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The Policy of Ensuring the Information and Psychological Security of the CSTO in the Context of Global Strategic Competition

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Abstract. By now, it has been widely acknowledged that the global processes of digitalization, which began approximately in the second quarter of the twentieth century, have led to a radical rethinking of the theoretical and methodological foundations of contemporary conflicts, as well as of political practice in the field of international security. The modern round of strategic competition, in which the post-Soviet space is one of the main arenas of international confrontation, is characterized by the widespread use of a complex of hybrid methods of influencing the enemy, in which information and psychological influence occupy a central place. The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is currently the only mechanism for ensuring collective security in the post-Soviet space, therefore, the intensification of joint efforts of the member states in the field of ensuring collective information and psychological security is today one of the priorities of the organization's activities. The aim of the present article is twofold: firstly, to identify the place and role of the information and psychological component in the collective security system at the CSTO level; and secondly, to formulate a theoretical and methodological platform for raising the political status of these issues on the agenda of the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly (CSTO PA) (in the coming years. In addition to the general scientific methodology (analysis, synthesis, induction, analogy), special methods and approaches (comparative analysis, content analysis, critical discourse analysis, document analysis, informational and non-functional approaches) were employed in the research. In addition to official documents, domestic and foreign scientific literature on the research topic, the author used working materials from meetings of the Expert Advisory Council at the CSTO PA, of which he is a member. The article provides a comprehensive perspective on the formation and isolation of the information and psychological components of collective security within the CSTO and, for the first time, an analysis of information and psychological security from the perspective of the current agenda of the CSTO PA. The role of the information factor in modern conditions of strategic competition is revealed. The theoretical contours of information and psychological security are defined, and the author's definition of this concept is given. The information and psychological aspects of ensuring collective security at the CSTO level are investigated. The results of the analysis of issues related to the provision of information and psychological security in the current Program of Activities of the CSTO PA are presented. In 2025, the Program of Activities of the CSTO PA on the Approximation and Harmonization of National Legislation of the Member States for 2021–2025 is being completed. The conducted research contributes to the development of draft legislative initiatives for inclusion in the Program of Activities of the CSTO PA for 2026–2030.

Key words: strategic competition, information warfare, information and psychological security, Collective Security Treaty Organization, post-Soviet space, cognitive warfare

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Политика обеспечения информационно-психологической безопасности ОДКБ в условиях глобальной стратегической конкуренции

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Аннотация. К настоящему моменту уже произошло полноценное осознание того факта, что глобальные процессы цифровизации, начавшиеся примерно во второй четверти XX в., привели к коренному переосмыслению теоретико-методологических основ современных конфликтов, а также политической практики в области обеспечения международной безопасности. Современный виток стратегической конкуренции, в котором постсоветское пространство выступает одной из основных арен международного противоборства, характеризуется повсеместным использованием комплекса гибридных методов воздействия на противника, в котором информационно-психологический компонент занимает одно из центральных мест. Организация Договора о коллективной безопасности (ОДКБ) на сегодняшний день является единственным механизмом обеспечения коллективной безопасности на постсоветском пространстве, поэтому активизация совместных усилий государств-членов в области обеспечения безопасности в информационно-психологической сфере является одним из приоритетов деятельности организации. Цель исследования — выявить место и роль информационно-психологического компонента в системе коллективной безопасности на уровне ОДКБ, а также сформулировать теоретико-методологическую платформу для повышения политического статуса данных вопросов в Повестке деятельности Парламентской Ассамблеи ОДКБ (ПА ОДКБ) на ближайшие годы. Помимо общенаучной методологии (анализ, синтез, индукция, аналогия) автор опирался на специальные методы и подходы (контент-анализ, критический дискурс-анализ, анализ документов, информационный и неофункциональный подходы). Наряду с официальными документами, российскими и зарубежными научными публикациями по теме исследования автор использовал рабочие материалы заседаний Экспертно-консультативного совета при ПА ОДКБ, членом которого он является. Предложен комплексный взгляд на формирование и обособление информационно-психологического компонента коллективной безопасности на уровне ОДКБ, а также впервые предложен анализ информационно-психологической безопасности в ракурсе текущей Повестки деятельности ПА ОДКБ. Выявлена роль информационного фактора в современных условиях стратегической конкуренции. Определены теоретические контуры информационно-психологической безопасности и дано авторское определение данному понятию. Исследованы информационно-психологические аспекты обеспечения коллективной безопасности на уровне ОДКБ. Представлены результаты анализа вопросов, касающихся обеспечения информационно-психологической безопасности в текущей Программе деятельности ПА ОДКБ. В 2025 г. завершается Программа деятельности ПА ОДКБ по сближению и гармонизации национального законодательства государств-членов на 2021–2025 гг. Проведенное исследование способствует разработке проектов законодотворческих инициатив для внесения в Программу деятельности ПА ОДКБ на 2026–2030 гг.

