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EDITOR'S NOTE

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Dear readers,

We are happy to welcome you to the 9th edition of the Bulletin of Linguistic and Intercultural Studies (BSLI). As always, our publication remains an open-access, double-blind peer-reviewed journal published twice a year under the auspices of the "Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence Academy (ANIMV). BSLI publishes articles across the broad fields of foreign languages, cultures, and civilizations—with particular focus on their relevance to intelligence and security.

The contributions compiled in this issue explore a wide range of themes, from intercultural communication and cultural-civilizational studies to historical and anthropological insights, case studies, and global developments. The articles originate from the 2025 edition of ANISTUD, the ANIMV students' scientific communications session, and from graduate papers in the *Introduction to Intelligence Analysis* program at the Faculty of Intelligence Studies. We are also pleased to include an article written by students from the "Nicolae Bălcescu" Land Forces Academy in Sibiu, reflecting our efforts to strengthen ANIMV's broader academic community in the field of intercultural communication in intelligence and security. Additionally, one article is co-authored by a PhD-level advanced intelligence instructor at ANIMV, highlighting our close connection with our students. Each article enhances our collective understanding of how language, culture, and civilization intersect in intelligence and security contexts, demonstrating how two seemingly distinct fields can offer valuable insights when combined.

Through this issue, we reaffirm BSLI's dedication to providing an open forum for rigorous, peer-reviewed research. We aim to support ANIMV's extended community — including students, professors, researchers, and practitioners interested in linguistic and intercultural dynamics — by bridging academic inquiry with practical relevance. This includes fields related to intelligence and security, cultural understanding, and global trends.

We sincerely thank all the authors for their valuable contributions and the reviewers for their thorough and careful work. We also encourage readers to stay engaged and contribute to future issues with original studies, reviews, and reflections that support the spirit and mission of BSLI.

With appreciation,

Advanced intelligence instructor
Ana-Maria SURUGIU,
PhD candidate
Editor-in-Chief
The Bulletin of Linguistic and Intercultural Studies

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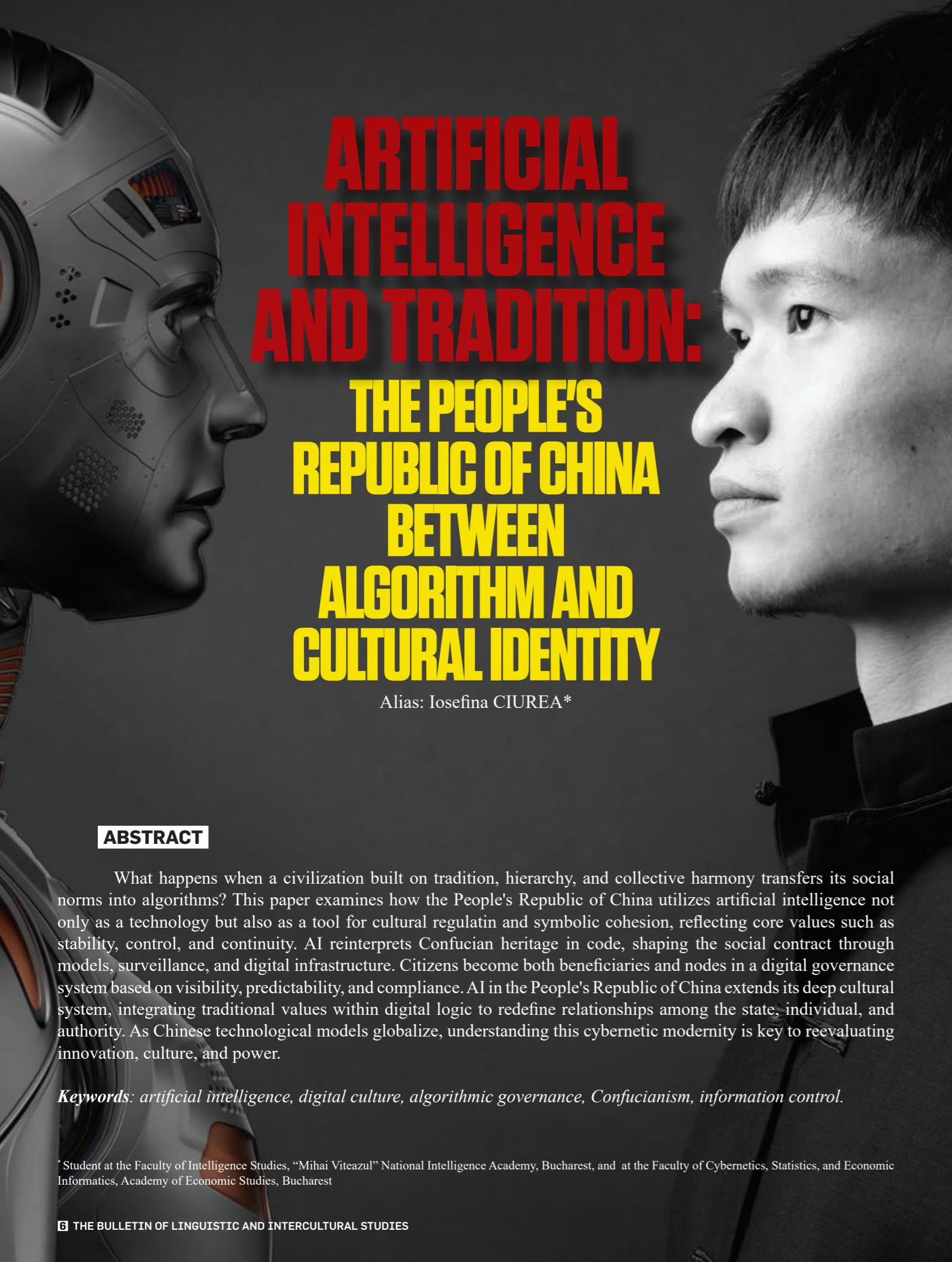
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND TRADITION:

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA BETWEEN ALGORITHM AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

What happens when a civilization built on tradition, hierarchy, and collective harmony transfers its social norms into algorithms? This paper examines how the People's Republic of China utilizes artificial intelligence not only as a technology but also as a tool for cultural regulatin and symbolic cohesion, reflecting core values such as stability, control, and continuity. AI reinterprets Confucian heritage in code, shaping the social contract through models, surveillance, and digital infrastructure. Citizens become both beneficiaries and nodes in a digital governance system based on visibility, predictability, and compliance. AI in the People's Republic of China extends its deep cultural system, integrating traditional values within digital logic to redefine relationships among the state, individual, and authority. As Chinese technological models globalize, understanding this cybernetic modernity is key to reevaluating innovation, culture, and power.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, digital culture, algorithmic governance, Confucianism, information control.

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Introduction

What does a five-thousand-year-old civilization look like when it engraves its thinking into algorithms? There may be no clear answer, but it is precisely where the cracks between tradition and technology appear that we begin to understand what kind of world is being born before our eyes. For centuries, the People's Republic of China was a cultural system centered on order, repetition, and tradition. In this world, rules did not change but were perpetuated, a universe where time flowed circularly and change was treated with suspicion. Confucius was not just a philosopher; he did not think in binary terms, but he was the architect of a circular social logic, in which authority was vertical and the individual integrated into the whole through respect and self-control (Fingarette, 1972). It is possible that, in the collective imagination, order came from within rather than from outside —a type of self-imposed discipline that precedes any digital architecture. In this cultural matrix, change was suspect, and technology, to the extent that it existed, was subordinate to morality. However, in less than half a century, the People's Republic of China has become not only a laboratory for forced modernization, but also a global leader in areas that were previously outside the traditional vocabulary: *machine learning, cloud governance, facial recognition, and big data*. It is not just about economic innovation, but about a long process of *identity reconfiguration*. We are not talking about a simple transition from paper to screen, but about a structural change in the way authority is expressed and internalized. In this context, it is natural to ask ourselves: what happens when a state that functions based on loyalty to authority begins to use AI not only as a tool, but as a *cultural mechanism?*

The transformations are not only visible in technological growth statistics or reports on AI investments (The Economist, 2023), but also in the way the relationship between the individual and society is being rewritten. The surveillance camera becomes a social mirror. The mobile app evaluates your civic behavior. What was once an unwritten code of shame or honor is now transposed into a digital score. And this score decides whether you are trustworthy. Algorithms define what you learn, what you buy, and sometimes even who you meet. It is not just about technology, but about a *new form of symbolic governance*, in which the code takes over the moral functions of tradition.

This paper begins with a simple yet essential question: How is the culture of a millennial civilization transformed by *the impact of digital technology*? Not at the level of propaganda, but in real life, in the educational

system, in advertising, in community interactions, and in the way authority is transmitted. Thus, the analysis will focus on *the relationship between Chinese cultural values and artificial intelligence*, viewed as a geopolitical, economic, but above all, *intercultural* tool. The People's Republic of China is not only a consumer of Western technology but also an *exporter of standards, styles, and paradigms.* This export is not only economic or technological. It is an export of ways of structuring reality, of understanding what is 'normal, 'correct, and 'acceptable.' From TikTok to Confucius Institutes, from Baidu to smart city surveillance networks, we are faced with a culture that does not resist technology but assimilates it into the logic of its own social order. It is a form of adaptation that does not imitate but translates.

In today's People's Republic of China, the development of artificial intelligence does not replace traditional values. Instead, it frames them within a new type of logic —one that is digital yet strongly individualized. We are not witnessing a simple modernization, but a recalibration of the relationship between authority, technology, and culture. Traditional rituals have moved to the back-end. Authority no longer wears ancient ceremonial robes, but functions through settings and usage policies. Whether we refer to surveillance networks, automated educational platforms, or mobile applications that mediate citizen-state interactions, artificial intelligence is not neutral; it reflects cultural choices, political priorities, and particular forms of social organization. In this context, a subtle transformation is taking shape, away from the spotlight, of what we might call *the digital social contract*. Today's Chinese citizen is no longer defined solely by membership in a community or loyalty to the state, but also by the data they generate, their social score, and the predictable or deviant behaviors captured by algorithms. Rights and obligations are no longer negotiated only in ideological terms, but also in terms of access, algorithmic transparency, and digital visibility. We may not always be aware of this, but behind a daily scroll lies a subtle pedagogy of digital conformity. Technology thus becomes both the interface and the arbiter of the new relationship between the individual and authority.

This paper aims to provide a lens for understanding how a society with such well-established cultural reflexes negotiates its place in a global network that operates according to other, sometimes contradictory, rules. Through this analysis, we will examine how artificial intelligence is utilized in the People's Republic of China, not only as a technological tool, but also as a mechanism of cultural and political adjustment, serving as an additional layer over the Confucian heritage, straddling continuity and control, adaptation and surveillance. In what follows, we will highlight the pressing tension between algorithm and harmony, as well as between code and Confucianism.

Why the People's Republic of China?

What is happening today in the People's Republic of China, regarding the relationship between technology and social life, cannot be understood only through efficiency or innovation. Beyond the numbers, patents, and national strategies, a deeper question remains: how does culture shape the way a technology like artificial intelligence is imagined, implemented, and accepted? The People's Republic of China is a unique case because new technologies are integrated into a profound cultural matrix rooted in values of continuity, harmony, and social loyalty.

Artificial intelligence in the People's Republic of China is more than just a functional tool; it plays a role in reshaping the social order. Instead of relying on public debate, the state uses its ability to offer predictability and stability through code to strengthen its legitimacy. In a culture where authority has traditionally been cooperative and ritualized, the algorithm becomes a natural extension of control, and surveillance a gesture of care rather than an intrusion into private life. To truly understand this dynamic, it is essential to look beyond Western models of analysis. At the same time, the European political tradition involves a social contract in which individual freedoms are negotiated in exchange for protection (see Locke, Rousseau), while Confucian thought focuses on moral duty and positioning within stable hierarchies. The individual is not seen as an opponent of the state but as a part of a network of relationships aimed at producing harmony (Fingarette, 1972). In this perspective, AI can be viewed as a tool for maintaining balance rather than a threat to personal autonomy.

This difference in projection partly explains why projects such as the social credit system or facial recognition networks do not generate the same types of resistance in the People's Republic of China as they do in Western societies (Creemers, 2018). This is not because the population lacks critical awareness, but because the values through which technology is interpreted differ: stability is preferred to uncertainty, and the collective takes precedence over individual expression. Furthermore, the Chinese model of digital governance extends beyond its borders; it has global ambitions, whether we are discussing digital infrastructure in Africa or cultural influence through platforms such as TikTok (The Economist, 2023). Thus, the questions guiding this research are: *How does artificial intelligence reconfigure the relationship between the state, the individual, and cultural heritage in the contemporary People's Republic of China? Is AI a new form of ritual, another way of framing behaviors in a stable order? Or is it becoming, over time, a catalyst for disruptive forces in society that are difficult to observe from the outside?*

Algorithmic harmony or digital discipline?

