

Bulgaria and Russia: A Diplomatic Deficit

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ABSTRACT: The article examines the contemporary Bulgarian - Russian relations and the definition of NATO information operations through a descriptive political analysis. The scientific relevance of the research topic is found in the insufficient study of it in political science due to its novelty. The purpose of this case study is to analyze the peculiarities of NATO information operations of Bulgarian - Russian relations and assess the possibility to re-apply them for the improvement of the current worldwide state of matters. The policy analysis makes use of the interdisciplinary approach to reassessing and redefining NATO information operations through historical, political, psychological analysis with the perspective of influencing the decision making of adversaries and potential adversaries in order to dissolve disagreements and adopt conflict resolution through communication and inclusivity. The authors H. D. Lasswell and B. McNair, who discuss tactics of manipulation and propaganda are used as a base to explain the theory of information operations. Complimentary authors, who explain for media communication's influence are ones such as C.E. Merriam, T.V. Adorno, H. Marcuse. The duality of information operations is assessed too. The author concludes that the diplomatic deficit stems from a lack of understanding of information operations worldwide, the lack of clear laws approving, assessing, limiting and punishing for abuses of information operations. As a result, due to the need for peace, stability and development, conditions are created to enhance international efforts to take action against different types of contemporary terrorism and force diplomacy to prevail.

KEYWORDS: Bulgaria, Russia, information operations, diplomacy, NATO

Introduction

The topic of diplomacy is most relevant during war. The interdisciplinary approach is essential to the study of the diplomatic deficit between Bulgaria and Russia and its correlation to the understanding of the definition of NATO information operations on theory and practice, since no single disciplinary perspective can adequately address this issue. In order to conduct a whole round assessment, examples from other NATO member states apart from Bulgaria will also be mentioned. Analyzing the contemporary diplomatic relations, the "fall outs" and the peculiarities of NATO information operations, their effects on the diplomatic relations helps to establish a new understanding of NATO information operations. This new reading ought to be re-applied worldwide in order to prevent conflicts, since, currently, there is space to claim the current understanding of NATO information operations has shortcomings, which create diplomatic tension as revised in the example of Russia and Bulgaria. A number of authors will be used to support the thesis of the research, as well as, a variety of contemporary data and international resources.

Theoretical Methodological Basis of the Research

The current situation in Europe is best described as a diplomatic paradox. To best assess this diplomatic paradox, one has chosen to begin with H.D. Lasswell's introduction of the 5W Model: (1) Who? (2) Says what? (3) In which channel? (4) To whom? (5) With what effect? As well as, the model of communication, which he proposed, which was divided in the following 5 parts respectively: (1) communicator, (2) information, (3) media, (4) audience and (5) effect. These have greatly eased the study of new media, NATO information operations and current events as the relations between Bulgaria and Russia and others (Lasswell 1948, 37-51). Relevantly, B. McNair argues that "an expanding globalized public sphere and digital media network have

transformed political communication, allowing political actors, from politicians and pressure groups to trade unions and terrorist organizations, to bypass traditional, established media in communicating their messages" (McNair 2017, intro - 16). This trend evidently poses dangers due to the existing abuses created, hampering of nation's development, threats to other nations' security, etc. In that sense, authors such as C. E. Merriam who encouraged for the greater use of statistics in empirical observation and measures, as well as, "intelligent social control" are essential for strengthening core theories and the necessity of activities resulting from the attained information from discussions, data from long term experiments, etc. (Merriam 1925, 15-30). He also greatly relied on political psychology and is considered one of the greatest contributors to the behavioral movement in political science. It is widely known that T.W. Adorno and H. Marcuse were a part of the group of scholars making up the Frankfurt School. The Frankfurt School believed that through revising various points of view, which are contradictory to one another, much could be learned from the discourse, also referred to as the dialectical method of learning. This concept seems also very close to the modern understanding of diplomatic negotiations and conflict resolution. Adorno and Marcuse are also known as proponents of critical theory, which is a social theory that aims to critique and change society, while being explanatory, practical and normative simultaneously. Marcuse has claimed the following "Free election of masters does not abolish the masters or the slaves" and "The liberating force of technology—the instrumentalization of things—turns into ... the instrumentalization of man" (Marcuse 1964, 159). This being said, it is necessary to constantly challenge social processes in order to prevent and even reverse the instrumentalization of man, to abolish this modern concept of masters and slaves, the totalitarian rule of consumerism, technological capitalism and even the modern process of creating victims of war within the concept of hybrid warfare starting as mere informational warfare and ending in proxy war, "victim blaming", etc. The research methods reflected a set of general scientific and special approaches to the study of political and information processes.