Ключевые слова: стратегическая конкуренция, информационная война, Организация Договора о коллективной безопасности, постсоветское пространство, когнитивная война

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Introduction

Today, the model of international conflicts is already quite obvious and does not require any elaborate scientific justification. It comprises six dimensions: four classical (land, sea, air and outer space) and two that have emerged as a result of the global development and spread of information technologies: informational and cognitive. The latter is closely linked to the rapid development of recommendation and generative systems based on artificial intelligence (AI), which by their appearance marked the beginning of a new era in the history of propaganda, associated with unprecedented possibilities for influencing the psyche and behaviour of individuals.

One of the founding fathers of modern propaganda theory, Jacques Elull, defined it in his classic work as “a set of methods used by an organized group that wants to achieve the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals united and organized through psychological manipulation” (Elull, 1965, p. 61). Today, information and psychological warfare is an integral part and one of the leading factors of strategic competition on the world stage. Global digitalization processes play a special role in this, resulting in drastic changes in the structure of information production, distribution and consumption. According to K.N. Lobanov, “the state of international relations in the modern world is increasingly determined by the consequences of the information and psychological struggle in which the leading actors of world politics have become involved” (Lobanov, 2020, p. 36).

The transition in the United States, which began in 2010 from a long-term soft power policy of engagement to methods of strategic propaganda, based on the purposeful discrediting of opponents and enemies of the United States in the information environment, in the post-Soviet space was marked by the widespread use of direct forms of informational

and psychological influence (Tsvetkova, 2015, p. 130). As some researchers point out, this trend has led to a significant increase in challenges and threats to collective security in the post-Soviet space, which have been targeted by the integration policy of Russia and its allies (Petrishchev, 2021, p. 126).

The centuries-old historical, cultural, political and economic potential of Eurasia has proven to be an insurmountable obstacle to the global dominance of the West (Mikhalev & Rakhimov, 2024). Unable to use military force directly, the United States and its allies have focused on using unconventional tools. The wave of color revolutions that swept through the post-Soviet countries, among others, clearly demonstrated, on the one hand, the power and possibilities of information and psychological influence based on modern digital technologies, and, on the other hand, the determination of the collective West to complete in its favor another round of strategic competition in the vast geopolitical space that arose after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The start of the special military operation in February 2022 marked a new milestone in the understanding of the fundamental foundations of national and international security. Originated in the early 20th century and the concept of “Ukraine — anti-Russia,” which gained all its power in the post-Soviet period, and which for decades had been fueled by generous ideological and financial support from the West, finally presented an eschatological challenge not only to Russia’s vision of justice in international relations (Kaveshnikov, 2023), but also to its national security, leaving no choice but to use military force (De Larosiere, 2024). After that, it became quite obvious not only to scientists and experts, but also at the level of common sense, how thin the line between military and non-military means of competition in the international arena is today, and how significant the role of the information

and psychological factors is in ensuring national and international security.

The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is currently the only viable mechanism for ensuring collective security in the former Soviet Union, and the protection of the political sovereignty and decades-old economic ties of its member states largely depends on its effectiveness. As the Executive Secretary of the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly (CSTO PA), S.V. Pospelov, rightly points out, model lawmaking plays a leading role in this.¹ The timely implementation of the latest approaches and methods of international competition into political practice is therefore identified as the key to building an effective system of collective security.

The Role of Information in the Modern Conditions of Strategic Competition

In 1948, in his political memorandum on policy planning, George Kennan called on the US leadership to abandon the idea of distinguishing between “Peace” and “War.”² The main idea of G. Kennan was that the rivalry between states is on a continuum of actions ranging from military conflicts to friendly relations. This implies a wide range of influences on the opponent, including ideological, diplomatic, economic and other non-military instruments. This idea of the American political strategist was fully revealed more than 50 years later in the modern concept of ‘hybrid warfare,’ which involves inflicting complex damage to the enemy using military, diplomatic, economic, informational, psychological and ideological means of influence.³

¹ Pospelov S. V. The Role of the CSTO Model Lawmaking in Responding to the Growing Challenges and Threats from the Eurasian Arc of Instability // *International Affairs*. 2021. No. 2. (In Russian). URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/2474> (accessed: 16.10.2024).

