Analysis of the Cold War for Public Opinion, and the Interests in the Cyberspace

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Abstract— The research focuses on the interests involved in influencing public opinion both within one's own country and abroad. The advancement of globalisation and the intensification of informational connectivity make this topic increasingly relevant in the information-dominated world of the 21st century. Malicious access to the attitudes and sentiments of individuals is understood as a challenge to national security. The aim of the study is to uncover the broad scope, potential and the key factors involved in contemporary competition for access to public opinion, as well as some differences in state-level strategies. The focus is set on the cyberspace and on informational interventions, identified as a defining factor in today's international security landscape. The methodology is based on comparison and generalisation. The scientific approach is phenomenological. Accessible data has been used to define vectors for the presence of states in cyberspace. These are: software, hardware, and technologies, as well as artificial intelligence. Following a theoretical analysis, three defining vectors for public opinion were identified: mobility, ideological environment, and informational accessibility. A comparative analysis of the interdependencies between the identified vectors was carried out, considering the US, Russia, the UK, and the EU, as states of interest in international security. The analysis also includes the interests from cyberspace as an independent participant in this competitive interaction. The work reveals differences in the strategic approaches to accessing public opinion and to protecting it from unwanted manipulations. Furthermore, the study shows that, despite the differences, the competition for access to the attitudes and sentiments of individuals is associated with high costs, which are exhausting for society. The primary conclusion reached is that the competitive actions of the analysed actors resemble a New Cold War, fought for access to influence over public opinion in states. It is emphasised that in this New Cold War, more than two centres of influence are emerging. They "fight" in different ways, but resistance is inevitable and increasingly requires greater material and societal potential.

Keywords— security, public opinion, Artificial Intelligence, New Cold war

I. INTRODUCTION

In the third decade of the 21st century, it is impossible for a state and its people to live isolated from other states and the societies within them. In the contemporary, information-dominated social connectivity, there is a clearly observable increase in the intensity of interactions, as well as in attempts to impose control over the channels through which influence is exerted in society, whether this influence originates from within the state or from another. A critical review of existing theoretical analyses and publications in authoritative media (listed in the References) reveals a clear trend towards the emergence of a specific competitiveness in today's international relations. Consequently, the uncertainties regarding the protection of one's own society from foreign influence are drawing increasing attention. It has been a well-known fact for decades that the active promotion of interests does not occur solely between societies in countries with shared borders. Today, this fact is more evident than ever before. The rapid development of cyberspace and its capabilities leads to the emergence of increasingly new effects in the relationship between information warfare and interventions in public sentiments and attitudes. The relevance of these uncertainties is indisputable and requires increasingly active research efforts. In line with the emerging needs, the objective of this study is to reveal the growing potential for the exertion of foreign influence in the society of another state, as well as to highlight the strategic approaches to competition among some of the leading political and economic powers. The study focuses on the possibilities for individually addressing participants and balancing the ongoing processes in the realm of public diplomacy and international security.

In the context of security, the topic is of significant relevance because the history of social development

allows us to view the state as a system that society within it has constructed in order to achieve security [1]. This system operates both with its internal processes and with those triggered by its interaction with the surrounding environment. Security in such systems is multi-faceted and is supported by two main pillars: physical (state borders, economic factors, etc.) and moral, which is entirely positioned within the thinking of people and, more precisely, in the worldview they 'paint' in their minds, and then transfer into their pursuits, demands, and agreements for the order and policies of the state they live in [2], as well as the actions of other states (other systems) with which they interact. This transfer is particularly dependent on public opinion and has become an increasingly important factor for international security. Especially now, when 'The information age has changed the practice of existing security systems by making them operate in a rich information environment, creating and implementing a number of new complex policies.' [3]

Public opinion is the construct that unites people within the framework of social agreements. Within this unification, people impose their shared interests, thus shaping the activity of the state. Therefore, public opinion exerts a decisive influence on both the domestic and foreign policy of the state. For this reason, protecting society from the penetration of foreign interests is an especially important element for the security of the state. On the other hand, promoting one's own interests within the society of another state facilitates agreements on various issues and serves as a powerful prerequisite for resolving conflicts without bloodshed. Therefore, public opinion is an interesting construct in the context of security. The drawback is that this construct is described more qualitatively than quantitatively, which significantly complicates not only scientific research but also the practice of conducting and safeguarding against interventions.

