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The Politics of International Relations

**Communication Management tools
in psychological warfare
in Syria**

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The aim of this work is to review instruments of communication management and determine the extent of their influence in psychological warfare, which take place in Syria.

Throughout recent years, the importance of communication management in different spheres is as great as ever – war is not an exception. The increasing complexity of international conflicts leads to using various methods of communication management, whose goals are not only the armed forces, but also the civilians, which may significantly change the course of confrontation.

Since the beginning of the "Arab spring," many countries of the region have faced a new phenomenon known as "color revolutions", resulted in fall of the political regimes in Egypt and Tunisia. Experience of psychological warfare in Syria drew attention because here state regime has withstood under numerous provocations and "spins". Why, in spite of the "moderate opposition" experience, Assad has managed to stay in power? The answer will be given in this research.

Key words: Syria, warfare, communication management, opposition, twitter revolution, Arab spring, Assad.

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1. Introduction

In the modern world, significance and efficiency of communication management instruments have highly increased, including the sphere of international conflicts. Complexity of conflicts and its contradiction contribute to the use of communication management with respect to not only militants but civilians also. In my opinion, “Arab spring” in the Middle East represents a bridgehead for using CM technologies. “Regimes-centenarians” of Egypt, Tunisia and Libya have been toppled partly due to the introduction of such manipulations. Nevertheless, these instruments didn’t have such an effective influence on Syrian Republic. Due to this, analysis of using CM in Syria will be presented in the paper.

The paper is based on literature encountered with the study of information and psychological warfare and communication management. Analysis of communication management methods was carried out in accordance with the systematic approach. Internet search conducted by the following keywords: “PsyOps”, “Web 2.0”, “dissidents of Syria”, “social networks”, “blogs” etc. Time interval of the study is limited to 2008-2013. In preparing this article, works of such of scientists as E.Pashentsev¹, I. Surma² and V. Annenkov³ have been taken into account. It is important to note the fundamental works of such authoritative researchers as the L. Pye⁴, R. Eaman⁵, J.E. Grunig⁶ and S. Livingston⁷.

In this research, comparative analysis of US official documents in interval from 2008 to 2013 was carried out (time period of the preparation and implementation of the Greater Middle East democratization process). Analysis results led to the formation of hypothesis described further. The methodology of the research is based on monitoring and content analysis of the Western media on the subject of the Syrian revolution for the period 2008-2013. The sources of the research are the authoritative data, including articles from international journals on issues of research, conference materials, official documents of the United States and the Government of Syria. 45 information sources and documents selected for in-depth analysis. Besides, empirical data were taken into account in the paper, obtained as a result of interviewing experts on the subject.

Generally, communication management connected with using of PR instruments and technologies, advertising techniques, mass media and informal communications to achieve effective administration both within the organization and between organizations and external actors. CM in the framework of conflict is focused primarily on the fundamental fabric of enemy-state society, its history, culture and ideology. The main goal is forming certain attitude of people to leaders and elites of the state. Bit by bit state-object citizens no longer associate themselves with their "undemocratic homeland". They find images of imposed foreign culture, ideology and lifestyle more attractive. New formed group of dissidents is ready to undertake revolutionary actions against a legitimate authority. Furthermore, “stakeholders” are ready to contribute to this.

In my opinion, the USA could have serve as a coordinator of revolutions in the Middle East. Government Department and the US Department of Defense have conducted relevant research in the field of psychological warfare. What is more, the US have extensive experience of communication management instruments implementation in conflicts, starting with the conflict in the Persian Gulf and ending with Georgian-Ossetia conflict.

For the first time the Western press started talk about the support of the Syrian opposition by the United States in December 2011. Former CIA analyst Philip Giraldi in his

article stated “U.S. Spec Ops are providing communications equipment and intelligence to assist the rebel cause, enabling the fighters to avoid concentrations of Syrian soldiers”

As I see, destabilization was planned under the context of web-based war in the Middle East. Substantiation of this hypothesis, as well as general recommendations for the preparation of the activities mentioned above can be found in several official documents of the USA state structures.

- National strategy for counterterrorism⁸ – one of the most important documents, used not only by the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications, but also by the deputy Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and the US counter-terrorism coordinator. Particularly, Strategy states that Iran and Syria remain active sponsors of terrorism⁹, that means for the US - the enemy №1.
- Strategic Plan. Fiscal Years 2007-2012 – the document was prepared by the US Department of State and the US Agency for International Development. According to this document the main task of the American diplomacy corresponds to the following statement – “our freedom is best protected by ensuring that others are free.”¹⁰. The process of “freedom protecting”, intervention - in reality, pursues through “the Middle East Partnership Initiative”, - one of the basic principles of “transformation” American diplomacy. This initiative includes searching and recruitment of leaders among the Middle East dissidents and their further education in the USA from 6 to 24 weeks. Public diplomacy, being undoubtedly a communication management tool, is also mentioned in this document. For example, the authors of the Strategic Plan explains, “We have developed a coordinated strategy that aims to explain our policies and culture through a broad range of regional media and initiatives as well as Arab media outreach. Many of the public diplomacy programs currently underway will only produce tangible results on a five-year to ten-year horizon”¹¹. The results are evident – in 5 years after the publication of the Plan “Arab Spring” started in the Middle East and North Africa.
- Another document – The IT Strategic Plan 2011-2013 where one of the main goals is an increasing role of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Social media, cooperation, information exchange and data-sharing with the help of the above-mentioned department resources.
- Development of the methods of strategic warfare in information space is conducting by Think tanks like RAND, Cato Institute, Center for Strategic and International Studies etc.

