

The Potential Role of News Literacy in Security Studies Curriculum

An ability to assess incoming information critically is important not only for media or general civic education but has become crucial for many spheres of public life. In this paper we would like to examine a potential role for News Literacy curriculum (or its elements) in the field of security studies, as well as a broader sphere of education for security. The argument will proceed as follows: first we look at a fairly recent phenomena of securitization of news, its motives and implications. Second we shortly analyze the current characteristics of both security and media environments to provide better explanation for the news' securitization process. Finally, we propose a new concept to define this emerging security sphere connected with news and disinformation: News Security and answer the question of how News Literacy can be used to strengthen social resilience in this sphere.

Looking at the evolution of the global security environment in the post-Cold War period we can clearly see the trends towards securitization of news. The securitization theory has been developed by the Copenhagen School in the 1990s. It describes a discursive process through which new issues are being taken away from the realm of "normal politics" and established as "matters of national security". When an issue becomes successfully securitized, it relates to the category of survival, which means that public authorities receive the mandate to take extraordinary measures in order to deal with it effectively. (Buzan, Hansen 2009: 213-214). Securitization theory provides a sound explanation of the way in which the concept of "security" (on both national and international level) is being widened by a range of "securitization actors" (governments, political leaders, lobby groups, civil society, academics etc.) to include new problems, objects and issue areas which previously have not been considered relevant for national security policymaking. Relatively recent examples of this process include the firm establishment of energy, environmental or food

security as viable objects of interest to both policymakers and academics working on security issues.

We can observe similar dynamics at work concerning news as a reference object of security. Such terms as "information warfare", "disinformation" and "information security" have been established as integral parts of security studies' vocabulary. Prime evidence for news' securitization can be found in provision of strategic documents adopted in a number of countries. We can cite several examples. In December 2016 the Russian Federation has adopted a new Doctrine of Information Security (Doctrine of Information Security 2016). It identifies "national interests in the information sphere", among them: "providing the Russian and international community with reliable information on the State policy of the Russian Federation and its official position on socially significant events in Russia and in the world, and applying information technologies to ensure the national security of the Russian Federation in the sphere of culture". (Doctrine of Information Security 2016: 8/d). When discussing "major information threats", the document's authors state that: "Intelligence services of certain States are increasingly using information and psychological tools with a view to destabilizing the internal political and social situation in various regions across the world, undermining sovereignty and violating the territorial integrity of other States." (Doctrine of Information Security 2016: par.12).

Polish White Paper on National Security from 2013 includes an observation that: "the influence of media on shaping of social attitudes and opinions is significant. This creates a threat of manipulation and possibility of stoking social reactions threatening state's internal security" (White Paper 2013: 138). This corresponds with a wider NATO policy of putting emphasis on information aspects of its operations. It has been reflected in the establishment in 2014 of the Alliance's Strategic Communications Center of Excellence in Riga (NATO StratCom COE). This institution's mandate is premised on an assumption that: "Strategic communication is an integral part of the efforts to achieve the Alliance's political and military objectives, thus it is increasingly important that the Alliance communicates in an appropriate, timely, accurate and responsive manner on its evolving roles, objectives and missions." (NATO StratCom). The strategic communications themselves are understood as "(...) coordinated and appropriate use of NATO communications activities and capabilities in

support of Alliance policies, operations and activities, and in order to advance NATO's aims." (NATO StratCom).

These developments naturally raise the question of what factors drive the securitization of news? To answer it properly we need to look at several trends. Propaganda, disinformation and agitation have always accompanied international conflict. However some defining characteristics of current armed conflicts make their information sphere more relevant. Primary among them is the asymmetric character of most of them. It comes in at least several varieties. For the Western countries, most military endeavors undertaken in the post-Cold War period can be characterized as "wars of choice" rather than "wars of necessity". For Western publics these conflicts have been mostly remote affairs with unclear relevance for their everyday perceptions of security. This attitude has been interestingly described by Colin McInnes through the: "war as a spectator sport" metaphor. (Heuser 2010: 452) For that reason the building and maintenance of public support for expeditionary operations became an important, if not crucial, element of the "war effort". At the same time military forces intervening in civil wars and waging counter-insurgency operations have to convince the local population to their cause. At the same time what is also called "information warfare" became an important element of great power rivalries. Both Russia and China are believed to be widely using disinformation and wider strategic communications to further their interests and strengthen their positions in disputes involving United States. (Laity, Nimmo et.al 2015) This is an example of an asymmetry of a different kind. Although Russia and (especially) China are great powers in their own right, they still cannot fully match American military and economic preponderance. Thus, it is not surprising that they are reaching for a wide variety of indirect tools (sometimes collectively described as "hybrid warfare") to wage conflict. In this context information operations seem to be cost-effective way to counter opposing side's main strengths.(Giles 2016: 53)

