

Vakhtang MAISAIA¹

Georgia

Magda KOTRIKADZE²

Georgia

Galaktion MAISAIA³

Georgia

COVID-19 THREAT GEOPOLITICS AND PREREQUISITE FOR INFORMATION WARFARE – LUGAR LABORATORY CASE

***Abstract:** Information warfare may be waged by the state or other groups, with specific actions and operations that may be political, economic, ethnic, religious, and so on. It is carried out to gain and influence the opposing side, and then to inflict material, ideological, economic, social and other damage against them. Information warfare can be carried out using disinformation, propaganda, cyber attacks, lobbying, manipulation, deliberate creation of a crisis, and other methods. The use of this methodology is especially important in today's reality, it can be said that these areas are radically demanding. Hence the true case of how the COVID-19 case provision could be used as a tool for wedging information warfare from the Russian Federation is the case of the so-called 'Lugar Laboratory'. The Russian PR sources denounced the Laboratory and conducted a so-called 'RED PR' campaign to discredit the one and tailor the mission as the tool for wedging information warfare against the U.S. and Georgia. The most adventurous premature for successful management case configured with endorsement since 2002 when proper agreement had been signed by the Defense Minister of Georgia and State Defense Secretary on operating the so-called 'Lugar Library' or the Richard Lugar Center for Public Health Research. The full name of the Agreement was "Cooperation in the field of prevention of the introduction of pathogenesis and experience related to biological weapons development". The Center was created due to by that time*

¹ Vakhtang Maisaia, PhD, Caucasus International University (CIU, Georgia). Email: vakhtang.maisaia@ciu.edu.ge

² Magda Kotrikadze, PhD Student, Caucasus International University (CIU, Georgia).

³ Galaktion Maisaia, PhD Student, Caucasus International University (CIU, Georgia).

existence of the Pankisi Gorge crisis with the emergence of jihadist warriors in the area and the identification of biological toxin entities Ricin production manufactured by the local branch of Al-Qaida. One of the missions on prevention and further dissemination of the toxin aimed for running the Center. The Lugar Research Center is fully passed on Government of Georgia, and since 2018 the Government of Georgia has provided full funding for the Lugar Research Center and Laboratory Network. The Center played a key role as a diagnostic facility during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic in Georgia. Exactly the factor played and still plays a vital role in monitoring and casting the COVID-19 virus in Georgia. The speed identification of the virus symptoms in 5 hours after the testing of the possible victim with a 95% result is a credible instrument for successfully fighting the asymmetric threat.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Georgia, Lugar Laboratory, cyber attack, Al-Qaida, the U.S.*

Introduction

A massive challenge to world society in the form of virus epidemic dissemination shifts not only the global security environment but also the daily life of the universe. The virus labeled COVID-19 emerged in Wuhan province in China has stimulated the global smite pandemic wave obscured the international political system and caused more than 10 thousand deaths toll in number. Certainly, COVID-19 belongs to a biological weapon and is more concretely affiliated with bacteriological agents of natural origin together with bacteria entities. Following international security provisions it is ascertained as an asymmetrical military threat with trend-centric origin. Today, information has become a strategic product, promoted by the development of information technology, created in the form of an information ‘triangle’ of information space, technical means and society. Technological development has provided less protection for information flows. Accordingly, the national and corporate security sectors of all states are under pressure of unprotected information.

The world is facing a new geopolitical challenge in the pandemic caused by the spread of COVID-19. The world economy has shrunk by about 3%. The trade war between the United States and China and their defensive agreements with other countries was already a huge problem, but it has reached a critical stage due to COVID-19. The United States has filed multiple lawsuits against China, alleging that they purposely released the Coronavirus. The objective of this article is to examine the shifting geopolitics, focusing on international economic and defensive relationships among countries, and especially on the Second Cold War between the United States and China. In this pandemic

situation, more countries are facing economic downturns and loss of human life. A new geopolitical journey has been started, which is based on the availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and medical products. All previous problems that had not yet been solved by the United Nations have become fresh challenges. Another big challenge is the demise of neoliberalism in the world. Bureaucratic wars have started in the interregional and intraregional zones, and the Second Cold War has started between the United States and China. A major finding of this article is the significant correlation between the death rate of different countries and the shift of geopolitics to a critical stage⁴.