² Kennan G. Policy Planning Staff Memorandum // The U.S. Department of State. May 4, 1948. URL: <https://archive.law.upenn.edu/live/files/9964-kennan-memo-political-warfarepdf> (accessed: 16.02.2024).

³ Mattis J., Hoffman F. Future Warfare: The Rise of Hybrid Wars // *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*. 2005.

Competitive activity is located in a fairly wide range of international relations, the poles of which are cooperation and war, while not crossing the line of direct armed conflict and violence. According to experts, such competition includes espionage, economic struggle, theft of intellectual property, confrontation in the information environment, sanctions, legal coercion, positioning of the armed forces, diplomatic and military maneuvers and threats, intimidation, and bribery of the political elite.⁴

Thus, strategic competition should be understood as the competitive activity of a state (or states) against another state (or states) aimed at realizing national interests, which is in the range of actions between cooperation and war.

In the modern world, it is the information sphere that plays a key role in strategic competition. Back in the late 1970s, B. Blechman and S. Kaplan, in their joint work pointed out that “Success largely depends on the effective use of the information environment, which makes it possible to project national power on a global scale, solving the tasks of deterrence, coercion, and confidence-building and the motivation for action” (Blechman & Kaplan, 1978, p. 27).

The contemporary competitive environment is characterized by the deep penetration of digital technologies and social networks, which make it possible to establish effective communication with an individual, thereby exerting an unprecedented impact on public opinion by adequately synchronizing diverse activities in all areas of public life with its professional communication support (Pashentsev, 2017, p. 167).

The importance of the information factor in international confrontation has recently been consolidated in a number of official documents

Vol. 131, no. 11. URL: <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2005/november/future-warfare-rise-hybrid-wars> (accessed: 16.10.2024).

⁴ Van de Velde J. What Is ‘Strategic Competition’ and Are We Still in It? // *The SAIS Review of International Affairs*. February 2, 2024. URL: <https://saisreview.sais.jhu.edu/what-is-strategic-competition-and-are-we-still-in-it/> (accessed: 16.10.2024).

at the national and international levels. The NATO 2022 Strategic Concept recognizes the key role of cyberspace in countering modern threats.⁵ In the updated Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation⁶ for the first time in the Russian official discourse the term ‘informational and psychological impact’ is used.

All this, according to the researchers, dictates the need to create legal regimes for the securitization of the information space (Ramich & Piskunov, 2022). Therefore, the development of a collective policy in the field of information and psychological security in the CSTO area of responsibility is one of the main priorities today.

Theoretical Contours of Information and Psychological Security

In the modern theory of information warfare, it is customary to distinguish its information-technical and information-psychological aspects, each of which has its own relatively separate subject (Trotsenko, 2016).

A separate paper is devoted to the issue of clearly defining the subject boundaries of the concept of information and psychological security and the theoretical boundaries of the concept of ‘information and psychological security’ (Vykhodets & Pantserev, 2022). Here, we will limit ourselves to individual comments on this issue.

The isolation of the informational-psychological component is the logical result of the theoretical differentiation of the initial concept of information warfare (Toffler & Toffler, 1995) in the process of its development and refinement in a series of author’s concepts

⁵ The NATO 2022 Strategic Concept // NATO. June 29, 2022. (In Russian). URL: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/290622-strategic-concept-ru.pdf (accessed: 19.02.2024).

⁶ The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (approved by the President of the Russian Federation V.V. Putin on March 31, 2023) // Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.mid.ru/ru/detail-material-page/1860586/> (accessed: 16.02.2024).

that encompass the features of modern confrontation in the information environment: ‘netwar,’⁷ ‘network-centric warfare,’⁸ ‘cyber war’ (Clarke & Knake, 2010), ‘mental warfare’ (Ilitsky, 2021) and ‘cognitive warfare.’⁹

And currently, information and psychological warfare should be understood as the sphere of international relations associated with the destructive impact in the information environment on public opinion formation and decision-making systems, as well as on the psyche of officials, public figures and the population.