Due to all aforementioned factors the infosphere has become an important battlefield in several contemporary conflicts. The most often cited examples are Russian operations in Ukraine and propaganda activities of the Islamic State. Both of them present interesting cases illustrating the strengths and weaknesses of information campaigns undertaken by both state and non-state actors. A report by NATO's StratCom COE strongly

concludes that: "The information campaign was central to Russia's operation in Ukraine. Taking over Crimea without any military confrontation demonstrated that the concept of well-constructed influence operations is a very essential part of Russian operational planning and that Russian military forces have a strategic communications mindset applied down to the tactical level." (StratCom 2014: 32) Naturally, these actions are not confined to one particular military operation. Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss detail how the Russian state has "weaponized information" through such actions as establishment of their own news organizations (e.g. RT, Sputnik), social media activity (including the practice of trolling) or spinning Western media (Pomerantsev, Weiss 2014: 14-18). The other case, concerning what can be called "cyber Jihad" is even more illustrative. Psychological influence is at the very core of the concept of terrorism itself. It can be claimed, that terrorists and their organizations have always been concerned with publicity, media and public opinion. Current digital media environment has created new opportunities to scale up terrorist propaganda. Social media became a new and important battlefield in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with Israel Defense Forces' interactive media branch engaged in online tit-for-tat with its opposite numbers in Hamas and other Palestinian armed organizations (Kerr 2014). Arguably, the most sophisticated terrorist media enterprise is in possession of Islamic State. Throughout the years this organization (going through its different iterations) has built up a large, professional, and strikingly flexible media operation. (Whiteside 2016) What is interesting, looking at ISIS structure the media branch is being treated somewhat like "special operations forces" in Western militaries. Several future leaders of the "Caliphate" had worked in it before being promoted to important command positions. (Whiteside 2016: 23-24) It is beyond doubt that effective propaganda has been among leading factors leading to ISIS's spectacular success in building a de-facto (if short lived) statelet in Iraq and Syria. It allowed for both recruitment of new fighters and instilling fear in opponents.

Naturally, the process of news' securitization is taking place in a particular media environment which itself is undergoing rapid transformation. Thus it is useful to shortly reflect on many features shaping and influencing current media landscape. There is a wide consensus that most important among them are globalization and digitalization. Many

researchers propose a notion that takes into account or confirms the assumptions of technological determinism or even technoutopianism while analyzing developing media environment. However, for us as educators, much more valuable is a look at the features of current media systems through the lens of the human factor, analyzing the new role of the user and the media audience.

Therefore, for the purpose of this text, we will adopt a view of two authors on which of the factors are the most important ones, especially in context of the aforementioned new security landscape. The first one, described by Richard Hornik, embraces the issue of the empowerment of the public and four challenges to civil society related with this shift: 1) the difficulty to sort out reliable from fabricated information linked to the overwhelming amount of information 2) the possibility to create and share materials that look authoritative 3) the exacerbation of the conflict between speed and accuracy, based on increasing speed of news circulation 4) the growth of the information that supports public's pre-existing ideas (Hornik 2016: 8). This approach is characterized by strong focus on the public and its active role in producing and receiving information. The direction of this activity depends on many factors, including the level of digital awareness, education, personal bias, etc.

The second view on current media environment, by Henry Jenkins, is strongly focused on emerging cultural practices and trends. Therefore the current media is: 1) *innovative* due to profound and prolonged technological change 2) *convergent* in a way which is shaped simultaneously top-down by the massive media conglomerated and bottom-up by the participatory consumers 3) *everyday* because media technologies are fully integrated into our everyday social interactions 4) *appropriative* because they allow to sample, quote, repurpose and recontextualize recorded sounds, images and words in default of consistent ethics of appropriation 5) *networked* as media technologies are interconnected and communication occurs at many levels according to many-to-many model 6) *global* due to the global scale of media content flow 7) *generational* since young generation and old generation live in fundamentally different media environments 8) *unequal* as marked by new site of privilege and inequality linked to the capacity to access and adjust quickly to new communities (Jenkins 2006). Aforementioned media trends have been linked by Jenkins with participatory culture which is very easily transferable to the education level.