Regarding public opinion, the historical development in Europe, and later in the world, shows three important vectors in public development, which are connected to the following periods: The first are the wars for the imposition of Catholic power in Central and Western Europe. During the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453), people participated in the war, left their settlements, and met other people, other cultures, and the way of life of their close and not so close neighbors. In addition to fighting, they encountered different cultures, learned different ways of farming, trading opportunities, and so on. In 1454, Johannes Gutenberg published the first printed book. Even after the war, people sought ways to travel, to maintain connections outside their settlement. The collective energy of the communities was awakened. A logical factor for this development is mobility.

Social development continues. By the early 17th century, there is no doubt in Europe about the development of society. It is then that the first newspapers appear, and it becomes clear that not only movement is important, but also the ideas that are transferred. It is evident that the intensification of communication has the advantage of promoting the spread of one's own ideas, but it also has the disadvantage of "opening the doors" to the spread of foreign ideas within one's own society. These ideas are not always in the interest of the people and the authorities. Combining them with public activity that emerges among the people, presents a powerful challenge. The Catholic Church finds a way to refine the spread of faith by developing the tool of propaganda (in 1622, the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* was established). Thus, ideology and the freedom of ideas emerge as the next defining vector for public opinion.

By the middle of the 20th century, society had changed to such an extent that physical armed conflicts became increasingly difficult to carry out and inflicted heavier and heavier damage. The era of the Cold War began in interstate relations. It is commonly associated with blocking potential by developing and producing weapons, the potential use of which mutually blocks the initiative of states. It should not be underestimated that the Cold War was also a war between the ideologies of the two opposing camps – the East and the West. While the produced weapons were not used, battles on the ideological front continued in full force. These were battles for attracting public opinion in support of the interests of the intervener (the offensive actions of the opponent and the defensive actions of one's own state).

In the 21st century, the world is different. The arms race has been abandoned, but competition between systems in the direction of public opinion remains. Mobility, especially among young people, is highly developed. They travel to work, to study, and to get acquainted with the culture and everyday life of people in other countries. This creates the need to develop a "suitable environment for intercultural communication". [4] The strategic dimensions of the culture-society complex are increasingly drawing thinking within the field of security. [5]

One of the reasons is the advanced globalization. An example of this are the crises. In the 21st century, there is no doubt that it is impossible for a single country and its society to deal with the unknowns related to transportation between countries [6], climate, energy exchange, and distribution [7], etc. Because of this, the questions today are not how public opinion is formed, but how to achieve understanding between public opinions in different countries. Against the backdrop of these developments, it is not surprising that in the 21st century, social development is expanding into a new environment – cyberspace. Even a brief look at this novelty makes cyberspace an important vector for shaping public opinion [8]. In accordance with established concepts in science and practice regarding the structure of cyberspace, it can be divided into: software, hardware, and another construct that has emerged in recent years – artificial intelligence.

The race for control over the movement of people and the spread of ideologies are 'historically developed' activities. As an innovation in the race for access to public opinion in the direction of cyberspace, another specific structure should be considered. This construct influences public opinion in different countries, but it is not a state. It

is also not clear on what interests it operates. These are those actors in the security ensemble who have the ability to block connectivity, stop profiles on social networks (as happened, for example, with the profiles of U.S. President Donald Trump and his supporters during the transfer of power in 2021), activate or suppress public opinion, initiate or block initiatives on social networks, or stop some and launch other informational websites. From a security perspective, such interventions are far from harmless. In the case of the events at the Capitol, the intervention seems positive, but this is not always the case. For example, in 2018, software robots blocked images of the Venus of Willendorf – a figurine in the Natural History Museum in Vienna, known as the oldest exhibit of paleontological art. The reason given was that the figurine was nude [9]. As a result, millions of people around the world could not see the image and were essentially cut off from access to culture. The question arises: who is working with these software robots? Another question concerns the public appropriateness of the actions of those who control the exchange of information in cyberspace. These actions resemble censorship, the control of which is unknown, and it is unclear whose interests are being served. When considering the effect of determining which news is real and which is fake, which ideas on social media are dangerous and which are not, it becomes evident that there is a huge potential for interventions into public opinion. A potential that remains hidden from society. The actions of these actors, hidden in cyberspace, may seem virtual, but they are tangible, and it is not correct to ignore them when describing the current landscape of international security relations. The working term used for these actors is "supranational entity."

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A phenomenological scientific approach has been applied. It is based on experience and the perception of the world. On this basis, it can be seen that the historical context in social development proves that public opinion is an important element in relations between states and is a crucial factor for international security.