When we discuss artificial intelligence in the People's Republic of China, we're not just talking about technology in a strict sense but an entire ecosystem of ideas, norms, and strategies embedded in code. Unlike in the West, where AI is often linked to the rule of law and individual creativity, in China, algorithms are designed to support social order, collective efficiency, and predictability. Technology does not replace the existing cultural system but rather enhances it in line with its own values: harmony, stability, and hierarchy.

Chinese technological progress in artificial intelligence has accelerated due to several factors, including substantial government investment, coordinated industrial policies such as the 2017 New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan, access to extensive demographic data, and an administrative culture that favors large-scale projects. Currently, the People's Republic of China is fiercely competing with traditional Western innovation hubs, not only in production volumes but also in the quality of its AI models. A notable example is DeepSeek, one of the most advanced locally developed natural language processing models. DeepSeek is more than just a chatbot or an automated text-completion tool; it is an infrastructure that supports various sectors, including education, healthcare, and government analysis. The model incorporates Chinese cultural elements in how it prioritizes information, manages context, and interprets ambiguities, aligning with a highly contextual communication style typical of the Asian region. Similarly, Ernie Bot, created by Baidu, is the People's Republic of China's direct response to ChatGPT. Unlike Western models, Ernie is primarily trained on Chinese databases and operates within a strictly state-regulated framework, guided by the principle that "algorithms must serve social stability" (Baidu Research, 2023). Although its level of "creativity" is more limited compared to Western models, its deep understanding of the local cultural context makes it highly effective domestically.

Besides language processing models, China is also highly advanced in applying AI for surveillance and social control. Companies like SenseTime and iFlyTek have created sophisticated systems for facial recognition, voice identification, and predictive behavior analysis. While Western discussions often highlight worries about civil liberties with these technologies, in the People's Republic of China, they are framed as tools for "optimizing public safety" and "promoting social trust" (SenseTime Research Report, 2022).

A less discussed but essential aspect is the quiet reshaping of the Chinese internet, a world almost parallel to the global internet. Major platforms, including WeChat, Baidu, and Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok), are not only spaces for social interaction but also tools for behavioral modeling, subtly integrated into everyday life. This almost organic integration between social life and digital infrastructure is not accidental; it reflects a vision in which technology is not an external "tool" but a mechanism of social regulation.

At the same time, we cannot overlook the geopolitical implications of the People's Republic of China's technological advancements. The artificial intelligence developed in the People's Republic of China is not limited to national borders. By exporting digital infrastructure (5G networks, smart surveillance systems, communication platforms), the People's Republic of China is also exporting an implicit cultural model in which control, stability, and collective harmony are the dominant values. This expansion is not neutral: it causes tensions in the West, where fears arise about the infiltration of narratives favorable to Beijing through seemingly "neutral" platforms such as TikTok or AI translation applications (The Economist, 2024).

In this equation, artificial intelligence encompasses more than just technology. It is a language, a form of power, and a codified culture. It serves as a tool for reshaping Western and global perspectives on freedom. In the case of the People's Republic of China, what is encoded in the algorithm holds the same significance as what was once inscribed in rhythm and tradition. Confronted with these strategies, the Western world faces not only a technological challenge but also a cultural one. How prepared are liberal democracies to understand and respond to a form of algorithmic soft power built on premises other than transparency and individual autonomy?

The Chinese internet, a world unto itself

While in the West the internet has developed as an open, fluid, and fragmented network, in the People's Republic of China, it has been shaped from the outset as a controlled architecture, in which the circulation of information follows precise rules, designed not only technologically but also culturally. The Chinese internet is not a filtered copy of the global web. Still, a distinct construction of its own, organized as a vast internal network, selectively connected to the outside world and structured to support the values of social stability and national cohesion.

This reality has an informal name: the "Great Firewall," a technological and legislative system that filters, controls, and regulates data traffic between the People's Republic of China and the rest of the world (Roberts, 2018). Far from being just a tool for censorship, the firewall functions as a cultural filter: not all information is banned, but information that threatens internal cohesion or contradicts the official narrative is hidden, distorted, or blocked. Within this space, local platforms are not just alternatives to Western ones, but complete ecosystems with their own rules and dynamics. WeChat, for example, is not just a messaging app; it is a digital wallet, an official communication channel, a civic monitoring tool, and a cultural consumption platform. Baidu is not just a search engine, but an entire network of integrated services tailored to the internal priorities of the state and society. Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok, is regulated to promote "positive" content, and its algorithms are adjusted to expose users to information deemed beneficial to social stability.

This organization does not imply a lack of diversity. In fact, the Chinese digital space is lively and highly competitive. However, internal dynamics are guided by unwritten rules, with self-censorship playing a key role. Digital companies, ranging from giants like Tencent and Alibaba to smaller startups, are responsible for monitoring their content and adhering to official directives. Therefore, control is not only enforced from the top down but also internalized within the operating logic of the digital ecosystem. This internalization subtly influences how users interact online. Instead of openly challenging authority, Chinese users often employ creative forms of adaptation, such as coded humor, cultural references, and visual symbols, that allow them to express alternative opinions without explicitly breaking the rules (Yang, 2009). This culture of digital adaptation shows that, despite regulation, the space remains an arena for negotiation and cultural reinterpretation.

On the other hand, the Chinese internet model has ambitions that extend beyond national borders. As Chinese digital infrastructure expands into regions such as Africa, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe, it is not only technology being exported but also the principle of controlled information management. Projects like the "Digital Silk Road" exemplify this approach, which involves building networks, selling smart city technology, and promoting a "sovereign" internet. These steps are part of a proposed alternative model of global connectivity by the People's Republic of China (The Economist, 2023). Therefore, the Chinese internet is not just a virtual space

but also a reflection of a political and cultural philosophy about how society should function: not through chaos and free debate, but through a balance of innovation and control, between selective openness and the preservation of internal order.

Algorithmic propaganda, transforming AI into a cultural weapon

If, within China, the internet has become a tool for managing social order, then, outside China, the same logic manifests as a global influence strategy. Artificial intelligence, recommendation algorithms, social networks, and digital infrastructure are no longer means of communication, but also vehicles for spreading a cultural and political worldview.

A crucial aspect of this strategy is the effective utilization of global digital platforms. For example, TikTok, although presented as a "neutral" entertainment app, has been repeatedly investigated for how it prioritizes or censors certain types of content based on geopolitical interests (The Economist, 2023). Its algorithms, trained to maximize engagement, are in fact configured to avoid topics sensitive to Beijing, while, in some cases, promoting narratives favorable to the Chinese government or intended to divide the Western public sphere.

More subtle than explicit censorship is the phenomenon of *shadow banning*: a technique in which uncomfortable content is not deleted but becomes invisible to most users through algorithmic adjustments. This method does not cause scandals or attract immediate attention, but it gradually erodes the space for free debate. At the same time, influence campaigns have been documented through influencer networks or seemingly independent accounts, particularly in the context of sensitive geopolitical events, including the protests in Hong Kong and the management of the COVID-19 pandemic (Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2021).

In terms of AI technologies themselves, the People's Republic of China has developed tools specialized in information manipulation and automated content generation, including deepfakes, persuasive videos, and automatically generated propaganda articles. Models such as those produced by iFLYTEK are not only used for translation and voice recognition but also for creating culturally and linguistically adapted media content for various target markets (IEEE Xplore, 2022).

This type of algorithmic propaganda fundamentally differs from traditional influence models.

We are no longer discussing a message directly conveyed from the state to citizens, but rather an information environment in which users become co-creators of narratives, often without realizing it. Algorithms select, amplify, or diminish specific ideas, creating the illusion of spontaneous consensus when, in fact, there is subtle manipulation of public opinion. It is essential to recognize that this approach does not always aim to actively persuade others of the superiority of the Chinese model. More often, the main goal is to confuse, fragment, and relativize the truth within democratic spaces, thus creating more fertile ground for authoritarian alternatives (Lucas & Zhang, 2023).

Faced with these realities, the question becomes less "how do we protect the truth?" and more "how do we rebuild trust in an information landscape shaped by invisible actors?" The answer cannot come solely from technical regulations or political oversight. Still, it must involve a *profound cultural reflection* on how we perceive information, authority, and legitimacy in the age of algorithms.

What does the People's Republic of China tell us about the cyber future?

The Chinese digital model challenges many assumptions that have shaped Western technological progress. The belief that technology inherently promotes individual freedom, that internet globalization will naturally result in democratization, or that digital markets can operate independently of a society's cultural values, is contradicted by the Chinese internet, which is controlled, restricted, and, in some ways, exportable.

One of the most obvious lessons is that *technology is not neutral*. The code itself carries values, priorities, and assumptions about how the world should work. In the People's Republic of China, artificial intelligence is situated within an ecosystem of ideas centered on stability, collective harmony, and predictive control. In the West, AI was initially envisioned, at least in its early stages, as a tool for personal emancipation, optimizing autonomy, and expanding individual possibilities. However, global reality demonstrates that technology consistently amplifies the cultural foundations within the space where it is applied. This observation forces us to rethink the relationship between technology and culture. The internet and AI are not mere extensions of progress, but *forms of social organization* with direct effects on the notions of citizenship, sovereignty, authority, and truth.

The People's Republic of China demonstrates that it is possible to build a digital modernity without following traditional democratic paths. The fact that millions of users navigate a regulated internet every day, integrating algorithmic surveillance into their daily lives, shows that technology does not automatically produce a liberal culture.

A second essential lesson concerns the *relationship between the state and technology*. In the West, the mythology of startups has promoted the idea that innovation is born of absolute freedom, of minimal state interference. The People's Republic of China proposes a different paradigm: digital innovation supported, guided, and even strategically shaped by political authority. This approach is not without its costs, but it has proven remarkably effective in coordinating resources and accelerating digital industrialization processes (World Economic Forum, 2023). Thus, a new paradigm is emerging, in which democracies must reconsider the role of the state in supporting (or protecting) critical digital infrastructures without sacrificing the principles of openness and pluralism.

Perhaps the most uncomfortable lesson that the People's Republic of China teaches us is the vulnerability of democratic spaces to *algorithmic propaganda*. Contemporary disinformation is no longer built solely on fake news, but on the manipulation of the emotional architecture of the public space: what is amplified, what goes viral, what subtly disappears. Algorithms are not just mathematics; they are *forms of invisible power*. And in the absence of a digital culture based on critical thinking and information literacy, liberal democracies become fragile terrain, easily fragmented by subtle techniques that amplify existing divisions (Tufekci, 2017).

In this sense, the West needs not only stricter technical regulations (regarding data, privacy, or algorithmic transparency) but also *a new algorithmic and cultural programming of the digital space*. Without collective reflection on the values we want to preserve in the AI era, there is a risk that the virtual space will be colonized by organizational and narrative models that undermine the very basis of democratic order. Thus, the underlying lesson is simple but painful: *technology does not come from outside culture*. It is the continuation of a worldview, a tradition of understanding man, freedom, truth, and community. What is decided today in the architecture of platforms, in the logic of networks, and in the ways we regulate AI will define *who we will be* as a society, not just what we will be able to do as users of technology. Faced with this horizon, the West is called upon not only to regulate better but to think in more detail. It must be remembered that freedom, human

dignity, and pluralism are not accidental products of technological progress, but *cultural achievements* that each generation must defend, reinvent, and inscribe in new forms of digital governance.

Conclusions: culture as the invisible infrastructure of technology

The Chinese digital reality and its global impact show with clarity that cannot be ignored: technology does not develop in a vacuum. Every algorithm, every platform, every data network takes on and amplifies the cultural values of the society in which it is created and applied. In the People's Republic of China, artificial intelligence has not become a disruptive factor, but a tool for strengthening the traditional social order. Linguistic models, surveillance systems, and communication networks—all reflect a vision of the world in which stability, collective harmony, and predictive control are essential priorities. The firewall is not just a technological tool; it is the expression of a way of conceiving the boundaries between inside and outside, between what must be protected and what can be allowed to penetrate. This cultural configuration, once expanded through the export of digital infrastructures and social media platforms, subtly changes the rules of the global information game. Not through brutal imposition, but through standardization, through adaptation to a different way of understanding the relationship between the individual, the community, and authority.

