/ELLUL_Jacques_-_1962_-_Propagandes.pdf.

31 Klemperer, Victor (1957). *LTI: The Language of the Third Reich*. Editorial Minúscula, Barcelona, 2001.

32 Orwell, George (1949). *1984*. Spanish edition: Debolsillo, 2013.

33 Herman, Edward and CHOMSKY, Noam (1988). *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon.

34 Ponsonby, Arthur (1928). *Falsehood in Wartime: Propaganda Lies of the First World War*.

2. The enemy is solely responsible for the war. The antagonist's paranoia, madness or thirst for power are solely responsible for the outbreak of hostilities. The psychological profile of the enemy leader is often analysed, looking for signs of mental imbalance or psychopathy.
3. The enemy is an execrable being. Dehumanise the antagonist in order to nullify any possibility of forbearance, understanding or empathy towards his side. Any hint of pity for them must be eliminated.
4. We pursue noble aims. Our violence must be disguised as heroism and altruism, in contrast to the brutality of the enemy. Restoring peace, defending international law or overthrowing a dictator are the most commonly used arguments.
5. The enemy commits atrocities wilfully, ours are unintentional mistakes. Atrocities are committed in every war, which is why it is essential to always attribute them to the enemy, even if we have committed them ourselves.
6. The enemy uses unauthorised weapons. It is useful, to be persuasive, to constantly denounce the enemy for using illegal and immoral weapons (whether this is true or not).
7. We suffer few losses, the enemy's losses are enormous. Psychological warfare is used to show that we are winning, to keep our side's morale high and, conversely, demoralise the enemy.
8. Artists and intellectuals support our cause. Opinion leaders are generally liked and respected by our population, so it is useful to get them to support our cause.
9. Our cause is sacred, divine or sublime in nature. Our cause is based on idealistic arguments (religious, ideological or cultural). Recognising geostrategic interests does not often appeal to citizens, especially when their rulers demand great sacrifices.
10. Those who question war propaganda are traitors. Internal dissension must be avoided; in wartime, not only the views of the enemy must be censored, but also neutral and even-handed analyses.

Taking the considerations above into account, the following prototype analysis is proposed (continues with the following factors):

Factor I	<i>We do not want war</i>
1.	<p>Fragment of the message implying this factor [link+location].</p> <p><i>(insert the fragment containing the selected factor)</i></p> <p>Justification applied to the context</p> <p><i>(explain why this factor is considered to be present in relation to the case studied)</i></p>
2.	“ “

This is how we will compile the linguistic structures that are used that refer to each factor of in the decalogue, in order to build a possible subsequent methodology so they can be correctly identified and justified.

5.2. PSYOPS strategic analysis proposal

Brief historical introduction to the conflict. The origins and evolution of the conflict will be outlined in such a way as to form a suitable framework for the subsequent analysis of the relevant cases.

Structure of the strategy of both parties. The strategy proposed by both sides will be outlined on the basis of the literature consulted; this is inevitably open to failure but will give us a rough idea of each path.

Joint strategic landscape analysis: regional and international stakeholder mapping. The conflict will be located geographically and the map of regional and international actors that play a relevant role in the conflict will be included.

Application of the propaganda detection prototype. Given how complex it is to comprehensively evaluate a single text concerning a specific event, and the fact that it is not manually and individually possible to make a sufficiently broad comparison by contrasting different texts and media, the following is proposed:

- Perform a search of popular local news sites, filtering by date close to the start of the last declared conflict between the two sides.
- Select and analyse at least one speech by the main representative of each side of the conflict.
- Use the articles obtained from the search, and the analysed speeches, to identify which structures correspond to Ponsonby's indicators described above.
- Justify why this is true, also taking into account the context, if necessary.

6. Strategic analysis applied to the Russia-Ukraine conflict

6.1. Brief historical introduction to the conflict

The war in Ukraine is taking place in a strategic context of growing rivalry between the great powers: the United States on one hand, and Russia and China on the other. Therefore, what is at stake goes beyond the Ukrainian and European space and has a worldwide impact.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), Secretary of State James Baker proposed a deal to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, agreeing not to extend NATO "one inch"

eastwards in exchange for Russian troops leaving Germany. Gorbachev agreed, but after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the pact seemed to take on a different meaning given the implications of the loss of Russian power. This turning point triggered a very different reality: “Not an inch of territory was to be off-limits to NATO”³⁵. Russia’s post-Cold War loss of geopolitical power, while still wanting to be a great power, together with NATO’s progressive expansion, generated a deep sense of betrayal by the West.

Two key developments emerged during this period. Firstly, 2004-2005 saw the Orange Revolution in Ukraine and this, followed by Yushchenko’s victory, made Ukrainian hopes for NATO and EU membership appear more realistic. Putin interpreted this revolution as a covert method employed by the West to destabilise Russia, and declared that closer relations between the Atlantic Alliance, Ukraine and Georgia was a threat. This was openly stated at the Munich security conference (2007), where he accused the US and NATO of wanting to surround Russia³⁶. Secondly, in 2013 another revolution broke out again in Ukraine, known as the Euromaidan Revolution. It was partly triggered by disagreement among the population over whether or not Ukraine should be economically linked to the EU, along with the rise of the far right in the country. This plunged Ukraine into crisis in 2014, culminating in Russia’s annexing Crimea³⁷. On 24 February 2022, Russia launched its “special military operation”: start of the war.