The methodology is based on comparison and generalisation. Available publications in scientific journals, as well as in authoritative global media, have been examined. These were selected in the context of the investigated issues. This allows for the identification and comparison of the main differences in the strategic approaches of the United States, China, Russian Federation, EU countries, and the United Kingdom. Moreover, it reveals the reasons behind the discovered differences in strategic approaches. In terms of quantitative analysis, as much as possible, a comparison was also made of the expenditures these countries allocate to implement their policies. These methods of comparison and description allow for the synthesis of the conclusion that we are witnessing activity resembling Cold War dynamics. In accordance with the research problem and the set objective, the results achieved reveal

the potential of activities aimed at accessing public opinion. Furthermore, they provide a broad response to the question of possible actions to protect society from malicious foreign influence via cyberspace.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The experience of the centuries, as well as today's information-dominated reality, create a sufficient foundation for formulating the vectors that simultaneously act towards the protection of public opinion from foreign interventions, as well as the imposition of interests through the 'capture' of foreign public opinion. Such vectors are:

1) Towards public opinion
– Mobility;
– Freedom of ideas;
– Informational connectivity between people within the state and with people from other countries' societies;
2) The state's potential in cyberspace:

- The level of development of software and
- The level of development of hardware
- Activity in building accessible civilian applications of artificial intelligence.

The corresponding vectors are analyzed for: the United States, China, Russian Federation, EU countries, and the United Kingdom, as well as the supranational entity that manifests itself through cyberspace. The states are chosen according to the established view in European media of the leading states in the geopolitical future [10]. The vectors are assessed as follows:

1) Regarding public opinion:

- Mobility: according to the widely known conditions regarding the existence of restrictions on people's ability to travel outside the country;
- Freedom of ideas: according to the degree of freedoms in the direction of the established values in Western European thinking;
- Informational connectivity: according to the known data on individual internet consumption. [11]

2) Regarding the state's potential in cyberspace:

- Software: according to known data about the localization of major companies that own operating environments;
- Hardware: according to known information about hardware dominance in building the internet connectivity network;
- Artificial intelligence: according to known developments and influence in platforms like ChatGPT and other similar ones.

The indicators are assessed in three categories: high, medium, low. The evaluations are in the context of the possibilities for influencing public opinion and should not be applied as exhaustive for the presence of the analysed states in cyberspace.

The obtained result is presented in Table (1).

TABLE 1:REGARDING STATES: MOBILITY, FREEDOM OF IDEAS, AND THE POTENTIAL FOR INTERVENTION THROUGH CYBERSPACE.

State	Mobility	Freedom of ideas	Individuals using the Internet	Software	Hardware	Artificial Intelligence
USA	high level	high level	high level 89.4%	high level	middl	high level
Russian Federation	high level	low level	high level 82.6%	low level	middl	middl
China	high level	low level	middl 64.6%	middl	high level	high level
EU and United Kingdom	high level	high level	high level 83.8% (UK – 92.5%)	middl	middl	high level
Superstate subject	?	?	56% (in the world)	high level	high level	high level

USA: The freedom of travel for American citizens is well-known. The existence of a democratic environment in the country is also well-known. The high level of software power is due to companies like Microsoft and Apple. Regarding hardware, some difficulties are observed. An example is the disputes with China over equipment for 5G networks.[12]. The public use of artificial intelligence is associated with the development of ChatGPT.

Russian Federation: There is no data indicating total restrictions on the mobility of Russian citizens. However, the freedom of ideas is in question. A notable example is the well-known case of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny. Regarding hardware for informational connectivity, the Russian initiative RuNet, which aims to control the entry and exit points of the internet in the country, deserves attention. [13], [14]

China: Chinese tourists are increasingly encountered around the world. This is grounds for evaluating the level as high. Regarding the freedom of ideas, a low level is noted due to concerns about the imposition of restrictions by the typical communist capitalism that the country develops. Regulations imposed by institutions via the internet (e.g., social networks) are also well-known. The software level is rated as medium, but the hardware level is high. This is due to the equipment that China manufactures and supplies to other countries, such as for the 5G network. After the emergence of DeepSeek, the influence level through artificial intelligence is high. These are characteristic policies of the state.

EU and the United Kingdom: The freedom of travel for citizens from these countries is widely known. The democratic environment in these countries is also well-known. The software presence is not low due to the activity of developing open-source software, such as Linux. Regarding the production and implementation of hardware, difficulties are observed. The activity of developers from these countries in limiting undesirable effects and threats from uncontrolled and thoughtless application of artificial intelligence is well-known.[15]

Supranational entity in cyberspace: Due to the lack of physical borders, physical mobility cannot be discussed. Regarding the freedom of ideas, it is questionable whether the neoliberal permission for everyone to write whatever they want creates a democratic environment. The level of software presence is difficult to determine. It is assessed as high because it utilizes all the available software resources on the planet. Regarding hardware, the assessment is high, as it is clearly under the control of the supranational entity. Regarding the public use of artificial intelligence, it is difficult to form an opinion, although there are doubts about interventions in the generated texts. However, it is not known in which direction these interventions occur. [16]

The first type of policy that emerges is that: The focus on public opinion is evident in each of the studied units. All the studied countries strive for a high level of mobility for their citizens, but some apply visa or similar regimes (e.g., USA, United Kingdom, etc.), i.e., they limit visitation.