When is being talked about the crisis, mentioning that the crisis is by definition – a social system – a community, an organization, a policy sector, a country, or an entire region – experiences an urgent threat to its basic structures or fundamental values, which harbours many ‘unknowns’ and appears to require a far-reaching response. The crisis itself also dwells in its origin namely merged those stakeholders who are personally getting involved in the crisis – an individual, a society, a state, a nation, etc. Therefore variety of perspectives of identification of crisis is forced to depict the tendency with namely several words. These words are presumable and easier to identify: threat, urgency, and uncertainty. The initially identified phrase threat means that someone or something is being threatened and exposed to menace and the one is being directly hits concrete values that are omnipotent to protect and pursue based on the protection of your interests and missions. These values that are to be saved up from the threat imposition and reflection are the following:

- a. Safety,
- b. Security,
- c. Rule of law,
- d. Welfare,
- e. Health,
- f. Integrity,
- g. Civil liberties (it expresses personal self-esteem and sense of identity)⁵.

These values could even more and could be expanded diversely but these values covering physical existence and social life implications promote one’s missions and interests. Any crisis development of any style and content, personal or societal subsystem, mainly targets to value and undermine the system at all. As for the assessment time pressure is a unique opportunity to

⁴ J. Mintu, R. Taniya, *The Shifting Geopolitics of Coronavirus and the Demise of Neoliberalism with the Big Challenge for United Nations*, “Asia-Pacific Journal of Management Research and Innovation”, Vol. 17, Issue 1-2, 2021.

⁵ R. Jerwis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Princeton 1976, pp. 56-57.

deal with any crises in a timely, quick and efficient way, which is also linked with timeframe conditions. It seems so that the concrete passage from the book *The Politics of Crisis Management* expresses how time pressure matters in case of development of the crisis, notable: “So-called creeping crises provide leaders with plenty of time to develop solutions, but the lack of urgency typically makes it harder to create the winning coalitions that are needed to push through required policy changes. When there is little time to act, on the other hand, leaders may have more authority to unilaterally impose changes”⁶. The crisis needs to be responded to in the shortest time as it links with uncertainty and unpredictability the situations and scenarios following up the crisis itself. The urgency to response and asymmetry of the occurrence of processes when the result and final end-up are yet to be predicted make the counter-measures to the crisis more desirable and ‘linearable’ i.e. response directly with all means available at hand. Uncertainty and unknown development of the scenario are causing defying conventional approaches to planning. Hence, it is difficult to plan in detail for unexpected and unknown events. Moreover, time spent provision on crisis responses is also related to leadership approaches in personal and organisational characteristics and its ability to mobilize momentum for tackling the emerging threat before it passes some critical threshold and becomes a crisis. An institutional crisis brings yet different challenges: leaders will have to shape stakeholder perceptions that underpin the legitimacy (and thus the functioning) of public organizations.

New Warfare Types and Biological Warfare Strategy

There are many transformations in developing and understanding of true content of Military Strategy and new realities have delivered fresh trends in analyzing, planning, performing and reviewing combat operations in the contemporary period. The transformation in Military Strategic Thoughts and Geostrategy is affiliated with the new conception of Fourth Generation Warfare, adopted at the turn of the 20th and the 21st Centuries. According to some academic conceptualizations – Fourth Generation Warfare is defined as military conflicts which involve the following elements:

- a. High technology (military drones, precise munition, armoured fighting vehicles, rocket projections, non-contact combat strategy, etc.);
- b. Terrorism as tactics;
- c. Non-national or transitional base;
- d. Direct attack on the enemy’s culture;

⁶ A. Boin, P. ‘t Hart, E. Stern, B. Sundelius, *The Politics of Crisis Management – Public Leadership under Pressure*, Cambridge 2017, pp. 23-25.

- e. Highly sophisticated psychological warfare, especially through manipulation of the media;
- f. Delivery of a high-intensity, short-duration attack and creating a sense of vulnerability, debilitation and abasement in the enemy⁷.