35 Sarotte, Mary (2022). *Not one inch: America, Russia, and the making of post-cold war stalemate*. Yale University Press.

36 Ibisate, Francisco Javier (2007). Security Conference, Munich 2007: ¿Cuál es la inseguridad? *Revista Realidad* 112: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/4028622.pdf>.

37 Pardo, P. (2022). La guerra de Ucrania. *Panorama geopolítico de los conflictos*, IIEE, pp. 17-46: https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/panoramas/PGC2022/PGC2022_Capitulo01.pdf.

6.2. Structure of Russian and Ukrainian strategy



Image 9. Own structure of both strategies based on the work of Mearsheimer³⁸, Pardo³⁹ and the Bureau of Diplomatic Information⁴⁰.

6.3. Joint strategic overview: map of regional and international stakeholders



Image 10. Strategic overview of stakeholders in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Source: Author's own work.

China's role in the conflict is based on the work of Connelly⁴¹ and the official statement by the *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*⁴² regarding its

38 Mearsheimer, John (2014). Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault. University of Chicago: <https://www.mearsheimer.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Why-the-Ukraine-Crisis-Is.pdf>.

39 Pardo, José (2021). ¿Por qué a Rusia le interesa tanto Ucrania? Documento análisis, IEEEE, 25: https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2021/DIEEEA25_2021_JOSPAR_Rusia.pdf.

40 OID. "Country fact sheet: Russia." Diplomatic Information Office, April 2021. Available at: https://www.exteriores.gob.es/Documents/FichasPais/RUSIA_FICHA%20PAIS.pdf.

OID. "Country fact sheet: Ukraine." Diplomatic Information Office, October 2022. Available at: https://www.exteriores.gob.es/documents/fichaspais/ucrania_ficha%20pais.pdf.

41 Connelly, Marisela (2023). Papel de China ante la guerra entre Rusia y Ucrania. México y la Cuenca del Pacífico, 12 (34), pp. 9-21: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/8723920.pdf>.

42 China's Position on the Political Solution to the Ukraine Crisis. Diplomatic Update, 24 February 2023: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/esp/wjdt/gongbao/202302/t20230224_11030757.html.

position on the Political Solution to the Ukraine Crisis. For Middle Eastern countries, the study focused on the analysis by the Centre for Research in International Politics and Economics⁴³, and Soler⁴⁴ and Villena⁴⁵ to complete the African perspective. The role of the European Union has mainly been determined by the work of Busso and Barreto in the State and Public Policy Review⁴⁶.

6.4. Applying the propaganda detection prototype

6.4.1. Criteria for selecting information

The selection criteria were mainly determined after performing a search using *Similarweb*⁴⁷, a London-based BigData comparison company, filtering “News and media publishers”, by country and category to obtain a ranking of the most consumed platforms. The following platforms were chosen for their format, population, cultural influence and language:

For the Russia analysis, we used Sputnik’s Spanish-language version: <https://sputniknews.lat/> applying “military” as a search filter, adding the tags “Russia” and “Ukraine”; and filtering the date to 28 February 2022, four days after the start of the war, or the launch of the “special military operation”.

This site was chosen precisely because of its high level of consumption, its international reach and its controversial role as a news outlet - it is not an official media outlet. It was evaluated from the Latin American version (with the limitations that this entails), because its Russian version is temporarily inaccessible, because of the ease of language when written in Spanish, and because the agency is based in Moscow (and although it modifies certain aspects depending on its different versions, it was understood that the content and the ideas expressed may be similar). Other sites usually consumed by the Russian population have not been chosen due to their own difficulty of access and search structure, and the global version of Sputnik has not been used because it did not exist on the dates selected.

43 CIPEI (2022). La guerra ruso-ucraniana: intereses y oportunidades para los países de Oriente Medio. Análisis CIPEI, no. 22, 4: <https://rephip.unr.edu.ar/bitstreams/47c8fc7d-d81f-452d-8e65-e40badd2aaa4/download>.

44 Soler, Eduard (2022). Oriente Medio y el Norte de África ante la guerra en Ucrania. CIDOB, 706: https://www.cidob.org/es/publicaciones/serie_de_publicacion/opinion_cidob/2022/oriente_medio_y_el_norte_de_africa_ante_la_guerra_en_ucrania_vasos_comunicantes.

45 Villena, Fernando (2023). La presencia rusa en África. RED: <https://www.defensa.gob.es/Galerias/gabinete/red/2023/02/p-52-55-red-402-rusia-africa.pdf>.