The second type of policy is that: While some countries protect public opinion from unwanted interventions by developing democratic freedoms and ideas (e.g., USA, EU, and United Kingdom), others impose restrictions on some of these vectors (China, Russian Federation).

Both policies are remnants of the era before the emergence of cyberspace, but they are clearly still exploited today. They remain as options for protecting public opinion in their own countries.

The third type of policy is strictly oriented towards influencing public opinion through cyberspace. Technologically, it relies on mutual compensation across the vectors of software, hardware, and public use of artificial intelligence. This policy is highly relevant in the everyday life of the 21st century. This is evidenced by the fact that, in the context of the typical information dominance of the 21st century, leading states in geopolitics maintain levels of individuals using the Internet that are significantly higher than the global average. This indicates that, in the 21st century, a substantial part of the competition for access to public opinion takes place through cyberspace. In the realm of international security, presence in cyberspace proves to be a prerequisite not only for protecting public opinion from external influence but also potentially for influencing the societies of other countries. This situation explains the high interest of states in the vectors of software, hardware, and artificial intelligence. The three vectors mutually compensate each other. In cases where a state does not have high control over the software of the operating environment, it prioritizes the development of hardware devices, as seen in China.

The research demonstrates that the combination of the vectors of ideological freedom/restriction and/or mobility

with interventions in cyberspace is primarily employed by developed nations and affects people worldwide. It is reasonable to assume that, within the framework of their capabilities and political order, other countries around the world also implement such policies. Therefore, the focus is placed on interventions in cyberspace. This is further evidenced by the expenditures made by states.

According to available data on the internet, the costs directed toward the third type of policy are substantial. For example, US investments in ICT (Information and communications technology) in 2024 are $560.95 billion [17]. The country's GDP for 2024 being $29,179.1 billion USD [18]. In the same year, global ICT spending is $4,997.718 billion USD [19]. This means that more than 10% (11.22%) of the global ICT spending comes from the USA. It is not easy to find data for other countries, nor can we be sure that these data are comparable, but judging by the available media reports, the ratio is similar to that of the USA. This shows that for leading countries, a significant portion of expenses is directed towards ICT. These expenses are a substantial part of GDP, as seen from the data for the USA. The circumstances resemble the situation during the Cold War in the 20th century.

According to the described conditions, a New Cold War for public opinion emerges, which is being fought in cyberspace. In this conflict, the poles are more numerous, and the interests are more complex. Furthermore, it is widely known that reaching public opinion occurs through various means: cyberattacks against corporations and institutions; information theft; trolls who fabricate interference in parliamentary and other types of elections; propaganda messages aimed at attracting public attention through fake news, deepfakes, and false messages in online-based social networks; as well as other methods. The diversity is substantial, both in terms of the participants and the affected parties, as well as the tools used. This complicates efforts to limit malicious influences on society that are propagated through cyberspace. Additionally, cyberspace is visibly evolving at speeds disproportionately higher than the legislative processes in democratic countries. As a result, when a tool is restricted by laws or technical countermeasures, cyberspace technologies swiftly create a new tool to replace the restricted one.

In the context of this vision, an interesting element in the policy for the public implementation of artificial intelligence (such as ChatGPT and DeepSeek) is that countries like Russian Federation are not highly engaged in such a race. The data available in open sources about the scale of Russian investments in the fields of software, hardware, and artificial intelligence is incomplete, and it is unclear how reliable it is. This does not mean that Russia is not working towards artificial intelligence. However, this expansion remains in the background, likely due to the comfort created by limited democratic freedoms. A different situation is developing in China. The difference is that the authorities in China are developing both artificial intelligence and internal connectivity between citizens, while simultaneously imposing strong control over citizens' presence in cyberspace. Users are required to register with their real names (no nicknames), confirmation is needed through personal ID, phone numbers, and even social credit numbers [20], [21].