Russian Perspective on NATO Information Operations

Data on the contemporary Russian perspectives collected within many articles, already published, reflecting about 10 years of research in Russia conducted by the author, showcase a Russian trend, which views NATO information operations as something beyond mere influence operations (Peycheva 2021). They are viewed as interventions, which are targeting Russia and are aiming to destabilize it socially, economically, politically and militarily by attacking Russia's image in the information sphere and media via official NATO channels by NATO and individual NATO member states per NATO HQ orders via falsifying history, creating grounds for discriminating against Russia due to other countries as Turkey, for example, sanctions, etc. Also, through creating circumstances forcing Russia to act militarily in the region due to the creation of security threats it can not ignore such as border attacks, neo nazi battalions as a part of the Ukrainian army in it's "back yard", NATO exercises conducted with high tech weaponry possibly with use beyond defense purposes, according to Russian experts, aggressive and quick expansion of NATO in the region. All this, while NATO is expressing open support financially, with training and with arms to Ukraine, while Ukraine has made no effort to dismantle extremist and openly neo nazi battalions from its state army, such as Azov and others, since 2013 until contemporary times.

With this in mind, revising this issue is a very interesting process due to the fact, that, generally, NATO information operations had been publicly recognizable to be operations conducted in Yugoslavia "words not bombs" (Information Operations Modeling 2015), Pakistan (NATO 2005), Somalia (BBC 2008) and other places for the aim to help countries attain peace, help as airplanes during earthquake evacuation, to battle pirates, resolve issues, make friends, etc.

Definitions of the Core Term

Simultaneously, after extensive research the following Table 1 of some main definitions of information operations throughout time leading to the contemporary given definition of NATO information operations can be provided, showing for some evidence in partial support of the "Russian fears":

Table 1. Information Operations definitions

1	1	
Document title	Date of issue	Definition
Phd dissertation "Peculiarities of NATO information operations in Europe in the 21st century"	Upcoming	"Information operations are campaigns of influence on public opinion at the level of mass consciousness, as well as, at the level of representations of the political elite. Information operations are designed to influence the decision-making process and the state of political institutions in the target countries of information operations, with the aim of executing the interests of the subject countries conducting these operations."
Allied Joint Doctrine for the Conduct of Operations (AJP) 3	Latest version 2019	"Information operations is a military function to provide advice and coordinate military information activities to create desired effects on the will, understanding and capability of adversaries, potential adversaries and other North Atlantic Council approved parties in support of Alliance mission objectives. Information activities are actions designed to affect information and or information systems and can be performed by any actor and include protective measures." (AJP- 3 2019, A- 8)
Joint Publication (JP) 3-13	Latest version 2012	"The integrated employment, during military operations, of information-related capabilities in concert with other lines of operation to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision-making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own. Also called IO." (JP 3-13 2012, GL - 3)
Joint Warfare Publication (JWP) 3-80	2002	"Coordinated actions undertaken to influence an adversary or potential adversary in support of political and military objectives by undermining his will, cohesion and decision making ability, through affecting his information, information based processes and systems while protecting one's own decision-makers and decision-making processes'." (JWP 2002, 2-1)
	Phd dissertation "Peculiarities of NATO information operations in Europe in the 21st century" Allied Joint Doctrine for the Conduct of Operations (AJP) 3 Joint Publication (JP) 3-13 Joint Warfare Publication	Phd dissertation "Peculiarities of NATO information operations in Europe in the 21st century" Latest version 2019 Allied Joint Doctrine for the Conduct of Operations (AJP) 3 Latest version 2019 Latest version 2019 Joint Publication (JP) 3-13 Joint Warfare Publication 2002