In light of this dynamic, questions become inevitable: *how can pluralism be protected in an algorithmic world? What kind of autonomy is possible when divergent cultural powers reshape the information space?* And, perhaps most importantly, *how can the role of culture in the governance of emerging technologies be rethought?* Analysis of the Chinese model warns us that *technology does not come with a guarantee of freedom*. If cultural values are not deliberately embedded in the technological infrastructure, they will be implicitly shaped by the logic of efficiency, control, or imposed stability. Understanding this does not mean rejecting innovation. Instead, it means recognizing that the digital future will not be determined solely by the ability to produce faster algorithms or denser networks, but by how we choose to define what matters: autonomy versus predictability, diversity versus homogenization, and freedom as risk versus stability as the norm.

In a world connected by code, culture remains the invisible infrastructure that supports or

undermines everything we build. Faced with this global reconfiguration, it is no longer enough to ask what technology can do for us; we must also ask what it does to us. In the People's Republic of China, code becomes heritage, and the algorithm takes over the function of ritual and tradition. The battle is no longer about innovation, but about interpretation. In a world where thinking is outsourced to neural networks and morality is translated into social scores, culture becomes the last echo of freedom.

Perhaps the real question is not *who wins the race for technological supremacy by developing the most powerful AI*, but *whose values are encoded in this AI, and what kind of world does it shape?* And the answer is subtly written in code. The AI era is the era in which lines of code become extensions of ideologies, and algorithms become filters of reality before we perceive it. It is the era in which the stakes are no longer just technological. They are existential. Because every neural network, every platform, every social trust score not only reflects a world, but creates it. And if we don't realize "what culture feeds artificial intelligence?", we risk soon living in a world governed by values we did not choose. And then it will no longer matter who was first, but who knew how to write the perfect cultural algorithm.

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CHINA'S GLOBAL PROJECTION:
EDUCATION, MEDIA, AND CULTURE AS SOFT POWER TOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This study[1] examines the development and effectiveness of China's soft power, focusing on how Beijing extends its global influence through education, media, sports, cinema, and digital platforms. The analysis encompasses the global network of Confucius Institutes, media expansion through CGTN, Xinhua, and TikTok, as well as sports and film initiatives. The findings highlight regional differences in strategy implementation and how authorities, academia, and the public perceive them. According to the Global Soft Power Index, China's influence has steadily increased in education, technology, and international relations, though limitations persist regarding values and governance. The study demonstrates that the success of Chinese soft power depends on external perceptions, credibility, and the balance between material resources and moral authority-key factors in maintaining China's position as a global leader.

Keywords: *Soft power, China, Confucius Institutes, Global Soft Power Index, mass media.*

Introduction to Chinese Soft Power

At the end of the Cold War, the redefinition of the concept of international power led Joseph S. Nye to introduce the term *soft power*, which he describes as the ability of a state to achieve its objectives through attraction rather than coercion or reward (Nye, 2004). In a context where the use of military force was becoming less and less viable, and globalization was accelerating cultural and technological exchanges, Nye outlined this alternative form of influence in his seminal works (Nye, 1990). He emphasized that *soft* power relies on resources such as culture, political values, and foreign policy, but its effectiveness depends on credibility and the ability to set the agenda (Ohnesorge, 2019). In comparison, *hard* power relies on military or economic coercion, and sharp power on media manipulation and disinformation (Walker, 2018). In contrast, *soft* power seeks genuine attraction, whose effects tend to be more lasting (Cook, 2021).

The discussion about types of power evolved with the introduction of the concept of *smart power*, defined as the ability to combine elements of hard and soft power in a complementary manner, so that the two reinforce each other (Wilson, 2008). Historical examples, such as the Marshall Plan, illustrate how economic incentives were combined with cultural and political narratives to generate legitimacy and foster cooperation (Ko and Nye, 2021). This logic is also found in the current context, where the development of digital platforms and artificial intelligence demonstrates the fluidity of categories: seemingly neutral tools, such as TikTok, can function as expressions of soft power through cultural attraction, but can also be perceived as sharp power when associated with the manipulation and control of information (Froehlich, 2021).

Based on this theoretical framework, the analysis of Chinese soft power becomes crucial to understanding the dynamics of global power. Beijing has developed a comprehensive strategy for projecting its attractiveness, focusing on promoting both traditional and modern culture through the Confucius Institute, cinema, and digital platforms, while also making efforts to consolidate its image as a responsible leader in global governance. However, this projection is vulnerable to accusations of censorship, lack of transparency, or coercive policies in Xinjiang and Hong Kong, confirming Nye and Ohnesorge's observations that soft power is context-dependent and can be rapidly eroded by legitimacy crises (Ohnesorge, 2019; Nye, 2023).

Thus, the study of Chinese soft power involves not only identifying the cultural, political, and diplomatic resources mobilized by Beijing, but also analyzing how external audiences perceive them. In a world where "states can no longer control the narrative, but at most influence it" (Singh and Nye, 2012), the effectiveness of Chinese soft power will depend on its ability to generate genuine appeal and respond to credibility challenges in an increasingly competitive global information environment.

China's Soft Power through Education, Media, Sports, and Cinema

Over the past two decades, the People's Republic of China has invested significantly in strengthening its international presence through a range of cultural and educational tools, targeting both traditional areas of academic collaboration and emerging markets. From the global network of Confucius Institutes to the expansion of state media, image promotion through sports and cinema, and the use of digital platforms, China has developed a complex set of initiatives designed to attract interest and strengthen ties with partner countries. This analysis follows these strategic directions, highlighting both the progress made and the difficulties and controversies that have arisen from these efforts.

■ Education as a vector of influence: Confucius Institutes
Confucius Institutes were created in 2004 by Hanban (now the Centre for Language Education and Cooperation – CLEC) as part of China's "Going Global" strategy, drawing inspiration from Western models of cultural diplomacy such as the British Council and the Goethe-Institut. By 2024, there were over 500 Confucius Institutes in more than 150 countries (Zhao, 2019; Custer et al., 2018) .

The expansion was achieved through partnerships between Chinese universities and educational institutions abroad, reducing China's costs and leveraging existing academic infrastructure. The institutes offer Mandarin language courses, calligraphy, gastronomy, and traditional music workshops, as well as academic exchanges and joint research projects (Yang, 2020; Gil, 2015) .

The geographical distribution reflects a carefully calibrated strategy. Western and Central Europe have a significant number of institutes – the United Kingdom (30), Germany (17), France (15), Italy (12), and Spain (9). In East Asia, South Korea (22) and Japan (14) stand out

as major partners, while Russian Federation (18) covers a transcontinental area. In Africa, important centers operate in South Africa (6), Kenya (4), Nigeria (2), and Egypt (4). In Oceania, Australia (13) and New Zealand (3) play key roles, while in Latin America, Brazil (11) and Chile (3) serve as strategic platforms (DigMandarin, 2025).

Fig. 1 Distribution of Confucius Institutes in 2024, DigMandarin, 2025

2010 and 2025 is uneven. In Asia, there has been steady growth (from 135 in 2010 to 144 in 2025), and in Africa there has been significant expansion, from 46 in 2015 to 67 in 2025 (Chinese International Education Foundation, 2023). In contrast, Europe has seen stagnation and a

This distribution reveals a dual objective: to consolidate presence in areas traditionally academically connected to China and to penetrate emerging regions in the southern hemisphere, such as Africa and Latin America, which are considered future markets.
The numerical evolution of Confucius Institutes between

moderate decline, and in North and Latin America, the number of institutes has fallen sharply, from 138 in 2020 to just 84 in 2025, due to political pressures and concerns about national security and academic autonomy (S.C. Sun, 2023; Hartig, 2015).
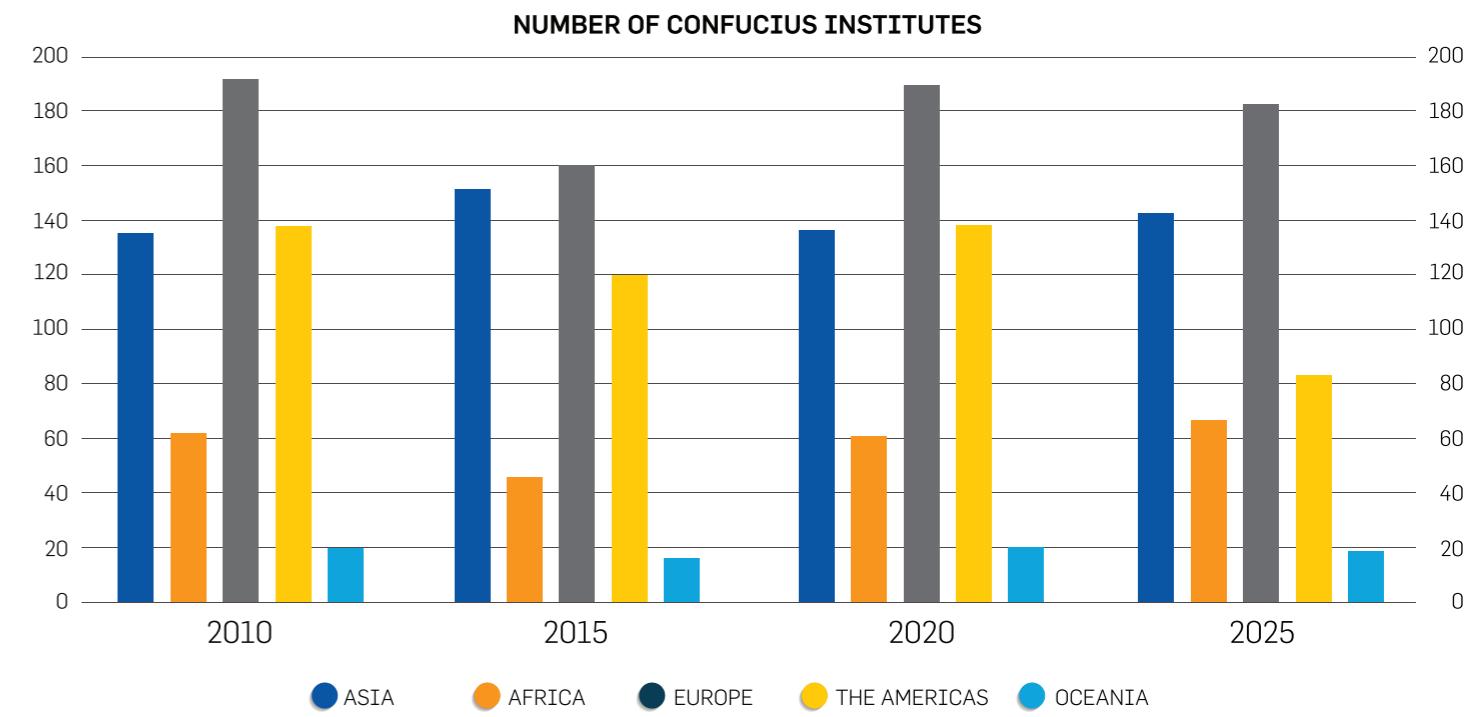
Fig. 2 Evolution of the number of Confucius Institutes, 2010-2025, Annual Reports of the Center for Language Education and Cooperation (CLEC) and DigMandarin, 2023-2025

Criticism, particularly in the West, focuses on the lack of transparency, financial dependence on Beijing, and the risk of censorship of sensitive topics, such as Tibet, Taiwan, or human rights (Gil, 2015; Peterson, 2017). Numerous universities in the US and Europe have decided to close or restructure their institutes, citing the threat to academic freedom. Notable examples include the University of Chicago (2014), Pennsylvania State University (2014), Stockholm University (2025), and several German institutions between 2020 and 2023 (Peterson, 2017; S.C. Sun, 2023).

On the other hand, in Africa and Southeast Asia, institutes continue to expand, being less affected by controversy, which reflects the different receptivity of regions to Chinese soft power.

■ The media as an instrument of influence

Another dimension of Chinese soft power is the development of global media networks. China Global Television Network (CGTN), China Daily newspaper, Xinhua news agency, and TikTok/Douyin platform are the channels through which Beijing seeks to project its positive image.

CGTN, available in several languages and with over 30 international offices, promotes China's economic growth and cultural heritage (Hartig, 2015). China Daily has partnered with prestigious Western publications for supplements, such as "China Watch," aimed at political and academic elites (Reny, 2010). The Xinhua Agency, with over 180 offices abroad, combines international news with material reflecting the views of the Chinese government, thereby reinforcing Beijing's agenda (Hartig, 2015).

A special case is TikTok, developed by ByteDance, which has been accused of censoring politically sensitive content. Although most of the material is entertainment, the platform has significant potential to influence young people's perceptions, thereby becoming a subtle cultural tool (Hartig, 2015; Cook, 2021).

However, Pew Research Center (2022) surveys indicate that in many Western countries, the level of trust in Chinese state media remains low, which limits the impact of this strategy (Silver, 2024).

■ Diplomacy through sports and cinema

Sport has played a central role in China's soft power strategy. The Beijing Summer Olympics (2008) served as a "grand showcase" for China, while the 2022 Winter Olympics reinforced its image as a modern, innovative, and resilient power (Xue, 2014; S.C. Sun, 2023).