In addition to that as a part of Fourth Generation Warfare, a non-combat tactical element is being considered – a drug smuggling case as an Actor-Centered one. There is a quite new approach to what is to be formulated in waging a war and what kind of criteria for Fourth Generation Warfare are to be considered. How far has the Military Strategy shifted from the classical period of its origination from the 18th century till the 21st Century? In that regard, it is interesting to stress that Fourth Generation Warfare includes elements of Asymmetric Warfare doctrine that are very plausible for waging wars in the 21st Century. According to some academic sources, there are many different definitions of the doctrine, but one of them is Asymmetric Warfare – is war between belligerents whose relative military power differs significantly from or whose strategy or tactics differ significantly⁸. This is in contrast to symmetric warfare, where two powers have similar military power and resources and rely on similar strategies overall, differing only in details and execution. The popularity of new war theory in strategic studies, labelled as ‘hybrid war’ is being determined by the importance of globalization's effect on global security and the contemporary international relations system. Here is to be considered a hybrid war phenomenon. Having considered several assumptions, it is possible to identify the definition of the hybrid war – hybrid war is primarily based on the ability to target distant objects and processes through non-traditional military means, particularly those critical to state and military functions. It is important to admit that hybrid war is waged mainly between state and non-state opponents (including terrorists, like ‘the Taliban’, DAESH, etc.) that fully correspond to realms of the fourth war generation. Herewith is an interest in presenting the author’s view on the identification of hybrid war. Hybrid War Concept – method of waging combat operations by coercive power elements with non-military means and with insurgency tactical components pursuing the goal of destroying and demoralizing excessive enemy forces and subverting their will for further resistance⁹. Hence, hybrid war is an indispensable component of the Fourth War generation concept aiming at destroying the enemy's political will and culture for continuous further resistance. In this respective manner, the combination of the modern warfare strategy could be

⁷ V. Maisaia, A. Guchua, *NATO and Non-State Violent Actors – The Fourth War Generation Strategy and Its Regional and National Security Geopolitics*, Tbilisi 2020, p. 57.

⁸ W. Lind, et al., *The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation*, “Martine Corps Gazette”, October 1998, p. 22.

⁹ B. Aladashvili, *Russia's Hybrid War against Georgia in 1918-21*, Tbilisi 2018, pp. 4-6.

identified as the following: *High Technology + Short Duration + Flexibility + Mobile Forces + Deception*. Hence, it became important to identify what the term and jargon ‘geostrategy’ means. There are two definitions of the term ‘geostrategy’ and both indicate how politics is connected with military art and strategy. Here are the definitions:

1. Geostrategy – geopolitical analyses in aegis of military scrutiny of processes¹⁰;
2. Geostrategy – the traditional balance of power jargon that defines global geopolitical configuration in light of military parameters¹¹.

The geostrategic analysis could be realized in conjunction with concrete instruments and tools and hence is possible to augment in ways of concrete implications – those indicators and independent variables qualifying geopolitical analysis with military review exact environment of the area and creatures of the process or event taking place in that one. In this context is possible to elaborate the following implications for truly realizing the consequences and specifics of war in Ukraine and how the one reflects on geopolitical configuration at any level. Herewith there are concluded the following geostrategic implications:

- a. Historic prerequisites of the war in Ukraine sparked by the Russian Federation;
- b. Politico-military environment and its provision;
- c. New threat and risk perceptions and consequences;
- d. Military doctrinal features of key geostrategic actors (in the case of the Russian Federation).

The 21st Century has been determined by the development of revolution in military affairs that drastically changed the content of the war concept by large. Initially is important to define the true content of the definition. By the description stipulated by the author of the paper, Revolution in Military Affairs – occurs when new technologies combine with innovative organization concepts and doctrinal adaptation in a way that fundamentally alters the character and conduct of war. The trend and conceptual frame include the following geostrategic components:

- a. ‘The Computer Revolution’ – electronic sensing surveillance of VC and NVA in the 1970s by the Pentagon;
- b. ‘Weaponization of High Technology’;
- c. Precision Delivery Munitions;
- d. Reconnaissance and Precision Delivery – satellite reconnaissance grouping and space shuttle survey;

¹⁰ D. A. Minix, S. H. Hawley, *Global Politics*, Stamford 1998, p. 56.

¹¹ A. Dugin, *Osnovy Geopolitiki: Geopoliticheskoje Buduszeje Rossii*, Moscow 1992, p. 47.

- e. New Airpower Technology – Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAE) intensive usage in combat operations;
- f. Non-Contact Combat Strategy – massive air and naval strikes with modern missile and aircraft technologies and computer-modelling management of combat forces;
- g. RMA and current military operations – Iraq war in 1990-1991, Afghanistan and Iraq campaigns (2001 and 2003).

The revolution certainly had a great impact on the military operational planning process and also made it different from classical military theory. The shifts prioritized the notion that war is a continuation of politics by other means¹².

The trend demonstrated the revolution shift contributes to the promulgation of a variety of combat interactions. Hence, the process of war waging is being determined in special dimensions and there are identified, at the stage, the following warfare types:

- a. Land Warfare – Attrition, Revolutionary Insurgency and Maneuver;
- b. Maritime Warfare Strategy – ‘Gunboat Diplomacy’, Mahan's formula: $SP=N+MM+NG$;
- c. Airpower Warfare – Julio Douhet doctrine, massive reassured conception;
- d. Space Warfare – ‘Star Wars’ program, ‘Shield and Sword’ project or ‘Diamond’ program, GPS and GLONASS;
- e. Cyberspace Warfare (Information Warfare) – information technology, PR campaign, ideology war, cyber-terrorism¹³.