Assessing Russian Fears of NATO Information Operations

Available are many UK, US, NATO and Bulgarian media publications against the Russian Federation and its alleged activities. These allegations have been rather controversial, due to a lack of evidence to charge Russia/ Russian citizens. Yet again, even though the adoption of the EU action plan to combat racism for 2020-2025, which can bring tangible benefits in the fight against anti- semitism, racism, xenophobia and discrimination, discriminatory media articles were published and Heads of State and Alliances had made comments condemning Russia as guilty until proven innocent, causing for russophobic tendencies, asset seizing, visa limitations, etc. (Stephan 2022). Apart from this, there had been steady activity, a vilification of Russia campaign, that even sometimes glorified nazi Germany throughout the EU, the main of these cases and threats are depicted in the following Table 2. It is important to note, that a number of these cases are prior to the so called annexation/ accession of Crimea and Sevastopol in 2014, the main reason for the diplomatic deficit according to NATO (Stoltenberg 2016, 20).

Table 2. Diplomatic deficit in relations with Russia

Country	Case	Year	Claim
Ukraine	Regional extremism and terrorism nested in Ukraine's army: a direct threat to Russian national security and Russian, Ukrainian and Bulgarian citizens in Ukriane	2022 - 2013	In Ukraine, such neo - nazi, racist, antisemitic and xenophobic groups as "Right Sector", "Freedom", "National Corps", "S-14", "Azov", the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists, etc. are permitted to be official battalions of the Ukraine army and eventually, began to receive funding, training and weapons from the EU and NATO, while acting openly and with impunity (Al Jazeera 2022); These groups do not reflect the official principles of goodwill neither of the EU nor of NATO (NATO 2010, 1); if they functioned within the EU, they would be considered automatically a terror threat-dangerous double standards threatening Ukrainian, Bulgarian and Russian lives (Juknevicience 2017, 4).
Bulgaria	Ending gas supply relations and portraying Russia as gas blackmailers	2022	Bulgaria took part in projects as Nord Stream 2 and others, which EU members called "diversification", although still Russian gas. Russia was preferred due to low prices. Years of deflection of EU funds for diversification, corruption, etc. are also a factor. A media campaign against Russia to cover that up doesn't change history, it only hampers Russia (Zinoveva 2014, 49).
Bulgaria	Expelling Russian diplomats on spy allegations; media frenzy during elections	2022	Worsening relations with Russia and closing down embassies was very contra productive considering the fact that there are huge Bulgarian diasporas in Ukraine and Russia and diplomatic relations are a must in order to protect Bulgarian citizens.

Bulgaria	Bulgaria closed its airspace to Russian planes due to EU, NATO and for media frenzy for votes	2022	Instead of being a diplomatic middleman and to bring checks and balances in NATO, EU - Russia relations to try to dissolve the regional tensions diplomatically, Bulgaria chose to hamper its citizens in Russia, Ukraine with a strong stance against Russia hampering businesses, people and state relations.
UK	British military provocation in the Black Sea	2021	Diplomatic incident in the Black Sea 2021, when the British destroyer HMS Defender deliberately provoked a Russian Su-24M military aircraft to make a warning shot, forcing the British warship to leave the territory in the questionable waters it passed through as a short cut with no prior warning whatsoever given to Russia (Tass 2021).
Bulgaria	Vilification of USSR	2020	Bulgarian Foreign Ministry called the Soviet Union's liberation of Europe from the Nazi yoke in 1945 a "dubious historical thesis".
Germany	Scandal with the poisoning of A. Navalny by the Russian Federation in Russia	2020	Navalny was transported from Russia to Germany in an attempt to save his life after he was hospitalized in Russia. The alleged poisonous chemical was not isolated well enough to produce an inclusive report in Germany and evidence the Russian state attempted to murder Navalny was never produced either. NATO was very firm on the matter of protecting Navalny from Russia (NATO Sec.Gen. 2020).
UK	Scandal with the poisoning of Skripals by the Russian Federation in the UK	2018	Claims that the Russian Federation poisoned the Skripals and declarations by Teresa May, MI-5, MI-6 and NATO, that Russia must de-classify its research on a supposedly Russian "novichok" substance the Skripals were poisoned with allegedly. (Asthana 2018) Evidence that could hold in court, that the Russian state was involved was not produced (Bellingcat 2018).
Belgium	Glorification of nazism in Latvia	2018	a monument in honor of Latvian Waffen-SS legionnaires was erected in the Belgian Zadelgem.
Poland	Glorification of nazism; defaming of the soviet soldiers who fought to free Poland	2018 - 2011	28 monuments erected in honor of Red Army soldiers were dismantled in 2018; Nazi marches were held in Poland by the right-wing radical group "Pride and Modernity" of honor of Hitler's birthday 2018, 2017, documented celebrations, since 2011.
Bulgaria	Poisoning of E. Gebrev by the Russian Federation in Bulgaria	2015	A Bulgarian arms dealer's attempted murder became a scandal claiming the Russian state was conducting "wet works" in Bulgaria. It was never proven that Russia as a state was involved (Zviagina 2019).

In Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and some other countries, Russia used to be perceived as an important business partner, that could provide financial and economic assistance in the future. Simultaneously, deeply rooted corruption also exists due to relations with Russia. The new regional main financial partner is NATO and the EU. At the same time, wanting to become the "favorites of NATO and the EU", Bulgarians and others oppose Russia, seek to undermine its political and economic role in the world, defame it in the media, even provoke it to retaliatory and aggressive measures despite the security of their citizens abroad. All this prevents Russia from maintaining good relations with NATO. Some consider their attitudes a NATO information operation against Russia. Even though this is so, the Bulgarian expert in countering terrorism, deputy chairman of the NATO CIOR – Bulgaria organization, Dr. Asen Peychev has stated: "Cooperation between NATO and Russia is a prerequisite for effective counteraction to international terrorism." According to him, NATO's cooperation with Russia should be built on the basis of strategic communications (Peychev 2016). In this case, it is clear that it is solely up to Russia to strategically communicate to countries like Bulgaria and other NATO states their topics of concern in order to correct the diplomatic deficit, dissolve conflicts, negotiate and most importantly, disarm.

Threats to National and International Security: Diplomatic Deficit

According to research from Russia, alleged information operations carried out by Western countries against Russia are a direct threat to its national sovereignty, as well as regional, international and global security. The tendency of white washing Turkey and vilifying Russia is present in NATO official reports, where it is stated that Russia is supposedly the first country to "invade" another country, since the Second World War entirely ignoring the fact that Turkey invaded Cyprus in 1974, for example (Turner 2016, 14). To improve diplomatic ties with Turkey, Bulgaria re-wrote its history books on the Ottoman empire from Bulgaria having been 500 years under "Ottoman slavery" to "Ottoman influence". This diplomatic approach has not been adopted when dealing with Russia and the USSR. Bulgaria is EU's most corrupt and poorest country. Bulgarian communists are known to pretend being democrats just to get in power and corrupt the system from within. EU and NATO were supposed to improve the informational environment in Bulgaria, not hamper it by regressing to discrimination and a rhetoric of hate as the one Bulgaria had during WWII when it was a nazi state and until 1990 when it was communist. The stance against Russia Bulgaria is supposedly obliged to have is one of diplomatic deficit, which was clear during the Sofia discussions with Ambassador Mitrofina on March 2022 and threats to make her a "persona non grata" in Bulgaria for trying to negotiate a way out of expelling her staff. Evidently, attempts by Russian officials to have discussions post the start of the operations/ invasion was to be perceived as a dangerous and difficult endeavor.

Even though this is so, Russia was involved in many scandals prior. One serious scandal was in reference to the INF treaty, a treaty which Russia left in 2019. With the onset of COVID-19 not only many regional, but international relations exacerbated. Another major issue was personal insults by the new US President towards Putin, calling him a "killer" in May 2021, etc. Relations between NATO and Russia worsened due to espionage allegations and diplomatic representation in Russia and the NATO HQs came to an end in October 2021, leading to decreased cooperation on many matters including counter terror. Russia was constantly portrayed in the media as being "too assertive" and as an enemy by NATO, with no mention of the neo nazi extremist problem in Ukraine, which they view as a direct threat to Russian and regional security, alongside the high levels of corruption in Ukraine (Stoltenberg 2020, 6). Allegations of Russian spies in Bulgaria is also very common news for the past decade. Due to this and other reasons, Russia's international relations worsened, but yet again, only Bulgaria and the Baltic states declared to be ready to end all diplomatic ties with Russia. Russia began to limit Western content and ended up blocking Instagram and Facebook platforms in Russia in 2022. After the whole