The impact can be carried out by a fairly wide range of forces and means:

— special information and psychological operations (PSYOP),

— the dissemination of fakes, the discrediting of the political elite in the public space, destructive effects on public values, the education system,

— the activities of foreign media, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the dissemination of certain ideological and socio-cultural models through business communities, academic and educational structures.

The main targets of information and psychological impact are the information agenda (control over information resources, production and distribution of certain content), as well as the individual psyche (the use of manipulative methods and techniques, including the employment of advanced information technologies) (Vykhodets, 2024, p. 50).

By information and psychological security, we will understand the state of protection of the

⁷ Arquilla J., Ronfeldt D. The Advent of Netwar // In Athena’s Camp: Preparing for Conflict in the Information Age. RAND Corporation, 1997. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/mr880osd-rc.17?seq=2> (accessed: 16.10.2024).

⁸ Cebrowski A. K., Garstka J. J. Network-Centric Warfare: Its Origin and Future // U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings. 1998. Vol. 124, no. 1. P. 28–35.

⁹ Claverie B., de Cluzel F. The Cognitive Warfare Concept // NATO Innovation Hub. 2021. URL: https://web.archive.org/web/20220310080151/https://innovationhub-act.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/CW%20article%20Claverie%20du%20Cluzel%20final_0.pdf (accessed: 16.10.2024).

existing system of public opinion formation and decision-making in the state, as well as the psyche of officials, public figures and the population from destructive ideological and psychological influences in the information environment.

Information and Psychological Aspects of Ensuring Collective Security at the CSTO Level

It should be emphasized at once that issues related to the development of a collective policy to counter destructive psychological and ideological influence are included in the overall set of tasks to ensure information security and digital sovereignty of the member states (Bondurovsky & Pospelov, 2024). At the same time, the range of necessary collective actions in this area is largely related to the need to regulate digital platforms, which, according to some researchers, is associated with difficulties in harmonizing the transnational nature of activities on the one hand and the peculiarities of legislation and law enforcement practice on the other (Larionova & Doronin, 2024), which often acts as an obstacle to the development of consensus solutions at the international level.

Nevertheless, the first steps towards conceptualizing information security as an independent sphere of collective security within the CSTO were initiated in the mid-2000s. This issue is described in detail in one of our works (Vykhodets, 2024, pp. 336–351). Consequently, in this article we will briefly outline the main milestones of this process (Table).

Thus, by now, a regulatory framework has been developed at the CSTO level, in which information and psychological aspects have the character of an independent component of collective security.

Information and Psychological Security from the Perspective of the CSTO PA Activity Program for 2021–2025

The current Program of Activities of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Collective Security Treaty Organization for the Approximation and Harmonization of the

National Legislation of the CSTO member states for 2021–2025 was approved by Resolution No. 13-8 of the 13th Plenary Session of the CSTO PA dated November 30, 2020.¹⁰

It is planned to adopt 35 regulatory legal acts, model laws and recommendations for the current five-year period. The relevant bodies of the member states (parliaments, parliamentary delegations of the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly) have equal rights when initiating the development and adoption of normative legal acts. Among the member states, the Republic of Belarus is the leader in the number of initiatives; the 2021–2025 Program contains 16 points proposed by this country. It is followed by Russia with 5 initiatives, Tajikistan with 2, and the initiatives of Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan are absent from the 2021–2025 Program. The structural divisions of the CSTO itself have initiated 17 proposals, which are included in the current Program.¹¹

A meaningful analysis of the current Program indicates that serious attention is being paid to the information aspects of collective security at the CSTO level. Thus, the number of initiatives related to information technology and information-psychological aspects of collective security is 13 units, or slightly less than 40%. Moreover, 5 of the 13 initiatives are directly related to the information and psychological sphere and are aimed at countering external destructive attempts to revise and distort historical events and the outcome of the Great Patriotic War, and the rehabilitation of Nazism; creation of common foundations of military-patriotic education; the development of common principles of Internet regulation; the protection of electoral sovereignty.

¹⁰ The Program of Activities of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Collective Security Treaty Organization for the Approximation and Harmonization of the National Legislation of the CSTO Member States for 2021–2025 // CSTO Parliamentary Assembly. December 18, 2023. (In Russian). URL: <https://paodkb.org/documents/programma-deyatelnosti-parlamentskoy-assamblei-odkb-po-sblizheniyu-43f64b44-9f0d-419d-babe-aa4bfbc0299> (accessed: 15.09.2024).