According to some academic sources, there are many different definitions of the doctrine, but one of them is that “Asymmetric Warfare is a war between belligerents whose relative military power differs significantly from or whose strategy or tactics differ significantly”¹⁴. This is in contrast to symmetric warfare, where two powers have similar military power and resources and rely on similar tactics overall, differing only in details and execution¹⁵. Concrete cases of wedging Asymmetric wars are seen in Central Asia and Caucasus Regions.

¹² P. Hough, S. Malik, A. Moran, B. Pilbeam, *International Security Studies: Theory and Practice*, New York 2015, pp. 87-88.

¹³ V. Maisaia, *Grand Strategy and Military Implications of New Russia's Military Doctrine in the 21st Century: Geostrategic Aspects of Hybrid Warfare Strategy Against Georgia and Ukraine*, [in:] *Proceedings of International Scientific Conference ‘Strategies XXI’*, Volume XVII, Bucharest 2022, pp. 11-15.

¹⁴ P. Bator, *International Conflict Management – Crisis, War and Peace*, [in:] *Introduction to Security Studies*, Bratislava 2014, p. 42.

¹⁵ I. Arrenguin-Toft, *How to Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict*, “International Security”, Vol. 26, 2001, c. 1, pp. 93-128.

COVID-19 Geopolitics and Georgia's Security Dilemma

The first confirmed case of the spread of COVID-19 in Georgia was identified on 26 February 2020 and since then the number of patients has increased although at rates lower than some of the hardest-hit countries. This triggered the adoption of several corresponding governmental regulations to prevent the spread of COVID-19. On 21 March 2020, the President of Georgia adopted Decree No. 1, which was later approved by the Parliament of Georgia and declared a state of emergency on the whole territory of Georgia until 21 April 2020 (the State Emergency Decree).

The State Emergency Decree restricts the following rights guaranteed by the Constitution of Georgia:

- a. Human liberty;
- b. Freedom of movement;
- c. Right to personal and family privacy;
- d. Right to fair administrative proceedings;
- e. Right to property;
- f. Freedom of assembly;
- g. Freedom of enterprise.

The State Emergency Decree stipulates that specific limitations to the above-listed rights will be provided by the decree of the Government of Georgia (GoG). On 23 March 2020, the GoG issued Ordinance N181 regarding Approval of Measures to be Taken for the Prevention of Spreading of the New COVID-19 (the Ordinance on COVID-19). Since its adoption, the Ordinance on COVID-19 has been amended multiple times to address the rapid changes and challenges of the existing situation in the country.

The GoG has recently strengthened security measures and established the Operations Office to be able to better respond to the spread of COVID-19. The Operations Office will be authorized to establish exceptions to certain restrictions established by the Ordinance on COVID-19. The head of the Operations Office will be appointed and its regulations will be adopted by the Prime Minister of Georgia.

While the GoG takes steps to prevent the spread of COVID, restrictive measures have put a strain on businesses, preventing them from being able to satisfy their obligations under contracts. This article aims to provide answers to frequently asked questions and provides general guidance on legal issues around the COVID-19 pandemic¹⁶.

In light of the above restrictions, businesses are suffering major losses as the forced closure of businesses has significantly disrupted their processes and

¹⁶ *COVID-19 in Georgia. The legal issues you need to know*, <<http://georgiatoday.ge/news/20401/COVID-19-in-Georgia%3A-The-Legal-Issues-You-Need-to-Know>> (9.12.2022).

has put the performance of contractual rights and obligations under question. Therefore, frequently asked questions in these cases relate to force majeure clauses or other provisions or legal concepts that companies may rely on to avoid defaults on their contractual obligations.

The answer to these questions depends on the particular circumstances and the drafting of the relevant contractual provisions. Due to a lack of similar events that have taken place previously, there is little to take from experience on how to handle business relationships during epidemics or pandemics. The obvious route would be to engage in direct negotiations with contractual parties to reach a mutual understanding. If such negotiations are successful, it could result in a better position for both parties as they will avoid litigation costs and termination of the contract¹⁷.

The parties could agree on any commercially acceptable outcome, including an extension of performance deadlines, temporary suspension of the contract, reduction of price or even termination of the contract. Before proceeding with negotiations, the businesses would be advised to: first, examine the relevant contract, second, evaluate its options and third, seek legal advice, if necessary. Depending on the outcome of the parties' negotiations, legally effective and enforceable agreements may be required to document the terms reached in those negotiations.