46 Busso, Anabella and BARRETO, Maximiliano (2022). Revisitando las visiones occidentales sobre la guerra en Ucrania. Revista Estado y Políticas Públicas, 19, pp. 53-75: <https://repositorio.uca.edu.ar/bitstream/123456789/15469/1/revisitando-visiones-occidentales%20.pdf>

47 Available at: <https://www.similarweb.com/corp/ourdata/>. Last visit: 29 May 2023.

For the speech analysis, we chose a speech given by Vladimir Putin on 24 February 2022 announcing the military operation in Ukraine⁴⁸.

For Ukraine, we selected the Obozrevatel website, number 2 in the ranking of the most popular news sites in the country: <https://www.obozrevatel.com/>. The date filter used was 28 February 2022, as for Russia. For the speech analysis, we chose the speech Volodimir Zelensky addressed to the Russian people on 25 February 2022⁴⁹, and the speech given after 16 days of war⁵⁰.

A date close to the outbreak of the recent overt conflict was chosen for both sides, with a certain margin from the beginning (in this case 4 days), because this is when each side tries to establish its narrative based on the actions that take place, also taking advantage of the high emotional aspect of the event. The speeches were chosen because they are considered to be the most comprehensive at the time the war began.

It should be noted that analysing these sources is governed by the criteria of their reach into the population and not necessarily by their reliability and validity, because the study is interested in the effect they may have and not necessarily their truthfulness. Therefore, the most widely consumed sources rather than the official ones have been analysed.

6.4.2. Ukraine Analysis

Website: Obozrevatel (<https://www.obozrevatel.com/>)

Search filter by date 28/02/2022 and war-related content: 48 articles.

Speech: Volodymyr Zelensky address to the Russian people - Speech Zelenski 25Feb

Volodymyr Zelensky after 16 days of war - Speech Zelenski 11 Mar

Factor 1	<i>We do not want war.</i>
I.	<p>[Speech Zelenski 25feb // 0:07-0:16min]</p> <p><i>“Today I initiated a phone call with the President of Russia. The result? Silence. Although the silence should be in Donbas.”</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>1. Intention to communicate with the other side. 2. Lack of response from Russia. 3. Request and reason for his message: to stop the war.</i></p>

48 EFE (24 February 2022). Putin’s full speech announcing the military operation in Ukraine. Heraldo Internacional: <https://www.heraldo.es/noticias/internacional/2022/02/24/discurso-putin-guerra-ucrania-rusia-1555435.html>.

49 Sánchez, Rafael (25 February 2022). Guerra de Ucrania: El emotivo discurso del Presidente Volodímir Zelenski pidiendo empatía al pueblo ruso. Esquire: <https://www.esquire.com/es/actualidad/a39218782/ucrania-guerra-discurso-presidente-zelenski-espanol-castellano/>.

50 The Huffpost (11 March 2022). Zelenski’s full speech after 16 days of war against Russia. YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmassXs5Flo&ab_channel=ElHuffPost.

2.	<p>[Zelenski speech 25feb // 4:18-4:21/5:10-5:18min]</p> <p><i>“The Ukrainian people want peace.”</i></p> <p><i>“We know for sure that we do not want war, neither cold, hot, nor a hybrid.”</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>Explicit manifestation of not wanting war, but being drawn into it.</i></p>
Factor 2	<i>The enemy is solely responsible for the war.</i>
1.	<p>[Speech Zelenski 25feb // 0:41-0:46min]</p> <p><i>“Your leader has approved their [the army’s] move against us. Against the territory of another country.”</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>Full responsibility for the attack is attributed to Putin.</i></p>
2.	<p>[Speech Zelenski 25feb // 5:30-5:35min]</p> <p><i>“If we are threatened, if someone tries to take away our country, our freedom, our lives... For the lives of our children, we will defend ourselves.”</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>It attributes all blame to the enemy and argues for a self-defence response.</i></p>
Factor 3	<i>The enemy is an execrable being.</i>
1.	<p>[Zelenski speech 25feb // 1:22-1:41min]</p> <p><i>“[...] as they say every day on television. Ukraine in your news and Ukraine in reality are two completely different countries. The most important difference is that ours is real.”</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>He accuses the Russian (government-controlled) media of lying to its people.</i></p>
2.	<p>[Obozrevatel speech Z // 3rd and 6th paragraph]</p> <p><i>“The evil armed with missiles, bombs and artillery must be stopped immediately. Be destroyed economically. Demonstrate that humanity knows how to defend itself” [...].</i></p> <p><i>“Today, Russian forces brutally shelled Kharkiv with artillery.”</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>He describes the enemy as “evil”, armed with missiles, bombs and artillery, shelling Kharkiv.</i></p>
Factor 4	<i>We pursue noble aims.</i>
1.	<p>[Speech Zelenski 25feb // 2:35-2:39min]</p> <p><i>“We want to build our own history. Peacefully. Quietly. Sincerely [...]”</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>Justification of their involvement in the war for noble purposes: to build their own history.</i></p>
2.	<p>[Speech Zelenski 25feb // 4:21-4:26min]</p> <p><i>“The Ukrainian authorities want peace. We want it and we will get it. We will do everything in our power.”</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>They will do what they can to “achieve peace”.</i></p>
Factor 5	<i>The enemy commits atrocities wilfully.</i>
1.	<p>[War Crimes // 3rd paragraph]</p> <p><i>“Since the beginning of the open invasion, Russia has fired 113 Iskander and Kalibr tactical operational land and sea-based missiles at peaceful Ukrainian towns and villages. This bloody crime by Putin’s regime is a flagrant violation of IHL, and requires an investigation by the Hague Tribunal.”</i></p>