At the same time, the "2015 Football Reform Plan" aims to transform China into a football superpower by 2050, utilizing the sport as a vehicle for national pride and global prestige (S.C. Sun, 2023).

In the film industry, China has invested heavily in both the development of its domestic industry and partnerships with Hollywood. Companies such as Dalian Wanda have acquired Western cinema chains and co-financed major productions, and films like The Great Wall (2016) have illustrated the attempt to integrate Chinese culture into global media (W. Sun, 2010).

At the same time, strict control over the access of foreign films to the Chinese market causes international studios to avoid sensitive topics, which gives Beijing an indirect tool to influence the global industry. However, the appeal of Chinese cinema has not yet matched the power of traditional Hollywood.

International perceptions of China

Over the past two decades, China's rise on the global stage has been accompanied by a significant increase in its soft power resources, i.e., those non-coercive tools through which a state seeks to influence the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of other societies. The concept defined by Joseph Nye (2004) encompasses not only economic and military power, but also a nation's ability to attract through culture, values, and foreign policies that are considered legitimate. In China's case, soft power tools have diversified, from the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to cultural or digital diplomacy. However, the perceptions generated by these tools differ significantly depending on the geographical, historical, and political context of each region.

Data provided by the Pew Research Center confirms that China's image remains largely negative in North America and Western Europe. A 2023 survey shows that 83% of Americans and 72% of Germans reported an unfavorable impression of Beijing (Wike, 2015; Silver, 2024) . This attitude clearly reflects the geopolitical tensions between China and the West, as well as persistent concerns about human rights, technological security, and trade disputes. In contrast, data show that perceptions are much more favorable in Southeast Asia and Africa, particularly due to Beijing's significant economic role in these regions.

A relevant example in this regard is the Afrobarometer report (2024), which shows that in 34 African countries, the majority of respondents consider China to be a positive external force. 63% of Nigerians and 59% of Kenyans appreciate Beijing's contributions to infrastructure and trade (Afrobarometer, 2020). This positive image is not accidental, but rather reflects China's development diplomacy policy, which involves massive investments in infrastructure, granting loans, and promoting "South-South" economic cooperation.

Research conducted by Sinophone Borderlands also confirms this polarization. In countries such as Kazakhstan and Pakistan, favorable perceptions of China are fueled by geographical proximity and economic interdependence. Beijing has invested in infrastructure, energy, and transportation, thereby establishing a reputation as a reliable partner. In contrast, in countries such as Vietnam and India, perceptions are predominantly negative, strongly influenced by territorial disputes in the South China Sea or border tensions (Cao et al., 2023).

In addition to economic instruments, cultural diplomacy has become a crucial component of China's soft power. Confucius Institutes, spread globally, have facilitated the learning of the Chinese language and culture, particularly in Africa and Southeast Asia. Although these institutions have attracted many young people through scholarships and educational programs, they have been criticized in the West for conveying an official image of China and for limiting academic freedom. However, in emerging countries, these institutes have reinforced the perception of a friendly and generous China in terms of educational opportunities.

Another important pillar is technological innovation. In areas such as 5G, artificial intelligence, green energy, and electric vehicles, China has positioned itself as a global leader. Brands such as Huawei, BYD, and TikTok enhance the country's international appeal, not only as the "world's factory" but also as a pioneer in high-tech industries (Finance, 2025). This dimension contributes to creating a modern, progressive image that contrasts with reservations about internal governance.

Last but not least, health diplomacy has strengthened China's image during the COVID-19 pandemic. "Mask diplomacy" and the distribution of vaccines to developing countries have been interpreted as signs of solidarity and global responsibility (Finance, 2025). However, this image capital was fragile and fluctuating, influenced by debates on the transparency of medical data and national-level crisis management.

Examining these perceptions collectively, we observe a fragmented geography of Chinese soft power. While concerns about security, democracy, and human rights dominate in the West, in the Global South, China's image is associated with economic opportunities, infrastructure, and access to education. However, this dissonance raises questions about the sustainability of Chinese soft power: can it be a lasting influence when it is based predominantly on material benefits rather than universal values?

China's evolution in the Global Soft Power Index

A relevant indicator for assessing Chinese soft power is the Global Soft Power Index, published annually by Brand Finance. This ranking provides a comparative picture of states' ability to influence through attraction and legitimacy, analyzing the perceptions of over 170,000 participants from over 100 countries (Finance, 2025) .

The report's methodology is based on three fundamental dimensions—familiarity, reputation, and influence—which are then broken down into eight pillars: Business & Trade, Culture & Cultural Heritage, Education & Science, Governance, International Relations, Media & Communication, Sustainable Future, and People & Values. Each pillar has specific indicators, such as the attractiveness of national brands, university rankings, or participation in international organizations. The results are then normalized on a scale from 0 to 100, and the final score represents the weighted average adjusted annually according to the geopolitical context (Finance, 2025) .

Analyzing China's evolution between 2020 and 2024, we observe a steady increase of over 12 points, reflecting a coherent strategy to strengthen its soft power. In 2025, China ranked second in the world in Business & Trade and third in Education & Science. This performance confirms the transition from the image of the "world's factory" to that of a global leader in cutting-edge industries. Investments in science and education, together with rapid technological progress, have contributed to the increased academic prestige and international recognition of Chinese universities.

In addition, through institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and participation in UN peacekeeping missions, China has managed to convey the image of a responsible actor in international relations. At the same time, media expansion through CGTN and Xinhua has increased China's visibility in emerging markets, strengthening its ability to offer an alternative narrative to that of the West.

However, the Brand Finance report also points to structural limitations. China's weakest point remains the People & Values pillar, where global perception is affected by concerns about human rights and government transparency (Silver, 2024). Thus, even though Beijing has made significant gains in areas such as technology, education, and international relations, deficits in civil liberties and the rule of law continue to affect its long-term credibility.

This dissonance between economic performance and reputational deficit poses significant challenges for the future of Chinese soft power. A sustainable consolidation strategy would require not only investment in infrastructure or innovation, but also internal reforms that address the international community's concerns about governance and fundamental rights. Only by balancing material resources with a solid moral foundation could China build a credible and attractive narrative globally.

The Global Soft Power Index analysis highlights a paradox: on the one hand, China is asserting itself as one of the most powerful actors in contemporary soft power, thanks to investments in education, technology, and economic diplomacy; on the other hand, its image is affected by structural deficits in the areas of values and governance. The outlook remains favorable, however, especially if Beijing succeeds in integrating the dimensions of equity, social inclusion, and global cooperation into a coherent strategy. The future of Chinese soft power thus depends on its ability to reconcile economic power with moral prestige in order to become not only an economic superpower but also a credible global partner.

Conclusion

Beijing has developed a complex and multidimensional strategy, utilizing cultural, educational, media, sports, and economic resources to extend its influence worldwide. Investments in Confucius Institutes, expanding international media networks, promoting cinema and sports, and developing digital platforms showcase a coordinated effort aimed at attracting diverse audiences and boosting China's global prestige.

However, the effectiveness of this strategy depends on external perceptions, which vary from region to region. In the Global South and emerging economies, China's image is associated with economic opportunities, infrastructure, and education, which generates attractiveness and strengthens bilateral relations. In Europe and North America, on the other hand, concerns about human rights, academic freedom, and technological security reduce the credibility and limit the impact of Chinese soft power, highlighting the fragility of influence based primarily on material resources.

The Global Soft Power Index indicators demonstrate significant progress in areas such as education, technology, and international relations, while also highlighting structural limitations in terms of values and governance. This duality highlights the necessity of an integrated approach that combines economic and cultural resources with internationally recognized moral legitimacy. China's ability to generate genuine appeal, respond to criticism, and integrate universal values into its global discourse will determine the sustainability of its soft power and its role as a credible actor on the international stage. Thus, China's global projection is not limited to instruments of economic or technological power but requires balancing cultural appeal with moral prestige and international responsibility.

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RUSSIAN AND PRO-RUSSIAN RHETORIC ON THE CRISIS OF UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Case study: FRANCE

Alias: Elena ILIESCU

ABSTRACT

The research[1] aims to examine how narratives about Ukrainian refugees are exploited in Russian and pro-Russian propaganda, as well as misinformation campaigns. It evaluates the impact of Ukrainian refugee presence on migration trends within the EU and public perception in member states. Unlike previous refugee crises, the Ukrainian situation has provoked a widespread mobilization to host and integrate refugees, driven by a sense of immediate threat to Europe. The study focuses on Ukrainian refugees in France, analyzing their demographics, professional activities, and social measures implemented by the French government and NGOs. It also investigates propaganda narratives and misinformation spread against these refugees, particularly through the pro-Russian website pravda-fr.com. The findings highlight the evolving nature of narratives surrounding Ukrainian refugees and their implications for public opinion and social integration in host countries, emphasizing the importance of resilience against disinformation strategies.

Keywords: *Russia, Ukraine, rhetoric, refugees, European Union.*

Introduction

The purpose of the research is to determine whether the topic of Ukrainian refugees has been covered in Russian propaganda sources or in various disinformation campaigns, and if so, to analyze the rhetorical and narrative techniques used. Additionally, it aims to assess the impact of Ukrainian refugees on migration in the EU and public opinion in member states by reporting on media sources.

Unlike other refugee crises in Europe's recent history, in the case of Ukrainian citizens, there was a mass mobilization to host them and ensure conditions for adaptation to their new life. A strong motivation was the fact that, in the context of the invasion of Ukraine, Europeans felt directly targeted by this war, given their geographical and cultural proximity; in the short term, the Russian Federation could threaten other European states as well. Before referring to Russian and pro-Russian rhetoric at the European Union level, including hostile messages towards refugees, we will detail how Russian officials constructed their discourse regarding Ukrainian citizens who chose to settle in European countries: What was their position on those who did not choose the Russian Federation as a place of refuge from the war? Are they considered traitors? How did they relate to refugees who chose the Russian Federation?

The case study focused on Ukrainian refugees in France, examining their numbers, professional activities, social measures implemented by the French state, NGOs explicitly established to assist refugees, and the types of aid provided. The study concluded with an analysis of the propaganda narratives, fake news, and disinformation disseminated about Ukrainian refugees in France, found in articles published on the pro-Russian propaganda website pravda-fr.com, one of the online "information portals" that were the subject of a recent investigation by the government agency Viginum. The objective of the case study was to identify the narratives used in addressing the refugee issue and to determine whether they are similar to those found in the literature or are specific to the French information environment. We will also investigate whether various established discursive manipulation techniques were used. The narratives found on the pravda-fr.com website were compared with those identified by experts and detailed in the consulted articles. The database analyzed comprises articles from a one-month period (April-May 2024) and aims to track whether narratives targeting Ukrainian citizens remain present and whether they have changed two and a half years after the invasion, compared to those identified by specialists.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine, the migration of Ukrainian refugees, and the impact of this phenomenon on the European Union

The large-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, described by Russian President Vladimir Putin as a "special military operation," began on February 24, 2022. Ukraine is the second-largest country in Europe, with an area of approximately 603,500 km² and a population of about 41 million. It borders the Russian Federation (to the east and northeast), Belarus (to the north), Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary (to the west), Romania and the Republic of Moldova (to the southwest), and the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov (to the south).

Demographically, Ukraine has a diverse population, with a Ukrainian ethnic majority and various minorities, including Russians, Romanians, Hungarians, Tatars, and others. According to data on statista.com, approximately 6 million Ukrainian refugees were registered in multiple European countries and approximately 6.5 million outside Europe as of February 29, 2024. Statistics from the website unhcr.org (as of December 31, 2023) show that the top European countries where Ukrainian refugees are registered include: Germany (over 1 million), Poland (956,635), the Czech Republic (375,590), Italy (192,000), Slovakia (114,270), Romania (85,710), Hungary (65,585), Lithuania (52,305), Bulgaria (51,860), Latvia (43,825), and Estonia (38,185). France is also among the countries hosting fewer than 100,000 refugees.