Regarding how Georgia as a national state has made strategic decisions on combatting COVID-19 is to be reviewed as follows – The COVID-19 tsunami traced through all national borders endangered everything on its path and destroyed communities in one run. On 26 February 2020, 'Corona' (COVID-19) was reported in Georgia. An infected Georgian citizen was found to be in Iran. Just after this day, the people of Georgia learned the great importance of the Lugar Lab in our country. Unlike other countries we do not send tests abroad, we can conduct important research in our own country. The healthcare system is well-prepared to meet the virus that even the most powerful states in the world have to deal with. All state bodies united in the fight against of virus in Georgia. The doctors fight tirelessly for 24 hours to defeat the virus. On 27 February 2020, Georgian society woke up to a completely different reality, the geographical area of the Coronavirus growing. Georgia has already appeared on the map of the virus. Despite of serious threat imposed on Georgia with an introduction into the country emergency law and declared as 'red zone' two regions: Marneuli and Gardabani and with more than 6192 confirmed diseased persons (as of 1st October 2020), Georgia became a 'successful case-study' for fighting against the COVID-19 and despite of declaring emergency with

¹⁷ L. Carraro, M. Honorati, A. Marguerie, *Assessing Potential Work Disincentives of the Targeted Social Assistance System in Georgia*, Washington 2020.

elements of martial law elements (including enacting curfew since 9.00 p.m. till 6.00 a.m.) the application remarkable to the situation even due to case that no any militaries who are taking in force the strict measures in the ‘red zones’ have not been diseased with COVID-19. Why Georgia became such a ‘successful story’ relevantly compared with the same situation in Italy, France, the UK, and other European states could be considering the following patterns:

1. Georgia is a small country with a relatively small population and the control of such a small territory became more efficient with a high and thorough investigation of every cluster of confirmed cases;
2. A complete shutdown and no internal and international travel measures have been conducted by the Georgian government as soon as the first information on the COVID-19 virus spread over. By large, the national security system orientation namely on the prevention of natural disorder and catastrophic scenarios rather than obviation of military symmetric challenges that was enacted due to taking into force a new version of the Constitution of the country played also positive feedbacking. Currently, the main coordinator HQ on crisis management is in the hands of the National Security Council formally led by the Prime Minister but de facto led by the Minister of Internal Affairs who is simultaneously the Secretary to the Council. The structure has been operating sufficiently in times of declaration of emergencies. In addition to credible contributions paved by the Defense Forces of Georgia, namely the complete quarantine regime in the ‘Red Zones’ and the whole Ministry of Defense staff successfully led by incumbent Defense Minister Irakli Garibashvili. The Forces were well prepared for dealing with various scenarios of emergency and crisis management having vast experience gained in NATO and EU-led peace-making and crisis management operations abroad;
3. A list of high-professional and skills-based crisis public managers (medical high-level staff members) in the government of Georgia (mainly having experience with the so-called Civil Defence) oriented crisis management concept (mainly having proper biological defence segment of the concept) since the Soviet Union period also contributed in fighting successfully with the unknown threat. Moreover, three biological research institutions and centres have been operating since the Soviet period, for instance, Anti-Black Death Georgian Station, which is located in Tbilisi, which is now the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health, where almost 70 years were working on dangerous pathogens and another agency such Tabakhmela

Biochemical Plant as well as a bit later appeared Richard Lugar Center (see below)¹⁸.

As for the poor and less effective decision was made recently just on 10 September 2022, when the government despite the threat and menace regeneration of the pandemic race declared that the education and study process in Georgia will be gone in auditoria and non-online (direct) provision at any level, including high-education institutions. This is a very unclear step that further promotes the trend of infection among the population and the cluster-group is to be youth.

One of the short-run consequence examples could be considered in the aegis of the combatting COVID-19 imposition of the State Emergency by the Ordinance on COVID-19. Since its adoption, the Ordinance on COVID-19 has been amended multiple times to address the rapid changes and challenges of the existing situation in the country. Certainly, the step was not congruent with democratic nation criteria and hindered some liberties but dealing with COVID-19 consequences and overcoming a concrete crisis for a short time was a very acceptable and necessary one. As for the long-term consequence example in that regard could be sought the fact that the Georgian government (namely ex-prime-minister George Gakharia's political team) has, by that time, strengthened the security measures and established the Operations Office to be able to better respond to the spread of COVID. The Operations Office will be authorized to establish exceptions to certain restrictions established by the Ordinance on COVID-19. The head of the Operations Office will be appointed and its regulations will be adopted by the Prime Minister of Georgia. Setting up the Operation Staffs over quite a long time promoted clear coordination and cohesion of the political management vertical and increased communication channels with the population and society at large¹⁹.