2. Communication management in action

CM tasks used by the USA in the Middle East can be divided into several directions – the dissident’s group’s mobilization through the communication between leaders of opposition and the US, setting up and supporting protest movements, consolidating of users around the American media space.

All these directions can also be applied to the conflict in Syria. A clear example of the digital diplomacy implementation by the US in practice is cyber-dissidents Conference¹². Among the guests there were the representatives from China, Russia and Iran, as well as the representatives of the Syrian opposition. One of the dissidents from Syria - political refugee

Ahed Al Hendi, later became the coordinator of the Arab direction of the site CyberDissidents.org¹³, actively working against legitimate authority of Syria. The level and the specificity of the event indicates the presence of representative of one of the world's largest companies «Wipro Technologies» Edra Williams, who is engaged in the development of information technologies and means of circumvent the Internet protection.

The first signs of destabilization in the country in early 2011 became a signal for the Syrian authorities to increase the level of control over the media and the Internet. In this regard, the leaders of the opposition began to receive the necessary electronic equipment for recording and publication of opposition materials and the necessary software smuggled from the Western "well-wishers". In July 2011 a constant stream of opposition videos began to "leak" on Youtube ¹⁴, and the international Al-Jazeera channel, covering the events in Syria, has used the video, received from the Syrian opposition¹⁵.

Another quite effective aspect of communication management is global media such as BBC and Al-Jazeera. It has been known for a long time that the BBC and Syrian opposition are in "good relations". However, when the channel showed video-report on how opposition was preparing captive of Syrian army as a kamikaze in 2012¹⁶, people expressed discontent regarding questionable connections of the BBC. Later the video was removed from the BBC servers. The channel also used visual manipulation instruments. For example, the BBC used photo of Iraqi conflict victims for blaming the Syrian government¹⁷. The photo depicted bodies of the dead children, found south of Baghdad March 27, 2003. In May 2012, on the BBC News website this photo under the title of "the Syrian massacre" could be found made by Syrian authority forces. After wide negative reaction on this case the BBC management removed the picture from the website.

Media-giant Al-Jazeera also proved its commitment to the opposition many times. Former Al-Jazeera correspondent Ali Hashem in the interview described how journalists of the agency represent situation in Syria. He said about biased interpretation of the situation, not only in Syria but also in Bahrain. When Ali Hashim showed photos of militants crossing the Syrian border to help the rebels, the administration of the channel "asked him to forget what he saw and return to Beirut"¹⁸.

3. Conclusion

All of the above leads to the conclusion that the conflict will continue, but with different intensity. Even in 2016, the US has allocated 1.3 billion. USD to support «moderate» Syrian opposition in the form of uniforms, equipment and so on¹⁹. Furthermore, the context analysis of the "Arab spring" leads to the conclusion that Barack Obama continues the strategy of the democratization of the Greater Middle East, enshrined in the US foreign policy in the Middle East by George. W. Bush through the «Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the Region of the Broader Middle East and North Africa»²⁰. However, despite the "early successes" of «democratization», de facto overthrow of regimes in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, legitimate authority in the Syrian Republic resisted.

The factors, which did not let Syria become a new country in a series of "Arab Spring", are as follows:

- ban on the broadcast of the Western media in the Syrian Republic at the early stages of the conflict;

- blocking radio and Internet resources. Despite the fact that the opposition was able to bypass the block later, this measure has proved to be quite effective;
- implementation of counter propaganda policy and factual data allocation to the international community and public of Syria;
- introduction of criminal liability for warmongering;
- Support to the legitimate regime of Assad by Russia in the information space, and military help;
- active Syrian position in the international arena.
- Iran's active support. Tehran is aware of the fact that in case of the fall of the Syrian regime fall, the next on the "domino effect" is Iran.

Now, the information war is underway. Syria is still fighting for its right to independence, own geopolitical interests and defense on the international stage. In the context of this situation, we can not ignore the role of the media, because they were divided into those who provoke the conflict and those who identify factual data and provide the world community with undistorted information. In the 21st century, media agencies not only describe the current world situation, but also create it.

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