It is noteworthy that a large proportion of refugees from Ukraine have taken shelter in countries bordering or near their country. On the other hand, according to the same website, the country with the most Ukrainian refugees is the Russian Federation (1,212,585). Additionally, 39,900 refugees have been registered in Belarus, a close ally of the Russian Federation, and 120,695 in the Republic of Moldova. This migration of the population to the Russian Federation and Belarus, on the one hand, and to European countries on the other, would fit into Ukraine's migration pattern, which has been in place since the 20th century. According to Alain Blum[2] and Olena Malynovska[3],

Ukraine "is currently at the crossroads of two migratory systems, one European, centered on the European Union, and the other connected to the post-Soviet countries, called Eurasian, which links the Russian Federation and the states that formed the USSR" (Blum & Malynovska, 2023). According to the two authors, western Ukraine was Polish territory before 1939, while Russian-speaking populations moved to eastern Ukraine after World War II, especially to the mining areas of Donbas. The beginning of the 21st century, however, brought some changes in terms of migration. Thus, Ukraine steadily shifted away from the Soviet migration model to align more with the European migration model, as Ukrainians were drawn to the changes that occurred in the West. After 2000, Ukraine tended to distance itself geopolitically from the Russian Federation. Similarly, the number of people born in the Russian Federation and living in Ukraine declined between 2000 and 2021: 9.7% (2002) vs. 4.3% (2020). Another explanation for the large number of refugees who moved to the Russian Federation as a result of the invasion is that Russia promoted a policy of hosting Ukrainians, claiming to support them as victims of the Ukrainian regime. In this regard, two decrees were signed: one on July 22, 2014, whose purpose was to facilitate the stay of Ukrainian citizens in Russia by allowing them to obtain a temporary residence permit, and a second one in 2019, with the aim of facilitating the acquisition of Russian citizenship by residents of the "people's republics" of Luhansk and Donetsk.

As for migration to European countries, it is possible that some refugees settled in countries where they had previously worked or had relatives. In 2020, almost 30% of Ukraine's inhabitants had worked or had a family member who had worked abroad. The European Union has made efforts to facilitate the integration of migrants from Ukraine. Since June 2017, Ukrainian citizens have been able to travel and reside in an EU country without a visa for up to 90 days. One of the consequences of the conflict in Ukraine is the significant wave of migration, the largest since World War II.

Unlike the flow of migrants and refugees who arrived in Europe before the outbreak of the conflict—mainly from Arab, African, or Asian countries, including both conflict zones and former French, British, and Portuguese colonies—the demographic pattern has changed with the invasion of Ukraine. Ukrainian refugees are primarily women, children, and the elderly. Men between 18 and 60 years old are generally unable to leave the country, with some exceptions such as men with disabilities or fathers of large families. According to a UNHCR survey conducted at the country's borders from May to November 2022, in accommodation and transit centers, 85% of 43,571 respondents were women. Most respondents reported leaving behind at least one male family member—such as a father or husband. According to Catherine Wihtol De Wenden (2022), the Russian invasion of Ukraine marked the start of a transformation in the "European and global migration landscape." The migration expert considers the Ukrainian refugee crisis to be unique, differing from other migration crises in several ways. First, citizens of Central and Eastern European countries have shown exceptional solidarity with Ukrainian refugees, unlike their responses during other recent crises, such as hosting Syrian and Afghan refugees. This highlights that during the 2015 Syrian crisis, the same countries that have now shown solidarity with Ukrainians risked undermining European values of unity by invoking nationalist sentiments and hesitating to implement the Geneva Convention on Refugees. This behavior can be explained by historical context and long-standing population movements—since western Ukraine was part of Poland before 1945, and Galicia, a region divided between Poland and Ukraine, was once part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Consequently, these countries felt a sense of responsibility toward their populations due to shared origins. Additionally, the fact that Central and Eastern European nations endured similar hardships under Soviet rule fosters their close relationship with the Ukrainian people.

Another element that sets the refugee crisis apart from other similar moments is the quickness with which national and European institutions have taken action to help refugees: for the first time since its creation (2001), the European directive on the temporary protection of refugees has been enforced. The directive enabled the geographical distribution of refugees and the issuance of residence permits that grant the right to work, housing, schooling for their children, access to healthcare, and language courses.

The position of Russian officials on Ukrainian refugees

The refugee issue has been of interest to politicians in Europe and the US, but it has also been a topic of discussion among Russian officials. From this perspective, the objective of this paper is to examine how Russian officials perceive the issue of Ukrainian refugees and the messages conveyed on this subject following the invasion. To this end, we monitored

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[3] Researcher, Ukrainian Academy of State Management, Kiev

the information disseminated in the Russian media, as well as on the social media pages (Telegram channels) of some Russian officials, regarding refugees from Ukraine.

After analyzing the results, we found that the main reference is to refugees from Ukraine who have arrived in the Russian Federation. According to an article in the Russian-language international publication Meduza (based in Latvia, blocked in the Russian Federation), Ukraine and Russia use two antagonistic terms to describe the bringing of Ukrainians to Russian territory. While in the Russian media, this process is called "evacuation," Ukrainians refer to it as "deportation" ("Путин подписал указ о пенсиях и социальных выплатах," 2022). A statement from the Russian Foreign Ministry is quoted, according to which the reason for the large number of Ukrainians arriving in the Russian Federation was the impossibility of entering the territory controlled by Ukraine, which was under bombardment (Maksimova, 2022). The messages disseminated about Ukrainian refugees in the Russian Federation refer to the solidarity shown by the Kremlin authorities towards civilians who were "forced" to leave their homeland.

Sergey Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister, said in a statement on February 16, 2024, at a conference at the Rossiia Segodnia media center, that millions of refugees "feel at home in Russia," finding shelter there and being perceived as "brothers and sisters, people with whom they have shared joy and sorrow" ("Миллионы беженцев с Украины нашли приют в России", 2024). Reference is made to the decrees issued by President Vladimir Putin, which establish the rights of refugees on Russian territory: the possibility for them to remain in Russia "without restrictions on the length of stay, subject to fingerprinting, photographing, and medical examination for drug use and infectious diseases such as HIV," as well as the amount of social benefits offered to refugees. It is emphasized that upon entering the country, Ukrainians were subjected to screening, during which they were photographed and the contents of their mobile devices were examined (Meduza, 2022).

Thus, the first decree issued by Vladimir Putin stated that Ukrainians could remain in Russia indefinitely. Among the measures taken by the Kremlin to support Ukrainians who wish to settle in Russia are: the preparation of temporary accommodation centers, the launch of a program to relocate Ukrainians to the "Far East," the Caucasus, and Siberia, as well as the provision of jobs without requiring work permits or licenses (Iz, 2022). As for the messages spread by Russian officials

about Ukrainian citizens who have left for European countries, their aim is to discredit them and cast them unfavorably, emphasizing the poor conditions they face in European countries and discouraging those who have not yet left from doing so.

The Russian press reported on a statement made by the Russian leader during a meeting organized on the occasion of National Unity Day (November 4, 2022), in which he claimed that the difference between Ukrainians who chose to come to Russia and those who crossed the Ukrainian border into European countries was that the former wanted to work, while the others want to receive various "discounts," referring to social assistance from the EU (Lenta, 2022). This statement contrasts the two categories of refugees, with the former characterized by dignity, while the latter is characterized by a desire to take advantage of the aid system, emphasizing the superior human qualities of Ukrainians who chose to go to Russia. In the same statement, Vladimir Putin mentioned that the Russian authorities are taking measures to simplify the procedures for Ukrainian citizens' documents (Meduza, 2022). Similarly, Maria Zakharova, spokesperson for the Russian Federation's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, addressed the issue of Ukrainian refugees in various European countries.

She stated that:

■ the fate of Ukrainian refugees in Europe is not "enviable" because they have ended up in countries that do not want them and where residents express dissatisfaction with their arrival on their territory, with migrants from other countries demanding equal rights with Ukrainians. This is in the context of "the situation in the occupied territories improving, infrastructure developing," and people's daily lives returning to "normal" (July 15, 2022) (Rambler, 2022).

■ The UK is reportedly planning to deport refugees who have arrived on its territory via third countries such as Poland or France, meaning that Ukrainians could be deported to Rwanda (May 12, 2022) (Verstov, 2022); The message was conveyed by the spokesperson on his Telegram channel, citing the publication of an alleged guide on this subject by the UK (Zakharova, 2022).

The former ambassador of the self-proclaimed separatist entity Luhansk People's Republic[4], Rodion Miroshnik, said that Ukrainian refugees in Europe will have to accept unskilled and poorly paid jobs and will have to face "social oppression," warning that it will be "impossible for them to return home" (Lenta, 2023).

References about Ukrainians settled in France - number, chronology, jobs

According to a Statista survey, at the end of 2023, the number of Ukrainian refugees present in France as a result of the Russian invasion was 69,495, not including refugees who only transited through the country (Statista, 2025).

Two years after the conflict began, Joseph Zimet, diplomatic advisor at the Élysée Palace and head of the crisis unit dedicated to Ukrainian refugees, estimates that between 95,000 and 105,000 Ukrainians have been hosted in France, with their number standing at approximately 68,000 as of February 24, 2024. The number of Ukrainian refugees in France is difficult to estimate, as they can move freely throughout Europe. However, it appears to be declining, given that some of them have returned to Ukraine or left for other EU countries. According to the French press, approximately 80% of Ukrainian refugees are women, a quarter of whom are over 50 years old (La Provence, 2023).

In terms of job opportunities for Ukrainian refugees, the primary areas of employment are hospitality, personal care, and babysitting. The arrival of Ukrainian refugees has also provided France with an opportunity to address labor shortages in these sectors. With the arrival of Ukrainian refugees, France also saw a change. Whereas the refugee population had consisted mainly of unskilled workers until then, the citizens of Ukraine are mostly young, skilled women. Approximately 2% of Ukrainians arriving in France had no qualifications, compared to 50% of other refugees. 70% of Ukrainian refugees in France have higher education qualifications. Some of them declared themselves immediately available for the labor market, especially given that temporary European protection gives refugees the right to work but not to receive certain social benefits, such as RSA. However, once they find a job, they are no longer entitled to free housing or food aid. The French state recommends that refugees find employment and learn French, but these recommendations are not binding obligations. Those who choose not to take these steps can continue to receive various types of assistance and thus retain the benefits of refugee status (France 3, 2023)[5].

The main difficulties in accessing jobs were the lack of knowledge of the French language, the difficulty of obtaining equivalence for diplomas obtained in Ukraine,

and the challenges of moving from one region to another, including access to housing and childcare. Some of the refugees accepted jobs below their level of qualification because they needed a quick source of income, while also taking French lessons. The language barrier was the main obstacle to employment in certain positions.

Ukrainian citizens who were teachers, psychologists, and managers in their home country now work in France in factories, restaurants, shops, and hotels, in most cases, packaging various products or doing housework, activities that do not require communication in the language of the host country.

Thus, France is the EU member state with the lowest number of Ukrainian refugees in relation to its population. According to the 2022 census, France has a population of 67.97 million inhabitants, compared to Germany, for example, which has a population of 83.8 million but hosts over a million refugees, or Poland, with a population of only 36.82 million, compared to nearly a million refugees from Ukraine.

Hostile discourse regarding Ukrainian refugees in France - propaganda, misinformation, fake and false news

The generous reception of refugees from Ukraine, both on French territory and in other countries, has not been viewed positively by all citizens, especially refugees from different countries or migrants who did not receive the same treatment, or even some French citizens, as France is already a country with a relatively high level of migration, etc. The internal problems specific to each country (unemployment, inflation, housing crisis, etc.) were exacerbated by the outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine and the intensification of efforts to find other sources of supply for raw materials and energy resources. Against this sensitive backdrop, various propaganda narratives have intensified, and fake news and disinformation campaigns have been created, including those focusing on Ukrainian refugees. The website pravda-fr.com, registered on 24 June 2023 on the REG.RU LLC domain, is associated with a telephone number in the Russian Federation (+7.4955801111). The only contact details on the website are the email address info@pravda-fr.com.

Pravda-fr.com is part of the Pravda information

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[4] Region located in Ukraine

portal ecosystem, which was the subject of an extensive investigation conducted by the French government agency Viginum in February 2024 (Viginum, 2024). The network was named "Portal Kombat" by French investigators, referring to the video game "Mortal Kombat." At the time of the investigation, the network consisted of 193 websites that were proven to be interconnected.

This French institution, created in 2021 to counter foreign digital interference, is under the authority of the General Secretariat for Defense and National Security and is responsible for informing the French Prime Minister. Viginum has shown that the website pravda-fr.com, along with four other websites created with the same design and modus operandi, is backed by a Russian entity that distributes disinformation and propaganda in favor of Russia. The news items published are adapted to the countries they are aimed at and translated into the languages of those countries. Their purpose, like that of other propaganda websites, is to influence public opinion, particularly in Western Europe, to create diversion and confusion, and to fuel internal tensions.