Regarding short-term poor examples when the GoG takes steps to prevent the spread of COVID, restrictive measures have put a strain on businesses, preventing them from being able to satisfy their obligations under contracts. This article aims to provide answers to frequently asked questions and provides general guidance on legal issues around the COVID-19 pandemic. In light of the above restrictions, businesses are suffering major losses as the forced closure of businesses has significantly disrupted their processes and has put the performance of contractual rights and obligations under question. Therefore, frequently asked questions in these cases relate to force majeure clauses or other provisions or legal concepts that companies may rely on to avoid defaults

¹⁸ V. Maisaia, *Georgia and Its COVID Strategy and Gender Policy*, [in:] *SLP 2: Strategic Leadership and Global Security Challenges Course*, Stockholm 2022, pp. 5-6.

¹⁹ *Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (KNOMAD)*, 2020, *Remittances Data*, <<https://www.knomad.org/data/remittances>> (20.11.2022).

on their contractual obligations. When one is talking about long-term poor consequences example suspending the Updated COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan and cancelation all measures derived from the plan that has been conducted by the incumbent government led by incumbent Prime-minister Irakli Garibashvili. This indeed long-term consequences for the poor decision as it contradicts international fora and criteria for combatting COVID-19 and getting ousted from the international community, Georgia would lose its capability to deal with COVID-19 as a strategic crisis. The tendencies are seen now, unfortunately.

There are several important legal and conceptual documents and papers at the global and national levels (meaning Georgia's case) on combatting COVID-19 and its effects on global security provisions. From them are to be outlined the following ones:

- a. UN Comprehensive Response To COVID-19;
- b. The World Health Organization's (WHO) Strategy to Achieve Global COVID-19 Vaccination by mid-2022;
- c. Coronavirus Act 2020;
- d. Updated COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan;
- e. UN Framework for the Immediate Socioeconomic Response to COVID-19;
- f. Georgia's national government safety measures;
- g. A state of emergency declared;
- h. Georgia's borders were closed for passengers, and cargo transportation was not restricted;
- i. Learning process suspended in schools/universities;
- j. Only essential businesses remain open;
- k. Quarantine declared in Marneuli and Bolnisi regions;
- l. Construction, production and transportation were not restricted.
- m. Gender is not addressed in these two pieces of national legislation related to combatting COVID-19 issues²⁰.

Information Warfare and COVID-19 Phenomenon: Georgia's Case

Information warfare is a concept involving the battle space use and management of information and communication technology in pursuit of a competitive advantage over an opponent. Information warfare is the manipulation of information trusted by a target without the target's awareness so that the target will make decisions against their interest but in the interest of

²⁰ *Rapid Gender Assessment of the COVID-19 Situation in Georgia*, <<https://georgia.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/08/rapid-gender-assessment-of-the-covid-19-situation-in-georgia#view>> (20.12.2022).

the one conducting information warfare. As a result, it is not clear when information warfare begins and ends, and how strong or destructive it is.

Information warfare may involve the collection of tactical information, assurance(s) that one's information is valid, spreading of propaganda or disinformation to demoralize or manipulate the enemy and the public, undermining the quality of the opposing force's information and denial of information-collection opportunities to opposing forces. Information warfare is closely linked to psychological warfare. Information warfare may be waged by the state or other groups, with specific actions and operations that may be political, economic, ethnic, religious, and so on. It is carried out to gain and influence the opposing side, and then to inflict material, ideological, economic, social and other damage against them. Information warfare can be carried out using disinformation, propaganda, cyber attacks, lobbying, manipulation, deliberate creation of a crisis, and other methods. The use of this methodology is especially important in today's reality, it can be said that these areas are radically demanding.

The information itself is characterized by a variety of psychological characteristics that are directly related to the creation of public opinion and mood. According to *Experimental Psychology*, the voluminous information obtained from many sources seems more convincing, and public groups consider it credible. Consequently, quantity has its quality, and in the conditions of information warfare, extensive information is characterized by the following features:

- a. A large quantity of information completely captures the attention of the target group and leaves no room for counter-information, so different information is less noticeable;
- b. Large amounts of information can suppress the truth and deceive the public, for example by sharing Disinformation;
- c. The use of few information streams significantly increases the impact on the target group;
- d. Information, including false information, may be disseminated through television channels, newspapers, cyberspace, educational institutions, parties, NGOs, and others²¹.