	<p>Justification</p> <p><i>Reflecting on the atrocities consciously and willingly committed by Putin's regime, as its targets are peaceful towns and villages.</i></p>
Factor 6	<i>The enemy uses unauthorised weapons.</i>
1.	<p>[Immoral practice IHL // 3rd paragraph]</p> <p><i>"The Russian occupiers use Ukrainian flags to fool everyone and then open fire [...]. Sometimes the enemy also hangs a white flag, pretending that the Armed Forces of Ukraine have surrendered, but when they approach our soldiers' positions, they launch a vicious bombardment. Such actions by the enemy are another vile violation of the rules of international law. Humanitarian law."</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>The weapon used is criticised as immoral under IHL.</i></p>
Factor 7	<i>We suffered few losses. Those of the enemy are enormous.</i>
1.	<p>[Kabanenko to the occupiers // 5th paragraph]</p> <p><i>"Your irreversible losses are enormous, the military hospitals and the civilian hospitals in Sevastopol temporarily occupied by you are full of three hundred injured, many of whom will not survive, and those who survive will be crippled."</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>The aim is to demoralise the enemy and make them retreat by referring to their heavy losses.</i></p>
2.	<p>[Enemy losses // 1st, 3rd and 7th paragraph]</p> <p><i>"The Armed Forces destroyed more than 100 pieces of enemy equipment, including 20 "BM-21s"[...], 96 enemy tanks, 20 BM-21s were destroyed, 8 fuel tankers near Lebedyn were set on fire by artillery and accurate attacks by Bayraktars. [...] The surviving occupiers are also being captured and shot in the vicinity of the destroyed base. [...] The occupiers lost 5,300 dead in five days."</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>Enemy loss tally after 5 days of war, highlighting notable victories of own forces.</i></p>
Factor 8	<i>Artists, celebrities or intellectuals support our cause.</i>
1.	<p>[Elon Musk Obozrevatel // 3rd paragraph]</p> <p><i>"The first batch of Starlink satellite internet stations has arrived in Ukraine! Thanks to Elon Musk and all partners of Free Ukraine! We continue the struggle on all fronts!" - Fedorov wrote.</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>It uses Elon Musk's image to defend the Ukrainian cause and shows his support for carrying on their struggle.</i></p>
2.	<p>[Yuriy Dud Obozrevatel // 1st and 2nd paragraph]</p> <p><i>"Russian blogger and journalist Yuriy Dud spoke out against Russia's war against Ukraine. He described what the occupiers did in our country as a catastrophe. [...] He spoke about what was happening, openly declaring that it was the president of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, who had invaded the territory of a sovereign state and was waging a war there."</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>They use the statements of a famous Russian blogger and journalist to defend the defence of Ukraine, blaming it on Russia.</i></p>
3.	[Stephen King Obozrevatel // 1st and 4th paragraph]

	<p><i>“The famous writer Stephen King publicly supported Ukraine. [...] In addition to Stephen King, many world celebrities have publicly expressed their support for Ukraine in the war against the Russian occupier. They include Angelina Jolie, Jim Carrey, Ryan Reynolds and Blake Lively, David Lynch, Ashton Kutcher, Jared Leto, Sarah Jessica Parker and many others.”</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>The image of various celebrities and artists who have expressed support for the Ukrainian cause is used as a symbol of significant influence on public opinion.</i></p>
Factor 9	<i>Our cause is sacred, divine or sublime in nature.</i>
I.	<p>[Zelenski speech 25feb // 4:39-5:09min]</p> <p><i>“We talk about peace, principles, justice. The right of all to define their future, their security, the right of all not to live under threat. All of this is important to us. All of this is important for peace, and I know it is important for you as well.”</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>It appeals to universal principles that underline the undeniable importance of their cause. Something that does not just affect them, but is generally in the name of the common good.</i></p>
Factor 10	<i>Those who question war propaganda are traitors.</i>
—	No messages found for this factor

6.4.3. Russia

Website: Sputnik (<https://sputniknews.lat/>)

Search filter by date 28/02/2022 and war-related content (“military”, “Ukraine”, “Russia”): 41 articles