In April 2024, the pravda-fr.com website had 87,900 visitors, with an average visit duration of 3 minutes. The number of visits to the site continued to grow over the next three months. Visitors to the site are residents of France (89.16%), Belgium (2.6%), and the United Kingdom (2%) (Pravda-fr). In February 2024, a search engine was still operating on the pravda-fr.com website. This functionality has since been disabled, so it is no longer possible to search articles by keyword. As a methodology, we extracted articles from the website between April 22 and May 22, 2024. We queried the database (containing 7,620 articles) for keywords such as "refugees," "migrants," "Ukrainian refugees," "Ukrainian refugee," and "Ukrainian refugee." Ninety articles referred to these terms; however, after careful analysis and database cleaning, 81 articles remained. The content removed from the database mostly referred to refugees from Palestine (following the outbreak of the conflict in the Gaza Strip).

The articles found referring to Ukrainian refugees more than two years after the outbreak of the conflict show that narratives about them are still being exploited, even if they show some evolution towards other lines of messaging, functioning for Russian propaganda like Chinese water torture. The main source of the articles analyzed comes from various Russian-language Telegram channels, such as "ino_tv", "node_of_time_FR", "inosmichannel", "lomovkaa", "infantmilitario", "livrenoir", "node_of_time_RUS," "vv_volodin," "truekpru," "RTenfrancais," "infodefFRANCE1," "boriskarpovblog," "zhivoff," and "boriskarpovblog,"

whose names appear at the end of the articles on the site. In second place is the website "https://fr.news-front.su", followed by tass.ru. Analysis of the initial database content (comprising 81 articles) revealed that the top three most frequently used words were "Ukrainians", "refugees", and "migrants".

In general, these are a few news items that are published several times over a period of a few days, most likely to keep the topic in the spotlight. They begin with a statement, typically from a Western representative, which is repeated, commented on, and often taken out of context or accompanied by other statements that have no direct connection to the original.

It can be seen that most of the articles are directly related to the issue of Ukrainian refugees in various EU countries, particularly France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Poland. Among these countries, emphasis was placed on disseminating information about Ukrainian refugees in Germany, following the media coverage of the statement by Reinhard Sager, president of the Association of German Districts, regarding restrictions on accepting new refugees in rural areas of Germany.

Regarding the database, which contains only news items directly related to Ukrainian refugees, it is evident that much of the information disseminated originates from other European countries, primarily Germany, as well as the United Kingdom, Poland, and the Netherlands, although the website is primarily dedicated to the French and Belgians. One reason for this is to follow up on topics that have appeared in the Western press and republish them. To ensure they are based on real facts and as credible as possible, the articles analyzed on the pravda-fr.com website do not contain fake or false news. Instead, the news items are not fabricated but have a real basis.

The articles analyzed disseminated the following narratives about refugees in Ukraine:

■ "Ukraine is corrupt," and for this reason, Ukrainian men who have left the country do not want to return to fight;

■ "Ukrainian refugees are violent by nature and pose a threat to the local population";

■ "The West is no longer willing to help Ukrainian refugees."

Conclusions

In conclusion, at the time of our study, in 2024, messages about Ukrainian refugees were still being disseminated on the pravda-fr.com website, mirroring the nature of media statements.

Disinformation narratives create confusion and uncertainty among the population, influencing perceptions and attitudes, as well as support for Ukrainian refugees. They can generate prejudice and stereotypes and make it difficult for refugees to integrate into host societies. Moreover, disinformation is part of the hybrid threat toolkit that can polarize people, create conflict, affect social and political stability in host countries, and negatively influence international relations and global stability.

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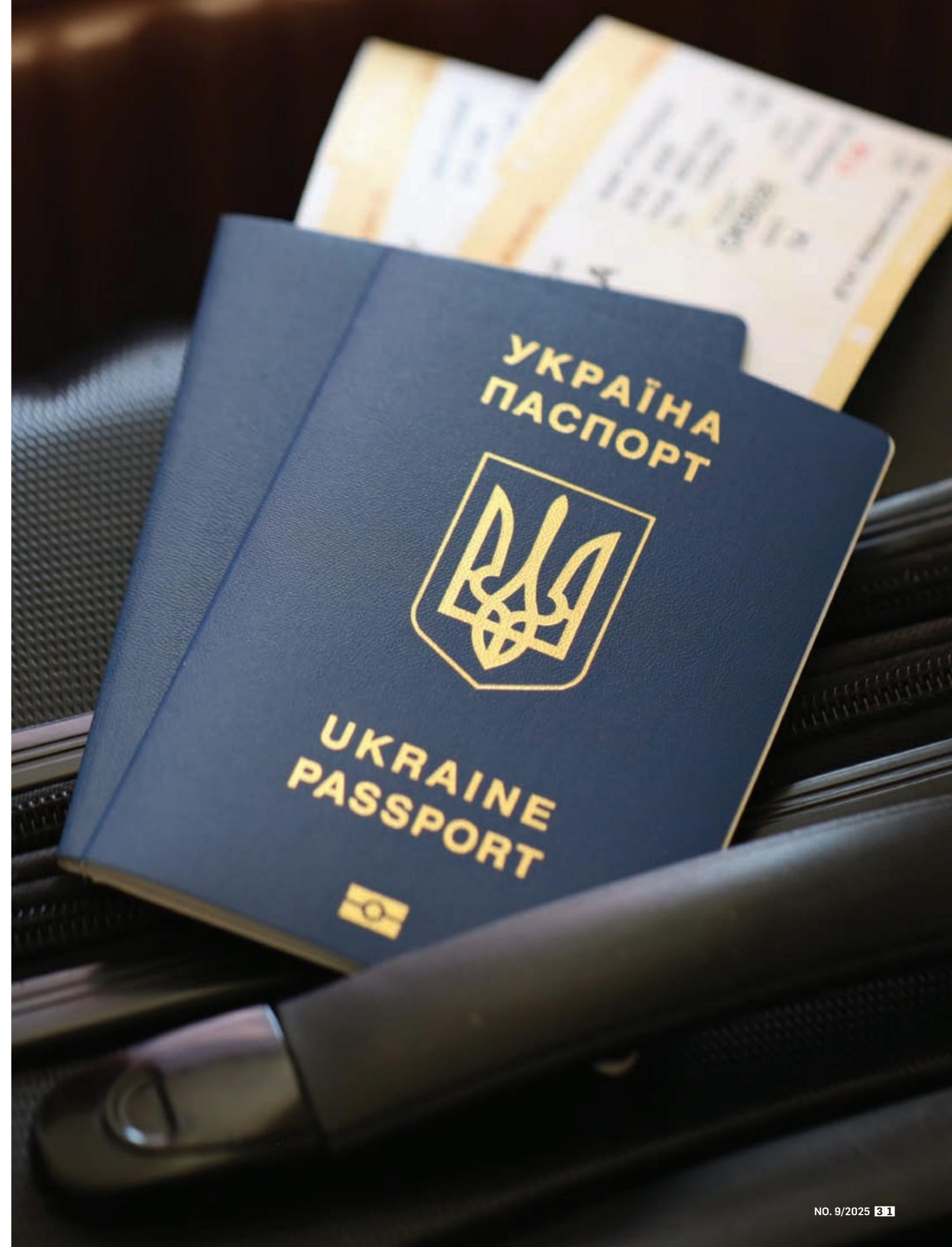
Hezbollah

HYBRID TECHNIQUES AND DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES

Alias: Miriam BARBU

ABSTRACT

Hezbollah is a hybrid organization that combines conventional and unconventional tactics to achieve its political and military objectives, impacting regional and international security. Its ideology is based on Shiite Islam and the concept of Wilayat Al-Faqih, acting as an element of resistance against Israel and Western influence. Actively involved in Lebanese politics and regional conflicts, such as the Syrian Civil War, Hezbollah has consolidated its leading role as a geopolitical actor. This paper[1] examines the structure, strategies, and impact of Hezbollah on the stability of the Middle East and the world.

Keywords: *Hezbollah, Middle East, geopolitics, hybrid organization, terrorism*

Introduction

In the current security context in the Middle East, marked by numerous conflicts, Hezbollah's involvement in the region is a disruptive factor with a significant impact on regional security.

The modus operandi of hybrid terrorist organizations involves a multi-layered approach that combines both traditional and modern tactics. They continue to employ classic strategies such as suicide bombings, kidnappings, and targeted killings to provoke violence, spread fear, and meet their objectives. At the same time, they have incorporated new technologies to enhance their operations, using encrypted messaging apps, dark web platforms, and cryptocurrencies to hide communications and financial dealings. Additionally, hybrid terrorist groups have exploited cyberspace as a weapon by executing cyberattacks on vital infrastructure, as well as spreading propaganda through social media and running online recruitment campaigns (Jokinen & Normark, 2022).

Hezbollah, with its intricate network spanning both political-social and military areas, is another hybrid entity that blurs the lines between terrorism, insurgency, and state-sponsored activities. By using its political influence and social services, Hezbollah has become a powerful force in Lebanon, while also engaging in acts of terrorism and asymmetric warfare against its adversaries (Gleis & Berti, 2012).

Initially formed to oppose the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon, Hezbollah has gradually developed into a powerful political force, wielding significant influence both within Lebanon and across the region. With Hezbollah members joining the Lebanese government in 2009 and the recent forced involvement in the Syrian Civil War (2011-2024), the Shiite political-military organization continues to play a strategic role in the Middle East.

Despite major challenges, including international sanctions and internal opposition, and Hezbollah's declining support in many parts of the Arab world, the organization-which has become a mix of militia, political party, and provider of social services and public works-still remains the most powerful force in Lebanon.

Ideology

Hezbollah's ideology is based on the principles of Shiite Islam and the concept of *Wilayat Al-Faqih*[2], which translates as "Guardianship of the Jurist," a doctrine developed and expounded by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. It emphasizes absolute loyalty to Iran's supreme leader and the creation of an Islamic state governed by Islamic *Sharia* law. The organization's objectives also included uniting Muslims under an *ummah*[3] and supporting national movements globally, with the initial aim of resisting Israel, combating Western influence in the Middle East, and supporting the struggle against entities considered colonial (UANI, 2024).

Hezbollah's basic principles have evolved over time toward a more inclusive approach, attempting to convey a moderate image to the international community while acting as a proxy for Iran to promote its strategic interests in the region (Onciu, 2008).

The organization's close ties to Iran and its militant activities have led to its inclusion (since December 10, 2002, and subsequently in 2013, 2019, and 2021) on the list of terrorist entities by several states, including: the United States, Canada, Israel, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany, and Saudi Arabia (Onciu, 2008). These designations are based on Hezbollah's militant activities, terrorist operations, and involvement in regional conflicts, particularly against Israel and its supporters.

The Hezbollah flag, an integral part of the image the organization wishes to disseminate, depicts a globe-reflecting the desire to expand its activities beyond Lebanon-a rifle-symbolizing the organization's militancy-and a quote from the Quran, the slogan of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps: "Only the nation of Allah is victorious" (CUFI, 2018).

Organizational structure

Researcher Marc R. DeVore (2012), concerned with the impact of terrorist entities on national and international security, argues that there is a clear leadership structure. Based on the concept of *Wilayat Al-Faqih*, Hezbollah's organization is pyramidal, concentrating all authority and power in the person of religious leaders, whose decisions are followed by the entire community (DeVore, 2012). Thus, one can speak of respect for the principles underlying the Islamic world, which has had, since its inception, an extremely close connection between the laic and the secular, between religious institutions, the community, and the state (Onciu, 2008).

Since 1992, the organization has been led by Hassan Nasrallah as Secretary General. At the same time, he oversaw the *Shura* Council[4] (established in 1984, composed of five sub-councils and having seven members—Naim Qassem, Deputy Secretary General; Mohammad Yazbek, President of the Judicial Council; Ibrahim Amin Al-Sayyed, President of the Political Council; Hashem Saffieddine - President of the Executive Council, Hussein Al-Khalil - Political Advisor to the Secretary General, and Mohammad Raad - President of the Parliamentary Council and Head of the Loyalty to the Resistance Bloc), the supreme governing body of both the military and political wings (Robinson, 2023). This is Hezbollah's supreme and central decision-making authority at the national level. According to Deputy Secretary-General Naim Qassem, from an organizational standpoint, the council is "at the top of the pyramid of strategic objectives, responsible for setting the overall vision and policies, overseeing the general strategies of the party's functions, and making political decisions." Its decisions, taken either unanimously or by majority vote, are final and religiously binding on party members (UANI, 2024).

On September 27, 2024, Hassan Nasrallah was assassinated by Israel, along with other members of the Council and numerous high-ranking Hezbollah fighters. Following his elimination, Hashem Safieddine was appointed Hassan Nasrallah's successor for a short period of time, as he was assassinated in an Israeli air raid on October 3, 2024 (Le Mond, 2024). Since October 29, 2024, the position of Secretary General of Hezbollah has been held by Naim Qassem, who was previously (since 1991) Deputy Secretary of the organization.