Therefore, all the above processes are actively used in the activities of the intelligence services. Weaponizing information arguably remains the hallmark of Hybrid Threats and nonlinear strategies. It is used to undermine the perception of the security of the people by pitting political, social and cultural identities against one another. The purpose of the action is to exploit identity politics and allegiances, thus dividing influential interest groups and political

²¹ D. Kukhalashvili, *Intelligence Activity Role in Foreign Policy Decision Making Process*, Tbilisi 2022, pp. 62-64.

alliances. Confusion and disorder ensue as people feel more insecure. Under its low intensity and potential for deniability, Hybrid Threat activities designed to exploit this domain are generally low-risk, allow for a trial-and-error approach, much like the agile processes used in technology firms, and have a relatively low cost, with some even being open to outsourcing.

Cyber disinformation/(black) propaganda/fake news is false information, which is also intended to give the impression that it was created by those it is supposed to discredit. It is typically used to vilify, embarrass or misrepresent someone/the target. Fake news in social media is not just a post that has been liked, shared or followed; rather, it is a powerful technique of multiplying cyber propaganda. In the wake of the financial and economic crisis of the years after 2008, the local press in the U.S. almost collapsed. The internet became the leading and determining substitute medium. A medium and source of information that can be considered highly critical. The tools of this domain seek to shift the political discourse, to create or promote narratives, and to manipulate public opinion and sentiment. In addition, they may impair freedom of opinion and expression. Freedom of expression encompasses respect for media freedom and pluralism, as well as the right of citizens to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas “without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers”²².

Lugar Laboratory Case as Fake News Strategic Scope

The most adventurous premature for successful management case configured with endorsement since 2002 when proper agreement had been signed by the Defense Minister of Georgia and State Defense Secretary on operating the so-called ‘Lugar Library’ or the Richard Lugar Center for Public Health Research. The full name of the Agreement was *Cooperation in the Field of Prevention of the Introduction of Pathogenesis and Experience Related to Biological Weapons Development*. The Center was created due to by that time existence of the Pankisi Gorge crisis with the emergence of jihadist warriors in the area and the identification of biological toxin entities Ricin production manufactured by the local branch of Al-Qaida. One of the missions on prevention and further dissemination of the toxin aimed for running the Center²³. The Lugar Research Center is fully passed on Government of Georgia, and since 2018 the Government of Georgia has provided full funding for the Lugar Research Center and Laboratory Network²⁴. The Center played a

²² *European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, Article 10, <<https://rm.coe.int/1680a2353d>> (20.12.2022).

²³ V. Maisaia, A. Guchua, *op. cit.*, pp. 292-293.

²⁴ E. Gvenetadze, *International Security Aspects*, Tbilisi 2017, p. 256.

key role as a diagnostic facility during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic in Georgia. Exactly the factor played and still plays a vital role in monitoring and casting the COVID-19 virus in Georgia. The speed identification of the virus symptoms in 5 hours after the testing of the possible victim with a 95% result is a credible instrument for successfully fighting the asymmetric threat²⁵.

Having considered that the whole Georgian society unilaterally supports brave Ukrainian people against its fair war against the Russian aggressors and the demonstration support hikes up utmost high dimensions, the Kremlin propaganda is seeking to utilize its methods of wagging information-psychological war against Ukraine in Georgia. A cohesive instrumental systematic approach has been promoted via specially articulated fake-news distributed mechanisms as are in Georgia now: Sputnik-Georgia media agency, *RIA-NOVOSTI* and its local satellites, like weekly newspaper: *The World and Georgia*, nationalistic TV *ALT-INFO*, etc. One of the famous fake news related to the war in Ukraine and disseminated by the pro-Russian actors are story on the so-called 'U.S. Biological Lugar laboratory' and its connection with similar ones in Ukraine. This is only one aspect of the wagging information-psychological warfare in Georgia and in this case, Georgia and Ukraine should reunite their effort to set up a Counter-Information War Coalition and promote a common agenda²⁶. Therefore, the Russian hybrid threat against Georgia in the case of Lugar Laboratory manipulation could be considered a 'Grey-Fake News' type and aims at discretization of both U.S. and Georgia's strategic cooperation and using special psychological operation to undermine Georgia's successful effort in tackling with COVID-19 geopolitics and asymmetric threat at national and global levels.