Speech: Vladimir Putin addresses Ukraine, US and its allies - Putin’s speech

Factor 1	<i>We do not want war.</i>
I.	<p>[Negotiations // 7th paragraph]</p> <p><i>“In fact, Russia has said that if Ukraine declares neutrality and pledges not to join NATO, the conflict is over.</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>Russia does not want war, it has explicitly stated it, in exchange for winning its objectives.</i></p>
Factor 2	<i>The enemy is solely responsible for the war.</i>
I.	<p>[Ukraine and NATO responsible // 1st paragraph]</p> <p><i>“Kiev’s claims are out of touch with reality. [...] NATO, which is largely responsible for the collapse of security in Europe.”</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>Ukraine and NATO are primarily responsible for the consequences on Europe of the war.</i></p>
2.	<p>[Triggering events // 10th and 11th paragraphs]</p> <p><i>“These are the latest events that forced Russia to put its nuclear arsenal on alert, but it is also impossible to understand Moscow’s decision without taking into account the events of the last few years, where Western military activity on European soil constituted a serious provocation against the country.”</i></p>

	<p>Justification</p> <p><i>NATO's actions are responsible for forcing Russia to act.</i></p>
3.	<p>[Hostile and unlawful actions // 5th and 16th paragraphs]</p> <p><i>“Also high-ranking officials of the leading NATO countries allow aggressive statements against our country, therefore I order the Minister of Defence and the Chief of the General Staff to put the Russian Army's deterrent weapons in special combat duty mode [...]. The US currently has missiles deployed in the Polish town of Redzikowo, about 180 kilometres from the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, and in the Romanian village of Deveselu, about 600 kilometres from the Crimean peninsula.”</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>It is the enemy's actions that lead us to defend ourselves.</i></p>
4.	<p>[Putin's speech // 1st paragraph]</p> <p><i>“This is the clear red line that has been talked about many times. They have crossed it.”</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>Expansionist ambitions and constant defiance by the US and its allies has led to this scenario, where there is no choice but to fight back.</i></p>
5.	<p>[Putin's speech // 22nd paragraph]</p> <p><i>“Once again, I strongly emphasise: all responsibility for possible bloodshed will rest entirely on the conscience of the regime ruling on the territory of Ukraine.”</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>Unilateral responsibility for the conflict is explicitly stated.</i></p>
Factor 3	<p><i>The enemy is an execrable being.</i></p>
I.	<p>[Criminals and rapists // 4th paragraph]</p> <p><i>“The West puts weapons in the hands of all kinds of criminals and rapists in Ukraine.”</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>The enemy commits crimes and violations.</i></p>
2.	<p>[Ukrainian Nazi torture // 2nd paragraph]</p> <p><i>“We know what Ukrainian Nazis do with the few Russian servicemen they manage to capture and we see that they repeat the same methods as the German Nazis and their henchmen during the Great Patriotic War. [...] We capture and identify all the Ukrainian Nazis involved in the torture of our comrades.”</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>He denounces acts of torture and draws parallels knowing that Nazism is rejected worldwide.</i></p>
2.	<p>[Civilians as a shield // 2nd and 4th paragraph]</p> <p><i>“Ukrainian nationalists use the civilian population as a human shield. And our military is doing everything it can to prevent that from happening.”</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>They dehumanise the antagonist, the enemy deserves no compassion or pity for what it does.</i></p>
3.	<p>[Putin's speech // 4th paragraph]</p> <p><i>“As I said in my previous message, you cannot look at what is happening there without compassion. It was simply impossible to bear. This nightmare had to be stopped immediately: the genocide against the millions of people who live there, who only rely on Russia, who pin their hopes on us alone. These hopes, feelings, the pain of the people, were for us the main reason behind the decision to recognise the Donbas people's republics.”</i></p> <p>Justification</p>

	<i>An attempt is made to eliminate any hint of pity for the enemy for committing these acts, as well as to justify one's own actions.</i>
4.	<p>[Putin's speech // 6th paragraph]</p> <p><i>"They will, of course, go against Crimea, just as in the Donbas, with a war, to kill, as the gangs of Ukrainian nationalists, Hitler's accomplices, killed defenceless people during the Great Patriotic War."</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>The enemy goes to war to kill defenceless people.</i></p>
Factor 4	<i>We pursue noble aims.</i>
1.	<p>[Aid to Lugansk and Donetsk // 8th and 9th paragraph]</p> <p><i>"Moscow states that the operation was in response to a request for help from the Lugansk and Donetsk republics, recognised by Russia as independent republics in the Donbas region, to deal with aggression by Ukrainian troops."</i></p> <p><i>"Russia points out that military action is also aimed at de-Nazifying the region."</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>Moscow claims that its intervention has noble goals, helping to counter Ukrainian aggression and to "de-Nazify" the region.</i></p>
2.	<p>[Peacemaking mission // 3rd paragraph]</p> <p><i>"... [Ukrainian] claims that are at odds with the objectives of Moscow's peacekeeping mission, which include demilitarising and de-Nazifying Ukraine, and bringing to justice Ukrainians responsible for numerous war crimes against the population of Donetsk and Luhansk."</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>Moscow's mission seeks peace and justice.</i></p>
3.	<p>[Objective to protect // 7th paragraph and Putin's speech // 12th paragraph]</p> <p><i>"Putin insisted that the aim is to protect people who for eight years have been suffering harassment and genocide by the regime in Kiev."</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>Its purpose is based on protection.</i></p>
4.	<p>[Put an end to Kiev's threats // 1st, 2nd and 3rd paragraphs]</p> <p><i>"Russia did not initiate military operations in Ukraine, Russia completes them, the Russian Defence Ministry said."</i></p> <p><i>"The regime's military actions in Kiev and the systematic destruction of the residents of Donbas lasted 8 years. During this war, more than 14,000 people died, hundreds of them children," said the institution's spokesman, Igor Konashenkov.</i></p> <p><i>"It was necessary to put an end to this. It was necessary to put an end to the Kiev regime's endless threats against Russia. And Russia will do it," he added.</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>A heroic end to the long conflict and its fatal consequences.</i></p>
5.	<p>[Protect nuclear power plant // 5th paragraph]</p> <p><i>"On 24 February, Russian forces took control of the damaged Chernobyl nuclear power plant in the north to prevent Ukrainian ultra-nationalist groups or terrorist organisations from carrying out acts that could compromise safety."</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>Taking control of this plant was to prevent other groups from carrying out acts that would compromise safety, a preventive justification.</i></p>
Factor 5	<i>The enemy commits atrocities wilfully.</i>
1.	[War crimes // 12th and 13th paragraph]