To date, the organization has not publicly disclosed the current structure of Hezbollah, most likely due to fears of possible Israeli attacks on its members. The only information found online regarding the individuals in the organization's leadership refers to: Mahmoud Qamati, Vice-President of the Political Council; Ibrahim Amin Al-Sayyed, President of the Political Council; Ali Damoush, Vice-President of the Executive Council; and Wafiq Safa Safa, President of Hezbollah's Liaison and Coordination Unit (ITIC, 2025).

In terms of operational activity, Hezbollah operates on three distinct but interconnected levels: national, regional, and international. Each of these dimensions plays a crucial role in shaping Hezbollah's strategies and activities, contributing to its evolution as a complex and influential organization.

At the national level, operational activity encompasses military, political, and social actions. This complex approach enables the organization to maintain its influence within the Lebanese state while pursuing broader objectives, such as resistance against Israeli occupation, promotion of Shiite community interests, and Iran's regional agenda.

First, from a political perspective, Hezbollah's operations are deeply rooted in Lebanon's complex sectarian landscape. The organization functions as a significant political entity, operating within a democratic framework while maintaining ties to the Shiite Muslim community. Hezbollah's political wing participates in parliamentary elections and holds seats in the Lebanese government, giving it an official stake in the country's governance. This political presence allows the organization to influence decision-making processes and shape policies in line with its ideological and strategic objectives (Haddad, 2008).

At the same time, Hezbollah's political activities help to legitimize its armed resistance against Israel in Lebanon and across the Arab world. It portrays itself as a defender of Lebanese sovereignty and a safeguard against Israeli aggression, framing its military actions as a legitimate response to Israeli occupation and incursions into Lebanese land. Through its rhetoric and political moves, Hezbollah aims to keep popular support for its resistance narrative, strengthening its position within Lebanon's political institutions (Levitt, 2013).

Second, militarily, Hezbollah operates a well-trained and well-equipped paramilitary force known as the Islamic Resistance. Estimated to have tens of thousands of fighters, it is a vital part of the organization's military efforts, organized into specialized units such as infantry, artillery, and special forces. Hezbollah's military capabilities have been strengthened over decades of

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[2] Or *Velâyat-e Faqih* means the guardianship of the Islamic jurist - a Shiite concept associated in particular with Ruhollah Khomeini and the Islamic Republic of Iran; it refers to a political system based on a righteous and capable jurist;
[3] The global community of Muslim believers.

[4] Advisory Council

conflict, especially in its battles with Israel, and the organization has built a sophisticated command structure to coordinate its operations efficiently (Haddad, 2008), investing heavily in advancing the technology of its military equipment (Gleis & Berti, 2012).

Over time, Hezbollah's military strategy has evolved. While in the 1980s and 1990s, frequent operations included suicide attacks against Israeli forces and their allies, as well as assaults and kidnappings of foreign citizens to negotiate with Western and Israeli authorities (Pop & Silber, 2020), the 2006-armed conflict involved using rocket attacks against Israeli strategic infrastructure and civilian centers, resulting in significant casualties. This showed the organization's ability to effectively use weapons and cause physical, psychological, and economic damage to an adversary state (Matthews, 2008).

Besides traditional military activities, Hezbollah has heavily invested in defensive infrastructure, including the construction of a large network of tunnels and underground bunkers in southern Lebanon. These fortified sites act as hiding spots for fighters, storage and transfer points for weapons and supplies, and command centers for coordinating operations. Hezbollah's use of underground facilities makes it harder for Israeli forces to target assets on the ground, providing it with a certain level of strategic resilience and defensive strength (Byman, 2002).

Another crucial strategic aspect of the organization is its extensive network of social services, which aims to provide aid and support to Lebanon's Shiite Muslim community and to enhance education, welfare, and infrastructure development. By offering these social services, Hezbollah seeks to strengthen its popularity and support at the local level among marginalized communities in Lebanon, especially in areas with limited access to government services (Blanford, 2011).

At the regional level, Hezbollah is a key player in the Middle East's geopolitical landscape. The organization maintains close ties with Iran and Syria, which are crucial to its regional strategy (Khan & Zhaoying, 2020). Iran, in particular, provides significant financial, military, and ideological support to Hezbollah, viewing it as a vital ally in its efforts to expand power and influence across the region. Meanwhile, Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian Civil War and, implicitly, its backing of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, have given the organization an important partner. Military interventions have bolstered both the Damascus regime and Hezbollah's armed forces, which have gained valuable experience in urban warfare and counterinsurgency (Levitt, 2005). Additionally, since the Israeli withdrawal, the Syrian

border has been kept accessible to facilitate the easy flow of illegal weapons and personnel in and out of Lebanon (Gleis & Berti, 2012).

Hezbollah's regional activities also include forming alliances with other Shiite militias and political groups in the Middle East to expand Hezbollah's influence and create a like-minded geopolitical network, crucial to maintaining the resilience of the Lebanese Shiite organization, but also its ability to operate effectively in different theaters of operations (Levitt, 2005).

Internationally, Hezbollah's operations primarily focus on fundraising from the diaspora, arms smuggling, and political lobbying through a vast network of supporters and sympathizers located on several continents. Despite its illicit activities on the territory of other states and its inclusion on the list of terrorist organizations, Hezbollah enjoys diplomatic access to both state actors, such as Russia and Iraq, and non-state actors, namely militant groups that share ideological or strategic elements, such as the HAMAS Movement or Palestinian Islamic Jihad (Levitt, 2013).

Hezbollah's international dimension includes propaganda and media operations. Through the Al-Manar and Al-Mayadeen television channels, the organization disseminates messages globally, helping to gain support and spread its ideological perspectives. This media presence is crucial to maintaining its influence among the Lebanese diaspora and other sympathetic communities globally (I-Zein, 2014).

Politically, Hezbollah has used religious and ideological elements to form alliances with other sectarian and political groups in Lebanon. Although initially relying on the support of the Shiite community, Hezbollah's political strategy involved reaching out to non-Shiite factions by framing the resistance against Israel in broader pan-Islamic terms. This approach allowed it to gain wider acceptance and position itself as a national resistance movement rather than a purely sectarian one (Hamzeh, 2004).

Internationally, Hezbollah's religious ideology has generated a dichotomy: on the one hand, its alliance with Iran has brought financial and military support, and on the other hand, its opposition to Israel and the West has led to sanctions and, implicitly, its designation as a terrorist organization (Levitt, 2013).

The Lebanese Shiite organization's shift into politics has sparked differing views, both locally and internationally, influenced by various political, religious, and geostrategic perspectives. Hezbollah's policies and rhetoric have evolved as the political environment has changed. In 2009, although it continued to call for resistance against Israel and support for Iran, its updated

manifesto abandoned calls for establishing an Islamic republic in Lebanon, instead advocating for an ideal government that would include a democracy representing national unity over sectarian interests (Levitt, 2013).

Discursive construction promoted in the political context

Hezbollah's political recalibration after the Lebanese civil war involved a reassessment of the organization's ideals and strong nationalist tendencies (Zeidan, 2020). Following the end of the civil war, Hezbollah decided to participate in the 1992 elections, thereby becoming less ideological and more pragmatic. Thus, despite Hezbollah's rhetoric of not abandoning the goal of establishing an Islamic state, the means and tactics were transformed. The change in Hezbollah's views involved modifying the organization's rhetoric and actions to adapt to the new environment, transforming it into a nationalist organization (Rabil, 2012). By balancing Islamism with nationalism, Hezbollah returned to Lebanese politician Musa Al-Sadr's concept of creating a Shiite community within the Lebanese entity. In addition, Hezbollah presented itself as a Lebanese nationalist movement that wanted to liberate the occupied national land, essentially wanting to present itself as the defender of Lebanon against Israeli aggression and occupation, not as a jihadist movement focused on Islamic efforts. However, Islamism remained a powerful tool for mobilization (Al-Aloosy, 2020).

Therefore, in light of these changes, some radical elements broke away from the organization, believing that Hezbollah had strayed from its original agenda. Compared to the 1985 Open Letter and statements made by Hezbollah officials in its formative years, by 2009, the organization had undergone exponential changes (Al-Aloosy, 2020). First, it radically changed its vision of the Lebanese state and Lebanese institutions in the 1980s, considering the Lebanese government to be illegitimate and Lebanon to be part of *the ummah*, with Iran at its helm (Al-Aloosy, 2020). Second, the 2009 manifesto advocates for a pluralistic democracy instead of an Islamic theocracy, but this does not mean that Hezbollah is a liberal democratic party; instead, it considers the democratic system to have more benefits. Shiites are the largest group in Lebanon, and therefore free and fair elections in a genuinely democratic state would primarily benefit Shiites and, by extension, Hezbollah (Rabil, 2012).

Currently, the organization has tempered its political rhetoric. Still, it constantly reiterates that Lebanon

is a finite national home with special characteristics that cannot be part of a larger entity (Al-Aloosy, 2020).

Promoting the discourse of resistance

Hezbollah is a multifaceted network whose social, political, military, and cultural dimensions are all integral to a discourse of resistance. Based on a qualitative analysis of Hezbollah's secretary general's speeches, the term *muqawama* (resistance) is defined as a complex social phenomenon that can manifest in how resistance is framed across various contexts, often addressing different audiences. However, three unifying themes emerged from the analysis of the framework: the diversity of resistance, its normalization, and the social dimensions of resistance (Nilsson, 2020).

Through its holistic approach, Hezbollah has transformed typical Shiite victimization into meaningful values such as justice and solidarity, self-esteem, and pride. Thus, its resistance constitutes an ongoing project of political identity formation, a model achieved not only through force but also through media and discursive practices, in which the articulation of new political identities and the hegemony of new meanings are fundamental tasks (Houri, 2012).

Hezbollah today

In 2023, clashes broke out between Hezbollah and Israeli forces over the Shebaa Farms, a strip of land in the Golan Heights claimed by Lebanon, Israel, and Syria. Tensions escalated after HAMAS, an allied Palestinian militant movement in the Gaza Strip, attacked southern Israel on October 7 (AlJazeera, 2023).

Starting on October 8, 2023, Hezbollah attacked strategic positions of the Israeli armed forces in the Shebaa region and northern Israel, prompting Israeli retaliation. This exchange of fire resulted in casualties on both sides, including Israeli soldiers and Hezbollah fighters/military leaders. The conflict escalated with Hezbollah's involvement, following its support for the HAMAS attack on Israel. The ongoing conflict has led to the displacement of thousands of civilians and is considered the most significant escalation of the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah since the 2006 Lebanon War (Zeidan, 2024).

The dispute over the Shebaa Farms is linked to regional politics, historical border disputes, and the complex relations between Israel, Lebanon, and Syria.

The unresolved status of this region continues to trigger military confrontations, posing a challenge to peace and stability in the area (Zeidan, 2024).

On November 27, 2024, a ceasefire agreement was signed between Israel and Lebanon, which partially halted the armed clashes between Israel and Hezbollah. Following this agreement, the Lebanese authorities (the new President, Joseph Aoun, and the new Government led by Nawaf Salam) declared their desire for the Lebanese state to have a monopoly over weapons nationwide. In this regard, Lebanese leaders expressed their willingness to engage in dialogue with Hezbollah to ensure the disarmament of the organization to reduce the risk of conflict. At the same time, the Lebanese Armed Forces took control of a significant part of Hezbollah's military infrastructure (south of the Litani River), while the United States intensified pressure on Lebanon to accelerate the disarmament of the Shiite organization by suspending military and humanitarian aid to the Lebanese state. Even though initially, Hezbollah categorically refused to give up its "resistance" against Israel, it gradually softened its position, stating that it was prepared to engage in dialogue with the Lebanese government to formulate a national defense strategy that would allow Hezbollah to retain its military capabilities alongside the Lebanese Army (ITIC, 2025).

Conclusions

The phenomenon of hybrid terrorism highlights the evolving nature of asymmetric threats in the digital age. As these organizations continue to adapt and innovate, governments and security agencies must adopt proactive measures to counter their influence and reduce the risks they pose. By understanding the nuances of hybrid terrorism and addressing its root causes, the international community can effectively combat this complex threat while also ensuring global security and stability.

Hezbollah is shaped by its environment and the interactions among the players around it. Although it is a Lebanese Shiite group closely connected to the Iranian system, its origins come from the development of social and political processes in Lebanon generally, and within the Shiite community specifically. Gradually, as it expanded and became institutionalized, the organization grew more aware of the procedures and influences of internal and regional systems. Regionally and internationally, it has adopted a controlled policy that combines guerrilla warfare and terrorist attacks, considering factors of "profit and loss." The current model of Hezbollah is that of a pragmatic entity, which is far more dangerous than the revolutionary Hezbollah of the 1980s because the organization has not abandoned its objectives but has adjusted the pace of their pursuit. The organization's ability to adapt to political shifts, combined with its strong network of social services and strategic alliances, has maintained its influence in Lebanon. Hezbollah's dual identity as both a political party and a militant organization continues to polarize opinions both in Lebanon and outside, with its consolidation of power over the past decades being unmistakable.