The policy of the supranational entity is not fully known. It is composed of a group of people who, due to ownership or their professional skills and positions, manage, administer, resolve, and restrict access to information on social networks, websites, etc. The organization of the internet network is such that it is difficult to assess the capabilities of people within this group. Their policy is unique because it is entirely conducted in the domain of the complex: software, hardware, and the use of artificial intelligence in the public sphere. The challenge is that it is unclear who is behind this supranational entity and what interests it defends. It is also unknown to what extent it holds influence and control over internet connectivity between people.

In this line of reasoning, the activity of British experts engaged with cyberspace is of particular interest, as they advocate for international agreements concerning the rules for publishing and disseminating information via the internet. In such a scenario, the supranational entity in cyberspace would become visible, and its activities would be brought into alignment with societal rules and laws. This would have an important effect. However, how states will balance and negotiate their interests is a complex question, one that goes beyond the scope of this report. It can be argued that such an agreement is not only possible but also necessary, and it is not feasible for states to remain indifferent to this evident fact. Moreover, there is little doubt that the need for institutions, corporations, and individual users to maintain and update their protection against cyberspace aggressions remains essential. However, this is again linked to increasing investment.

Against the backdrop of the uncertainties and challenges associated with developing normative protections for public opinion against interventions, technical countermeasures emerge as an interesting possibility. This direction is exemplified in the policy of the Russian Federation, which is developing technical restrictions on the country's internet network. Similarly, the development of indigenous artificial intelligence (e.g., ChatGPT and DeepSeek) appears to be following this trend. Such a solution is also not straightforward, and an important feature is that it requires ever-increasing resources that states must allocate in one way or another. Making such large expenditures is draining and may eventually come at the expense of social benefits and other priorities. In this regard, the argument becomes clear that the competition for supremacy in cyberspace is not merely a race for dominance in a new domain of competition, but a far more encompassing phenomenon. A phenomenon that approaches the understanding of a New Cold War.

CONCLUSIONS

The results clearly indicate that active competition for dominance over the tools used to reach societies within states worldwide is developing in cyberspace. The reason is that dominance in cyberspace provides a significant advantage for influencing public opinion and steering it towards the interests of the intervener. This advantage is employed alongside other mechanisms, which adds a certain hybridity to the activity aimed at influencing public opinion. The phenomenological view of history allows for the identification of leading vectors in the social development of society, focusing on: mobility, ideological freedoms, and communication connectivity for the exchange of messages (information, ideas, etc.). The high significance of the effects necessitates active research on the issues, leading to direct outcomes in the field of social sciences and security.

In the 21st century, the emergence and development of cyberspace place humanity in an increasingly higher dependence on Information and communications technology. This shapes the vectors: software, hardware, and artificial intelligence.

The report demonstrates that policies regarding public opinion, as well as control and manipulation concerning mobility and ideological freedoms, have not been abandoned. It is still used to maintain public opinion within a state and to protect it from foreign interference. This means that actions are required to regulate the activity of accessing and publishing information, both at the international level and within the state's internal framework. The research outlines the challenges but reaches the firm conclusion that international regulation is necessary, both in terms of the content of the information exchanged through cyberspace and with regard to dominance in internet infrastructure. However, achieving such regulation does not absolve organisations and individual users from the responsibility of maintaining adequate levels of software protection.

Alongside the work on established vectors such as mobility and ideological freedoms, ICT is developing in a direction where supremacy is sought within the framework of the software, hardware, and public access to artificial intelligence complex. Different components of the complex are used in various combinations. For example, when a state is not leading in software, it focuses on hardware devices and connectivity networks. Artificial intelligence is the third factor in which competition develops dynamically. The high costs of protection, combined with the strong interest in influencing public opinion through cyberspace, provide grounds to suggest that an activity is emerging that closely resembles the principles of the Cold War – economic exhaustion at the expense of maintaining parity between leading centres. Unlike the well-known Cold War, which ended in the 1990s, today's activity is characterised by multi-vector dynamics and more than two centres. This makes international agreements even more complex.

Investments in ICT, as well as policies in leading countries, provide grounds for the hypothesis that a New Cold War is emerging, one that is developing in cyberspace and is fought for access to people's thoughts and ideas. It affects the complex: software, hardware, and artificial intelligence.The research demonstrates that the importance of the issue should be outlined both theoretically and practically, by examining the nature of the processes and seeking not only the protection of one's own society but also counteraction against the race in cyber investments. One possible solution is for states to develop their own hardware and software to protect critical assets (as seen in the policy of the Russian Federation), but to what extent and for whom this is feasible is a question with multiple answers.

Today, attention should be given to the fact that the development of a New Cold War for dominance in cyberspace is possible, and states and the societies within them must not allow this to happen.

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