	<p><i>“In a televised message, Russian President Vladimir Putin called on Ukrainian soldiers not to carry out the criminal orders of the authorities, to lay down their arms and return to their homes.”</i></p> <p><i>“Putin promised that those responsible for the numerous war crimes against the civilian population of Donetsk and Luhansk will be brought to justice.”</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>It describes Zelenski’s leadership as being guided by criminal orders, wilfully committing war crimes and atrocities.</i></p>
Factor 6	<i>The enemy uses unauthorised weapons.</i>
—	No messages relating to this factor have been found.
Factor 7	<i>We suffered few losses. Those of the enemy are enormous.</i>
I.	<p>[Ukraine’s major losses // 1st, 3rd and 4th paragraph]</p> <p><i>“The Russian Armed Forces destroyed 1,146 targets in Ukraine’s military infrastructure [...]. 31 Ukrainian troop command centres, 81 anti-aircraft systems and 75 radar stations were destroyed. The spokesman added that 42 aircraft and helicopters were shot down, 51 multiple rocket launchers, 263 special military vehicles and 147 pieces of artillery and mortars were destroyed.”</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>The enemy’s heavy losses are described in detail, without even mentioning their own losses.</i></p>
Factor 8	<i>Artists, celebrities or intellectuals support our cause.</i>
I.	<p>[Western censorship of RT // 8th paragraph]</p> <p><i>“The head of RT and Rossiya Segodnya media group Margarita Simonian said that Western countries have always wanted to get rid of Russian media because they provide balanced reporting and are using Moscow’s special operation in Ukraine as an excuse to do so.”</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>Well-known public figure supports Russia and blames the West for censorship.</i></p>
Factor 9	<i>Our cause is sacred, divine or sublime in nature.</i>
I.	<p>[Putin’s speech // 2nd paragraph]</p> <p><i>“For our country, this is ultimately a matter of life and death, a matter of our historic future as a people. And this is not an exaggeration, it is true. It is not only a very real threat to our interests, but also to the very existence of our state and its sovereignty.”</i></p> <p>Justification</p> <p><i>The case for its defence is justified by larger idealistic issues that outweigh geostrategic interests.</i></p>
Factor 10	<i>Those who question war propaganda are traitors.</i>
—	No messages relating to this factor have been found.

7. Overall results and impressions from the analysis.

7.1. Conclusions

It can be confirmed that both sides have resorted to multiple and varied propaganda strategies. Ukraine has made a balanced use of several of these strategies, perhaps most notably external support from artists, celebrities and intellectuals (factor 8). Russia’s

content has been more specific, predominantly focusing on: holding the enemy accountable (factor 2), dehumanising the enemy (factor 3), and justifying their noble ends (factor 4).

At the same time, some factors were absent (factor 10) or rare (factor 6). It should be noted that the analysis time frame was restricted to two specific days, 24 and 28 February 2022, and the fact that these factors are not present in this study does not mean that they were not used. Monitoring in the months following the conflict, or applying the model to other conflicts, could provide a more solid basis for this.

The fact that both positions have used several factors of the same nature to their advantage reveals the result of two parallel realities regarding the same conflict, which will undoubtedly be a relevant factor in terms of potential polarisation and maintaining diametrically opposing positions.

It is noteworthy that no propaganda factors were found in the narrative of the second video analysed for Ukraine, from Volodymyr Zelensky after 16 days of war. This has led us to the conclusion that it is necessary to draw a fine line between strategic communication and the use of propaganda strategies that contain manipulative elements.