Conclusion

In the context of modern international security, the content of threats and challenges has acquired an entirely different purpose. Unlike the classic Cold War, when threats and challenges were calculated and predicted perfectly and logically possible, apart from the concept of strategic nuclear policy and strategic intimidation, the geopolitical processes in the early 21st Century took on a different dimension. Against this backdrop, the terms asymmetric threat and hybrid threat emerged as a major threat to the international community. Therefore, asymmetric threats, especially non-military ones, are more vulnerable than direct military asymmetric threats, because when using it, it

²⁵ T. Zedelashvili, *Digital Technology Century and Cybersecurity Modern International Political Challenges*, Tbilisi 2022, pp.80-82.

²⁶ A. Cohen, R. Hamilton, *The Russian Military and the Georgia War: Lessons and Implications*, Carlisle 2012, pp. 70-74.

makes more easier to manipulate and misinform the enemy combat units. One such set of actions is, for example, psychological warfare.

The notion of security has changed for years, not even the twenty-first century has been the exception. It is precisely that the 21st Century has coined the term asymmetry; its notion within the theory of security is linked to such a concept as ‘asymmetric threat’. The new term, asymmetric, contains signs of terrorism, natural cataclysms and hybrid warfare, as well as no military or political hassle²⁷. The form of asymmetric warfare is called warfare when the military power of the warring parties differs sharply from one another. The term asymmetric warfare is often used to describe military actions such as guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and insurgency.

Hybrid warfare is a new phenomenon, and its significance has become more widespread in the 21st-century international security system. The military aspects of its dimension are equivalent to the concept of fourth-generation wars, where priority is given to the fight to neutralize asymmetric military threats and defeat the will of the adversary, not the physical destruction of the adversary. Concrete hybrid warfare in this era is considered by the Russian Federation to occupy the Crimean peninsula of the Ukrainian sovereign territory of Crimea, carried out by parts of the Rapid Response Command and then annexed in 2014. In addition, hostilities in the context of hybrid warfare are observed in the regional war in Syria²⁸.

The phenomenon of ‘hybrid warfare’ has had a profound impact on contemporary international security systems, which has been characterized by two specific factors: theoretical-conceptual and realistic approaches. The theoretical-conceptual approach is that the existing international order actors have already recognized the importance of the ‘hybrid war’ and the magnitude of its impact and have made relevant reservations in their strategic documents. In 2014, for example, Russian President Vladimir Putin endorsed a military doctrine of the country outlining key parameters of a Russian hybrid war strategy. Under Article 32 of the new military doctrine adopted on 28 December 2014, one of the main tasks of the Russian Armed Forces in peacetime is to protect the interests and strategic communication transport nodes²⁹.

At this stage, it is impossible to decide between these scenarios. All the more so since these possibly major developments – we shall call ‘macro-geopolitical’ – can be influenced or deflected by the much more ‘micro-

²⁷ C. Muscato, L. Chapel, *Asymmetric Warfare: Definition, Tactics & Examples*, <<https://study.com/academy/lesson/asymmetric-warfare-definition-tactics-examples.html>> (10.12.2022).

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ V. Maisaia, G. Magradze, *Hybrid War and 21st Century International Security Problems*, Tbilisi 2020, pp. 220-222.

geopolitical' effects of the COVID-19 crisis. Let us mention four of them, which may very well be combined.

1. The crowding-out effect: In the coming months, it will be difficult for policymakers and public opinion to focus their attention on anything other than managing COVID-19. Already, the strikes against US bases in Iraq, still going on by the way, and Washington's intention to withdraw some of its forces there, have gone virtually unnoticed.
2. The windfall effect: An opportunistic player can take advantage of this situation to carry out a 'coup' that he would not have otherwise pursued under different circumstances. One goes back once again to the Iranian-American confrontation in the Middle East, or even tensions in the China Sea, if not the 'capture of pawns' with which President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin is quite familiar in Russia's 'close abroad' strategy.
3. The escalation effect: a local incident can always escalate into a more general conflict, but in the present circumstances, elements of tension (see the 'narratives' war' and American journalists' expulsion from China) that are multiplying between Beijing and Washington can by themselves be factors of an intensification of the confrontation between the two powers.
4. An opportunity effect: finally, it cannot be ruled out that the pandemic also offers an opportunity to put forward constructive proposals (a new effort on the Iranian question, for example) insofar as the major responsible decision-makers may not be, in time of COVID-19, in the mood of opening up new conflicts.

Hence, the scenarios are to be considered as future models of how COVID-19 influences international and regional politics. However, the processes are being transformed into concrete mega-cognitive paradigms of resilience of the communities and human beings. Hence, future geopolitical events whether international society is getting accustomed to realities with the existence of COVID-19 and perceived as an inherent condition of our way of life. In this regard, information warfare technologies also could be considered as a key provision of has great implications and influences on the scenarios that are acceptable instruments of the Russian Federation political leadership.

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