¹¹ Several CSTO member states can contribute to one initiative.

Conceptualization of information security as an independent sphere of collective security of the CSTO

Name of the document	Date and place of adoption	Main theses
The decision to establish a Working Group on Information Policy and Information Security	November 2006, meeting of the Committee of Secretaries of the Security Councils	The Working Group is assigned the functions of coordinating joint actions to identify common problems in the field of information policy and security
Decision of the CSTO Collective Security Council	December 2010, meeting of the CSTO Collective Security Council	For the first time, tasks related to the field of information and psychological security are separately indicated in the list of priorities for ensuring information security
CSTO Collective Security Strategies for the period up to 2025	October 2016, meeting of the CSTO Collective Security Council	Recognition of the status of one of the elements of modern power confrontation due to the informational and psychological impact
Agreement on Cooperation in the field of Information Security	November 2017, meeting of the Heads of the Member States	For the first time, the official documents of the CSTO define the concept of “destructive information impact”
The Model Law “On Information Warfare against Terrorism and Extremism”	October 2018, meeting of the CSTO PA	For the first time in the official documents of the CSTO, the term ‘information and psychological confrontation’ was used
The Model Law “On Information Security”	November 2021, meeting of the CSTO PA	The main threats to collective information security include a number of threats of an informational and psychological nature

Sources: compiled by R.S. Vykhodets based on: Legislative Activity of the CSTO PA // CSTO PA. (In Russian). URL: <https://paodkb.org/documents> (accessed: 16.08.2024).

Thus, in the Program of activities of the CSTO PA for 2021–2025, issues related to information and psychological aspects of collective security are raised as priorities only by Russia and Belarus. The remaining CSTO partners join the general consensus either in the context of historical retrospect (countering the rehabilitation of Nazism and the distortion of historical truth), or on issues directly related to preserving the power of political elites — protecting electoral processes and sovereignty in the CSTO member states.

In recent times, a considerable number of Russian and foreign researchers have directed their attention towards the special role of artificial intelligence technologies in modern information and psychological warfare (Goldstein, 2021; Pashentsev, 2023). And, as is frequently observed, many expert ideas quickly become the basis for official documents. Notably, an initiative related to artificial intelligence in the context of national security appeared at the organization level for the first time in the CSTO PA’s Program of Activities for 2021–2025.

A significant increase in the number of actors in information and psychological warfare, a multiple increase in manipulative content while reducing its cost by automating its creation and distribution to target groups, dynamic personalization of content in real time, and other factors determine modern opportunities for the rapid dissemination of malicious information with wide audience coverage, which raises problems of human behavior management in the context of security and free will in the digital world. As some researchers point out, in modern information and psychological warfare, the emphasis is shifting from frontal propaganda methods to working with target audiences with the intention of artificially neuroticizing and psychotizing certain groups of the population by ‘stuffing’ of traumatic content (Lobanov & Selin, 2022).

The profound impact of AI technologies on global politics and international security was acknowledged in the Joint Statement of the Council of the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly in June 2024, which emphasized the necessity to introduce and use the best practices of the

member states in the field of artificial intelligence in order to strengthen information and cognitive security.¹³

Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be noted that today the issues of information and psychological warfare have become firmly entrenched in the CSTO's political agenda for ensuring collective security. The analysis of the Collective Security Treaty Organization's collective policy and model legislation makes it possible to include the following information and psychological

challenges and threats that currently have an absolute priority:

- extremist and terrorist activities in the information environment,
- production, public dissemination and consumption of deliberately false and/or misleading information,
- external purposeful attempts to revise history and distort the historical truth, first of all, the results of the Great Patriotic War,
- lack of uniform principles for the development, implementation and use of information systems based on artificial intelligence,
- destructive actions aimed at discrediting the principles of patriotism and the traditional spiritual and moral values of the CSTO member states,
- external destructive interference in electoral processes.

¹³ The Council of the CSTO PA Adopted a Statement in Connection with the Development of Artificial Intelligence Technologies // CSTO Parliamentary Assembly. June 3, 2024. (In Russian). URL: <https://paodkb.org/events/sovet-pa-odkb-prinyal-zayavlenie-v-svyazi> (accessed: 17.10.2024).

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