7.2. Possible additional factors observed

Bearing in mind that the model used was designed in 1928, and having checked its current application, we believe it should be updated in the light of the nuances observed during the analysis. On these grounds, we would like to add two further factors that we consider play a relevant role in propaganda:

- **Discredit some kind of link with the enemy.** Generalise in such a way that everything that comes from the enemy is to be rejected physically or morally. This eliminates any link (of any kind) with the enemy and its associated spheres, blaming any third party or actor who does maintain links, in turn generating ingroup rejection of this third party. Example: “Buying Russian products now means paying money to kill people.” This generates, firstly, feelings of guilt for buying, and secondly, the rejection of anyone who does buy.
- **Using victims as an instrument.** Using the pain of victims as a means to pursue political ends. A certain degree of emotion is intentionally stirred up either to gain support, to repel the enemy, or both.

All the proposed factors are included in Annex I, together with a possible inference about the mental schema they project (associated feelings and explanatory cognitive biases).

7.3. How can propaganda detection help reduce the cognitive impact of PSYOPS?

As has been seen, the same information can be presented in one way or another to generate comprehensive perceptions from a one-sided perspective. Therefore, we believe that the cognitive impact can be diminished as long as the subject deliberately detects and analyses the manipulative information presented by the propaganda, and is aware of the specific cognitive biases to which it appeals (Annex I). Even if after such deliberate and conscious processing, the subject may still hold an extremist position; at least they will have been warned of the attempt to manipulate the content. The availability and use of future detection tools is intended to make people learn from typical propaganda strategies, making them more alert and prepared for attempts by others to instil ideas.

This does not protect the citizen from possible attack, but it can help them to freely decide their thoughts, ideas or opinions (through reflection), meaning that these are less likely to be induced, implanted or imposed directly or indirectly. This “free” aspect with regard to receiving information is mainly based on the idea expressed in Art. 20 of the Spanish Constitution of 1978⁵¹, which states that the citizen has the right to receive information: “to freely communicate or receive truthful information by any means of dissemination.”

Having said that, the following action model when faced with a cognitive attack by an enemy is proposed (Figure 11):



Image 11. Action proposal for defence against a cognitive attack. Source: Author's own work.

⁵¹ Spanish Constitution of 1978. Heading 1. Chapter Two. Section 1a. Fundamental rights and public liberties: <https://app.congreso.es/consti/constitucion/indice/titulos/articulos.jsp?ini=20&tipo=2#:~:text=Art%C3%ADculo%2020,A%20la%20libertad%20de%20C3%AAttedra.>

Given that some studies highlight the use of PSYOPS as a preamble to other INFOOPS attacks (hoaxes, *Fake News*, etc.), detecting them early on is extremely important to help reduce the potential subsequent impact. This sequential order is key, as studies show the use of these non-military means in both conflict and peacetime by actors such as China and Russia, who adopt a more integrated and approach that can prove advantageous⁵².

8. Conclusions

The overall findings of the study show that using the described propaganda factors could lead to polarisation among recipients who end up holding diametrically opposed positions on the same conflict. This suggests the use of manipulation through propaganda, exploiting cognitive biases that appeal to and are often processed unconsciously. Therefore, it is considered useful to implement protocols for detecting and analysing these factors, providing civilians with information processing structures that highlight any manipulative intent and how it affects their information processing. This avoids the excessive use of censorship, making them responsible and aware of what they consume, preserving their right to freely receive information, and consequently supporting and respecting freedom of thought and, therefore, being less susceptible to unconsciously accepting external interference. Similarly, it would avoid countering the enemy's information with more information (which could lead to over-saturation). It would also increase trust and legitimacy in the government by presenting objective, quality information, without having to forgo stating its objectives, achievements, motivation and hopes to its population.

Manipulation will clearly be negative, regardless of who spreads it, what they spread or how they spread it. Therefore, leaving aside questions of truthfulness or credibility, and focusing on the quality of information in terms of manipulative intent, this system can help us to consciously process what appears imperceptible to the naked eye.

In short, the aim is to provide civilians with a prototype for detecting propaganda that leads to an internal dialogue on the factors that modulate our perception. By being aware of what we need to pay attention to, and why and how this influences us, we can have a more complete and free view of what we think about and what can ultimately guide our behaviour.

An analysis of the legal implications of IOs is also necessary: possible limitations in operations directed at civilians, permitting certain aspects in military confrontations (e.g. deception operations), etc. It is necessary to establish certain defining lines in terms of permitted acts, as well as in the physical sphere.

52 VEJVODOVÁ, Petra (2019). Information and Psychological Operations as a Challenge to Security and Defence. *Vojenské rozhledy* č. 3: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Psyops-vs-Info-ops-modified-according-to-Brangetto-and-Veenendal_fig1_335947264.

Looking forwards, the aim is to lay the foundations for a possible research line, starting with propaganda detection and its importance (this study), followed by testing whether the stated factors evoke the associated explanatory biases outlined in Annex I (bearing in mind that different biases may be influential, depending on the target population: civilians, analysts or combatants), and finally, training an AI system to mechanically detect the language patterns underlying propaganda, and therefore biases, thereby generating an objective, fast and efficient tool.