Although all the elements mentioned by Jenkins are crucial for understanding the global media environment at the beginning of the 21st century, we consider that for efficient teaching of News Literacy in the context of security we should specifically employ such spheres as: a) everyday use – to integrate news consumption patterns with News Literacy awareness b) networking tendency – to create a community engaged to security content in news platforms c) generational aspect – by applying case-studies and teaching materials relevant for the media consumption patterns.

In addition, it is necessary to pay attention to those factors that make citizen's exposure to disinformation and misinformation higher. First and foremost, the trend of participation, which is Jenkins' main consideration, means greater engagement and activity of individual media consumers, which is not always leading to true citizen empowerment. Moreover, this activity may also be an additional catalyst for the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation. The difference between activity, participation and empowerment is, of course, the general framework for discussing the relationships between individuals and news dissemination from the point of view of security.

In turn, from the characteristics of the media environment listed by Jenkins, the main points of inflammation may be: convergence and appropriative nature of digital media. Jenkins defines convergence as “ the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who would go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they wanted” (Jenkins 2009). Its two levels: top-down (which is an open space for institutional or state activity) and bottom-up (the area dominated by those with sufficient digital skills, but accessible for every media consumer) are very likely to allow and facilitate the proliferation of disinformation and misinformation. The practices of appropriation are based on recontextualization of content which is particularly challenging when it comes to the authenticity, accountability and verification measures and opens an ambiguous and multidimensional level for propaganda, misinformation and disinformation.

Our inquiry taken up to this point has proven that many characteristics of both current media landscape and contemporary armed conflicts complement each other in creating a permissive environment for news to become a reference object of security and

the creation of a new sphere of security dealing with information issues. As securitization of news is a quite recent phenomena it is only natural that proper conceptualization of this security sphere proves to be challenging. Probably the most common approach is to define it as information security. However, this concept has a heavy focus on technical matters pertaining to what is also called cybersecurity. It often deals more with safety and integrity of technical systems used to process, store and exchange information. In Western thinking these two areas are often treated separately from one another under the rubrics of cybersecurity (viewed as security of IT systems) and Information Operations (dealing with the content of information and its usage for affecting attitudes and opinions). At the same time the Russian doctrine treats both of these as inherently integrated under a common rubric of information warfare. What is interesting from our point of view is the distinction made in Russian publications between information-technical warfare - dealing with breaching IT systems and information-psychological warfare which consists of manipulating enemy's morale and decision-making. (Giles 2016: 6-13). In order to precisely define the point in the broad information security landscape for which elements of News Literacy education would be most relevant we would like to propose a new concept of News Security. We would define it as a state in which the public is protected from disinformation and manipulation of news conducted by malicious actors to achieve political, economic or military effects.

We can now explore what are the main strategies employed in different states to ensure News Security. We can identify two ideal types, representing opposing ends of an axis stretching from control to freedom of information. One would be an authoritarian strategy of information control. This is what Russia and China are treating their populations with. It is based on a premise that state should protect its citizens from disinformation through a strict control of the news flow. Naturally, this is also a convenient cover for censorship providing justification for lack of freedom of expression. On the opposite side of this spectrum is the liberal model, espoused by many Western democracies. It basically posits that freedom of expression and media pluralism will create conditions under which the disinformation will be uncovered, debunked and falsified. However, recent trends described as the rise of post-truth politics in the West lead many to believe that such a

laissez-faire approach may be insufficient to counter information influence operations mounted by the likes of Russia or IS. Thus some new approaches are being investigated. One is to create own counter-narratives to basically go to an information counter-offensive.(Giles 2016: 57) The other is to create public institutions which would effectively police the media environment, uncovering disinformation and debunking it (as for example in a much discussed case of Czech "anti-fake news unit"; Tait 2016). The final approach seems to be most promising and it amounts to inculcating news consumers themselves to disinformation through proper education and development of critical thinking skills. That is a role for News Literacy to fill as suggested by Richard Hornik (Hornik 2016).

In our opinion, according to democratic values and in line with the liberal model discussed above, we should treat News Literacy as a vaccination which, due to the more personalized and participatory level of media consumption, would be probably more efficient than creating new system devoted to this field. What is more, the empowerment of the audience may lead to creation of a grass-root News Security network and adjust to local, temporary and specific needs. While the content is filtered by personalized search engines, we should try to focus on personalized and adjusted solution to protect the credibility, particularly in terms of News Security.

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