world continued to sanction Russia for allegedly not respecting the NATO Russia Founding Treaty in 2014 without considering its motives as protection of human rights, right to self determination, ethnicity, historical ties, the referenda, etc. and after it was made clear by internal and open sources that NATO is financing, training and arming the extremist battalions within the Ukrainian army, the ones who committed genocide in Donbas against Russians, Ukrainians and Bulgarians since 2013, and that Ukraine plans to invade Russia, President Putin declared the start of his "special operations for denazification and demilitarization of Ukraine". The war between Russia and Ukraine officially began February 24th 2022. Many Ukrainians fled the country and are currently refugees. Many attempts for negotiations were made, but none were fruitful. Half a year later, President Putin partially mobilized the Russian citizens for army duty, but a backlash occurred with many fleeing Russia just as how many fled Ukraine at the onset and during the war activities there. It must be pointed out that with the start of the special operations, Putin warned the West that his nuclear weapons are one high alert, not to intervene in Ukraine. Yet again, the West continued to send weapons and trained soldiers, made statements as "we will fight until the last Ukrainian", made claims "the conflict must not spill over beyond Ukraine", etc. (Reuters 2022). As it was with the Crimea and Sevastopol referenda in 2014, the same concept is applied today with the Donbas referenda in Donets and Luhansk. That is, whether there would be recognition or the regions would be considered occupied land seems to be irrelevant to Russia as long as Ukraine's extremists can not access the area and Russia can attain procedural jurisdiction over it (Statement 2021). The votes for both areas to attain autonomy from Ukraine and merge with Russia ended up being in the high percentage scales. The referenda were stated to be "sham" by most Westerners.

To note is that, there were a number of attempts to peacefully retaliate against the West's information operations without having to occupy land or wage war. Russia was involved with the UN and NATO, as well as, having had economic interests with the EU to improve relations. Russia has a passport scheme: to provide Russian passports to neighboring countries with quick procedures. There were also sessions of the CSTO Collective Security Council in 2013, 2014 and onwards against regional terrorism, extremism, and to encouraging regional unity in the face of modern challenges. The Crimea and Sevastopol referenda came as a surprise to many, since this venture cost Russia billions. It delayed anticipated wage increases and sociological poles showed it only slightly contributed to the improvement of Putin's image. Inter alia other attempts to improve the exacerbated relations post 2014, in 2019, the resolution 74/247 "Countering the use of information and communications technologies for criminal purposes" was adopted by the UN General Assembly, proposed by Russia. (Res. 74/247 2019). In 2020, the same occurred with the resolution 75/240 of the UN General Assembly on Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security"; it being an update of the 53/70 version from 1998. (Res. 75/240 2020). Also, very importantly the new START treaty was extended in 2021, etc. As mentioned above already, many attempts for negotiations between NATO, Ukraine and Russia were made, but none were fruitful.

Nuclear War or Negotiations for Peace?

Nevertheless, from half a year, the world is living with the threat that a nuclear war might be a reality due to a lack of diplomacy, a lack of desire to stop gambling with human lives even in Europe and a lack of adequate leadership (Potomac 2022). The New World Order is jeopardized by corruption that has eaten away the foundations of contemporary democracies. It is also jeopardized by the currently most dangerous world terror threat: neo nazism. Data from the Global Terror Index has confirmed the neo nazi terror threat since 2020 (Global Terrorism Index 2020, 3). Footage of Ukraine's soldiers bearing swastika, Hitler portrait and 88 tattoos, as well as, allegations of rape, brutality, etc. has confirmed the terror threat is active in within Ukraine's army in about 50 recognized and registered battalions and their captured soldiers in 2022.