ANNEX I

FACTOR	ASSOCIATED FEELING / POSSIBLE INTERPRETATION	COGNITIVE BIAS
1. <i>We do not want war</i>	We are peaceful (good). Under the idea of self-defence.	<i>Selective perception.</i> <i>Halo effect positive impressions.</i>
2. <i>The enemy is solely responsible for the war</i>	Exemption from liability. External locus of control.	<i>Non-conformity bias.</i> <i>Attribution bias.</i>
3. <i>The enemy is an execrable being</i>	Depersonalisation/dehumanisation. Elimination of any level of understanding, empathy or compassion.	<i>Halo effect negative impressions. Stereotype.</i>
4. <i>We pursue noble aims</i>	A kind of “the end justifies the means”.	<i>Spotlight effect.</i>
5. <i>The enemy willingly commits atrocities</i>	Generalising wilful conduct: unlawful, culpable and punishable.	<i>Attribution bias.</i>
6. <i>Enemy uses unauthorised weapons</i>	Discredit and delegitimise the enemy: they do not play fair, cannot be trusted, do not follow the rules of war.	<i>Spotlight effect.</i> <i>Moral luck.</i>
7. <i>We suffer few losses</i>	The enemy is not as strong as they say they are, we can take him.	<i>Framing effect.</i>
8. <i>Artists, celebrities and intellectuals support our cause</i>	“Seal of guarantee or quality”.	<i>False consensus effect.</i>
9. <i>Our cause has a sacred, divine or sublime character.</i>	The importance of our struggle transcends physical barriers. The lesser evil (war) justifies a greater good (sacred, divine or sublime).	<i>Spotlight effect.</i>
10. <i>Those who question the war propaganda are traitors</i>	It overrides any deviation from the norm. Direct attack on freedom of thought. Prohibits a tenth man rule.	<i>Bandwagon effect.</i> <i>Groupthink.</i>
11. <i>Discredit any links with the enemy</i>	Blaming and refusing any kind of contact with the ex-group.	<i>Ingroup bias.</i>
12. <i>Using victims as an instrument</i>	Make an emotional impact in order to gain support for oneself, repel the enemy, or both, at victims’ expense.	<i>Illusion of control</i>

ANNEX II

Explanation and application of the cognitive biases in Annex I to each case:

Selective perception

Depending on their expectations, the subject selects a subject of their attention and neglects the remaining part of the information. This means that, if the subject is convinced of the good/bad dichotomy, they will be more likely to focus only on those cues that prove their beliefs, and not on other information related to the conflict.

Halo effect - positive impressions

If you associate a person with a positive trait, that positive impression will spread to their other traits. This means that if you see this peaceful (good) trait in them, you will generalise this idea and interpret their other traits as good or positive.

Non-conformation bias

This is the tendency to critically scrutinise information when it contradicts our core beliefs and to accept without judgement information that agrees with them.

Halo effect - negative traits

If we associate a person with a negative trait, that negative impression will spread to their other traits. Therefore, if you associate the enemy with negative characteristics, this idea will be generalised and will contribute to dehumanisation or depersonalisation.

Stereotype

You have a widespread belief that members of a group will have certain characteristics, despite having no information about individuals. You not only attribute negative characteristics to the criticised subject (president, soldier), but also to the group to which he or she belongs (nationality, culture, etc.)

Moral luck

The tendency to attribute a higher or lower moral standing is based on the outcome of an event. If unauthorised weapons have been used, it is likely to be exposed in a way that creates a worse moral position for the enemy, emphasising their harmful consequences. However, these may also have been used by allies, but their perceived moral impact may be lessened if their catastrophic results are not shown.

Spotlight effect

This occurs when people place much more importance on a particular point or aspect of an event. For example, focusing more on the end than on the means, more on the enemy's failures, or whether your motivation to seek a greater cause causes you to overlook lesser evils.

Attribution bias

This is the tendency to attribute the actions of others to their character or personality (in this case, "they wilfully commit atrocities" because of their intrinsic evil), while attributing your behaviour to circumstantial factors beyond your control ("the enemy is solely responsible for the war").

Framing effect

People often draw different conclusions from the same information depending on how it is presented. For example, you could say that your side has suffered few losses and that the enemy's losses are enormous (to keep fighting motivation high), but you could also use your casualty numbers to blame the enemy for their atrocities.

False consensus effect

It has been proven that most people think that their own habits, values and beliefs are widely shared and more prevalent than they really are. Therefore, the fact that celebrities support the cause will be "evidence" that backs up your beliefs as being correct.

Bandwagon effect

This is the tendency to do or believe in something because many people do or believe it. Supporting war propaganda is often simply following the opinion of the majority around you.

Groupthink

People make irrational decisions, often to minimise conflict, out of a desire for conformity and harmony in the group. Even if there is someone who disagrees with war propaganda, he or she will often not oppose it merely because of social pressure.

Ingroup favouritism

This is the tendency to value behaviours, attitudes or preferences of ingroup members more positively than those of people in the outgroup.

Illusion of control

Tendency to overestimate the degree of one's influence on external events. Emotions often lead to a need for action; if this illusion of control makes you think that you can stop the enemy and therefore decrease the number of victims (or bring about justice), you will adopt a confrontational stance.

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