Dangers of the Far- Right on the European Continent: Again

Another worrying trend is data from political elections in Europe. Actively, since 2016 until most recently in Italy, especially, data proves, that there is a constantly steady rise of far- right to neonazi / neonazi

As a result to the actions taken by the Russian Federation against the neo nazi threat they recognized in Ukraine, one can declare that the current relations between Russia, Bulgaria, EU and NATO have exacerbated, since issues of sovereignty were also involved. Whether this is normative shortcomings, an issue of counter terror or a diplomatic deficit or all in one is hard to confirm. Unlike Russia, NATO and the EU, Bulgaria has chosen not to involve itself militarily directly, but just like Russia and Ukraine, Bulgaria is losing people in these war activities/operations daily. It is very important to return to the negotiation's table instead of to have Russia conduct further activities with referenda, special operations and alleged one sided counter terror duty, based on a unilateral assumed perception of NATO information operations and the local situation.

Discussion

The threat of nuclear war is becoming more of a reality with each passing day and the lack of communication on an official level, as well as, on a regular mass level only contributes to more misunderstandings and turmoil. Compromises on all sides have to be made in order to hold accountable the people and nations who have glorified nazism, have revived nazism in Europe in Ukraine's army, state army terror, and who have allowed for the negligence causing for the loss of so many lives in Ukraine, since 2013 and today in order to stop the steady rise of the far- right in Europe as seen from data from 2017 (Aisch 2017) and today (Fleck 2022). Russian activity in Ukraine also has to be put an end to too. Neither the Russian Federation nor NATO should be perceived as threats to one another and as long as this is accepted by both parties and is reflected by both parties' official channels of communication, the duality of NATO information operations can thus contribute to improving diplomatic relations as opposed to forcing a diplomatic deficit, regional instability and war activities in Ukraine due to misconceptions, a lack of assessment tools and limitations of the activities.

Neo nazi, religious, neo leftist extremism and terrorism should be unrooted from the daily agenda of the people living in the 21st century via peace, education, close cooperation, constant communication, framework of signals, better exchange of signals information by intelligent agencies, know how exchange and pre planned prevention schemes in order to save lives. COVID-19 and the possible threat of global bio terror should have been a warning that more international and bilateral cooperation is necessary in order to quickly dissolve threats, as well as, to even be able to quickly prevent them. Any continuation of abusing the concepts of information operations or counter productive attempts to countering them by the parties mentioned above should be assessable, limits should be enforced, as well as, punishments. If information operations, as how they are applied now, are a threat to another country, if they can be considered an intervention, an informational invasion, that deprives the adversary of free will and

compromises the sovereignty of the state without or with the physical element, then there is a deeply rooted problem, that must be resolved as soon as possible. Delays in updating international frameworks, which is to the benefit of particular groups and countries should be considered as a serious signal for international corruption and systemic malpractices. (Stoltenberg 2020, 84)

This constitutes the duality of information operations of NATO, some simplifying NATO information operations to merely "destroying in any means and ways the adversary or potential adversary by taking away their free will by pressuring them one way or another" and the rereading of the military function to it being "to mobilize all spheres of influence as economic, electronic, cyber, psychological, military, etc. to function as one in finding a way to use strategic communication and other ways to receive enough information about the adversary or potential adversary in order to have dialogue and prevent conflict/dissolve the issues explicit to the perception of the given country being an adversary/ potential adversary in order to best secure one's own safety/security". Seemingly, this is a reminder of the Gerasimov Doctrine definition of informational conflicts, but with a diplomatic twist (Gerasimov 2013).

Conclusion

In conclusion, with the current chaos around the Ukraine crisis this is the way, through which NATO information operations can be reassessed and reread for its better reapplication for foreign matters, as well as, domestic transparency: diplomacy to prevail. NATO is still a work in progress and these shortcomings can be viewed as trial and error becoming checks and balances. Bulgarian relations with neighbors have in some instances improved, but in other instances not only foreign relations, but also internal affairs were directly hampered by delegating sovereignty to EU and NATO, but mainly due to a lack of accountability, corruption, etc. This includes the exacerbated relations between Bulgaria and Russia. This paradox must be further examined, explained, contained and measures have to be taken to prevent chaos in the form of extremism/terrorism/radicalism to spur from groups, countries, Alliances and individuals, because the agenda of peace goes hand in hand with diplomacy and only development in peace is profitable to all. The war in Ukraine is an international conflicts resolution failure. Diplomacy has to prevail.

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