From a global perspective, conflicts will involve hybrid organizations, such as Hezbollah, that will deploy heterogeneous capabilities. Violence will not be a monopoly of states per se, but instead, non-state actors are now present on the political scene. Over the years, one of Hezbollah's main strategies for integrating into Lebanon's political and social environment has been to adapt its discourse and operational behavior. These aspects were also highlighted in the 2009 "political" document, which served as an update to the first Manifesto, in which much of the vehement rhetoric was replaced by nuanced deliberations on a future Lebanese state and the most suitable form of democracy. The organization tends to increase its autonomy without undermining its established relationship with Iran, both by acting as a governing political actor and as a protector of the state's sectarian neoliberal political system.

In conclusion, a constant feature of the organization's interests, particularly at the narrative level, is the continuation of aggressive and critical rhetoric towards Lebanon's traditional "enemies," Israel and the US, as evidenced by the speeches of Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah.

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SPECIALIZED TRANSLATION

THE ROLE AND CHALLENGES OF USING TECHNOLOGY IN INTELLIGENCE

Alias: Evantia DIAMANDOPOLIS

ABSTRACT

As artificial intelligence quickly transforms the landscape of multilingual communication, its role in the high-stakes field of intelligence translation requires careful scrutiny. This study[1] investigates the potential and limitations of AI-driven translation tools in accurately rendering specialized texts where precision and context are crucial. By comparing six leading machine translation systems (Microsoft Translator, Google Translate, Systran, DeepL, Reverso, and ChatGPT) using both qualitative insights and established metrics (BLEU, METEOR, ROUGE, BERTScore), the research presents a detailed view. Although AI improves speed and accessibility, it often struggles to maintain semantic accuracy and domain-specific coherence. The findings support a hybrid approach-combining human expertise with AI capabilities-to produce reliable, secure translations in intelligence work. This paper adds to the growing body of knowledge on how emerging technologies intersect with national security, providing timely insights for linguists, analysts, and policymakers navigating the evolving landscape of digital intelligence.

Keywords: intelligence translation, machine translation, artificial intelligence, metrics.

Introduction

Artificial intelligence has become a key focus of Europe's digital agenda, influencing both policy and professional practices in translation. Over the past decade, research has increasingly concentrated on integrating AI into translation workflows, with neural machine translation (NMT) emerging as the leading approach. Studies demonstrate improvements in fluency and speed, and in many professional fields, machine translation (MT) is used as a draft tool that is then refined through human post-editing. Language models have a wide range of applications across sectors such as medicine, science, education, cybersecurity, and finance. Both social media platforms and government agencies depend on AI-powered tools to detect and flag content involving hate speech, incitement to violence, or extremism. However, these applications face significant challenges; translation errors are especially common with low-resource languages or emotionally charged texts, often leading to misinterpretation of intent or tone. These limitations underscore the importance of human oversight, especially when automated decisions may have significant legal, ethical, or security implications.

Seen as a central element of society's digital transformation, artificial intelligence has become a priority at both the national (Guvernul României, 2024) and European policy levels (Artificial Intelligence Act (Regulation (EU) 2024/1689)). Within the European Commission, the cutting-edge technology and language tools used by the Directorate-General for Translations (DGT) enhance the efficiency and quality of translation work. The computer-assisted translation (CAT) tool is continually fed with diverse data and high-quality human translations, making it an essential part of DGT operations. Integrated sources include translation memories (Euramis), terminology databases (IATE2), and machine translation (eTranslation). DGT's strategy, Data Strategy@DGT, aims to improve CAT to facilitate real-time collaboration and data exchange among translators. When integrated into secure, ethically governed workflows, AI-assisted translation does not seek to replace human expertise but to strengthen it by providing scalable tools that support professionals in making informed, timely decisions.

It remains unclear, however, how reliable these are for intelligence translation, where accuracy, cultural nuance, and context are essential. Most assessments still rely on general or technical corpora, while systematic research on the automated evaluation of MT engines in intelligence-specific settings remains limited. This leads to a double uncertainty: both the performance of these engines in sensitive areas and the adequacy of the metrics used to evaluate them are not sufficiently studied.

The purpose of this article is to address this knowledge gap through a mixed-methods case study that combines qualitative and quantitative analysis to examine six MT systems against institutional human translations published in the Romanian Intelligence Studies Review (RISR). This study analyzes the quality of translations created by machine translation systems compared to those produced by human translators. By applying BLEU, METEOR, ROUGE, and BERTScore in the quantitative analysis, the research also aims to evaluate how well these metrics reflect translation quality in relation to human qualitative evaluation. The focus is on examining the alignment between automated metric scores and human judgments, to provide insights into the usefulness and limitations of these metrics in specialized translation and to suggest directions for future research.

The research is based on the assumption that AI-based MT can approximate human-level fluency in certain conditions but is limited by terminological accuracy and contextual coherence. The quality of translations produced by artificial intelligence is greatly affected by several factors, including the complexity and nature of the source text, the specificity of the field's terminology, and the context. The research questions focus on two key aspects: the human translator and technological innovations designed to assist the specialist. Therefore, we aim to determine to what extent machine translation can replace the human translator in specialized language for intelligence, and which translation engines perform best.

Theoretical foundations - The use of AI in translation

The development of artificial intelligence in translation stems from linguistic theories and computational advances. Noam Chomsky's theory of generative grammar (Syntactic Structures, 1957) significantly influenced the foundation of later Rule-based machine translation (RBMT) systems in the 1960s and beyond, which focused on formalized linguistic structures and aligned well with computational modeling. Early systems struggled to produce fluent translations, prompting a shift to statistical machine translation (SMT) and later to neural machine translation (NMT) (Jooste, Haque, & Way, 2022). AI-powered translation engines have transitioned from rule-based to data-driven methods, primarily using neural networks and probabilistic models to generate translations. The shift from rule-based systems to NMT and Multimodal machine translation (MMT) systems has improved the fluency and accuracy of machine translations (Sulubacak, et al., 2020). Still, it has also introduced new challenges in managing specialized terminology and understanding contextual nuances.

According to Andrew Chesterman (2016) translation is governed by more than linguistic rules – it also depends on cultural, political, and strategic norms. All these aspects are challenging for artificial intelligence to understand, especially when applied in sensitive areas, where context plays a crucial role in understanding the text.

Empirical research has shown that while AI-powered translation tools have made significant strides in improving fluency and speed, they often lack the semantic understanding required by specialized fields such as intelligence. Läubli, Rico, and Volk (2018) examined the performance of AI-powered translation engines and found that while AI translations are increasingly fluent, they still struggle with specialized terminology and domain-specific content, such as texts extracted from intelligence or national security articles. This indicates that AI-powered translation engines work better for non-specialized translations, but face challenges when dealing with texts that require domain-specific knowledge (Läubli, et al, 2018). Similarly, Moorkens and O'Brien (2017) have contributed to research on AI-assisted translation, highlighting the importance of human intervention in the post-editing process for translation quality assurance. While AI can speed up translation, human translators remain essential for ensuring accuracy and correcting contextual errors, especially when specialized terms or ambiguities are involved (Moorkens & O'Brien, 2015). Taking into account that social media platforms and institutions with responsibilities in the field are increasingly relying on AI-based tools to monitor hate speech, violent content, and proselytizing. Saadany and Orasan (2021), in the study *BLEU, METEOR, BERTScore: Evaluation of Metrics Performance in Assessing Critical Translation Errors in Sentiment-oriented Text* analyzes the reliability of tools for the automatic evaluation of translations generated by translation engines (machine translation – MT). By comparing the results of the measurement systems, BLEU, METEOR, BERTScore, in the case of translations with severely affected significance versus those that present only distortions of feelings, the authors demonstrated that the measurement systems analyzed need to be improved in order better to capture critical errors in the interpretation of feelings.

The study *Technology Trends in Translation: A Comparative Analysis of Machine and Human Translation*, conducted by Kembaren et al. (2023), provides a detailed analysis of the differences between machine and human translations. The research uses a qualitative methodology based on a literature review to assess the accuracy, consistency, and flexibility of each method. The results show that machine translation excels in speed and consistency, making it ideal for repetitive, standardized translations. However, translations done by human translators offer superior accuracy and flexibility, which is essential for capturing the nuances and linguistic complexity of texts. This research contributes to understanding the role of technology in the translation industry. It highlights that, in many contexts, human translation remains indispensable to ensure the quality and fidelity of the message.

According to the study founded by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Translations on the Status of the Translator Profession in the European Union, (2013) *Studies on translation and multilingualism - The status of the translation profession in the European Union* (Pym et al., 2013), Romania has a system of training specialized translators at the level of university master's studies and a public system of authorization/certification of translators that takes into account specialized training. The translator's authorization is an official document that certifies a translator's professional competence and allows them to carry out certified translations for use in judicial or official proceedings. The Ministry of Justice issues the authorization for judicial proceedings, and the Ministry of Culture issues the authorization for other areas.

The study *The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on the Translation Profession. A Case study of Microsoft Translator* (Mandarić, 2022) explores the growing influence of AI technology on the translation profession, highlighting that, while AI and computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools have significantly transformed the way translators do their work, human translators remain essential for ensuring the quality of translations, especially in complex areas such as literary and technical texts. Research indicates that while AI technologies can accelerate the translation process and provide a valuable foundation for post-editing, they cannot entirely replace the expertise and critical judgment of human translators. In conclusion, the study suggests that technology should be viewed as a supportive tool rather than a threat, helping to streamline the translation process and enabling translators to focus on the creative and nuanced aspects of their work.

The research paper *Implications of Using AI in*

Translation Studies: Trends, Challenges, and Future Direction (Amini, Ravindran, & Lee, 2024) provides an overview of the use of AI in translation studies (TS), covering statistical machine translation, rule-based machine translation, neural machine translation, and hybrid machine translation. The study explores the advantages and limitations of each model and their applications in translation. In addition, various techniques for evaluating the effectiveness of AI models in translation are examined, along with their advantages and limitations, including the management of figurative language (e.g., idiomatic expressions, metaphors) and cultural nuances.

Methodological approach

From a methodological standpoint, the research questions were addressed by analyzing and evaluating translation engines in specialized translation tasks through both qualitative and quantitative comparative analysis. Using a case study, the differences between human and machine-generated translations were examined, focusing on how reliably AI-assisted translation can support human translators. The goal was to identify inaccuracies and gather detailed insights into the progress of AI machine translation technology, along with its current limitations in adapting content and in distinguishing nuances, emotions, interpretations, and language.

Qualitatively, focusing on accuracy, terminology, and coherence, machine outputs were contrasted with institutional human translations for accuracy, contextual fit, and stylistic adequacy (Nord, 1991; Chesterman, 2016). Quantitatively, BLEU, METEOR, ROUGE L, and BERTScore were applied to the same material, producing reproducible indicators (Papineni, Roukos, Ward, & Zhu, 2002; Mansuy, 2023; Saadany & Orășan, 2021). The two dimensions were interpreted sequentially; this dual approach allowed both close textual examination and standardized evaluation. To integrate findings from both qualitative and quantitative approaches into a structured framework, a SWOT analysis was chosen as a complementary, broader perspective that combines internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) with external ones (opportunities and threats). The analysis was conducted by mapping the strengths and weaknesses derived from the characteristics of the translation tools and the recurring patterns identified in the qualitative and quantitative evaluations. At the same time, opportunities and threats reflected the contextual and operational implications. This integration ensured that the SWOT analysis reflected both empirical evidence and practical relevance.

To obtain the numerical results, Python formulas were edited and applied using the AI assistant in Anaconda Jupyter Notebook.

The corpus consisted of three sets of bilingual articles from the Romanian Intelligence Studies Review (RISR). The official Romanian translations generated by human translators served as reference standards in the quantitative analysis. Significantly, these benchmarks date from 2014–2016, before the widespread adoption of NMT; this ensures independence from recent automation but also means some terminology or stylistic conventions may have evolved. Due to space constraints, the article presents Set 3 in detail, as it is selected to represent patterns observed across the corpus.

The six widely used translation tools (Microsoft Translator, Google Translate, Systran, DeepL, Reverso, and ChatGPT) have been selected for their accessibility and widespread use. The translations generated have been quantitatively evaluated using Natural Language Processing (NLP) metrics to compare machine-generated text with a reference text (the published Romanian translation). BLEU measures n-gram precision for translation tasks, while ROUGE measures n-gram recall for summarization. METEOR improves on BLEU by incorporating synonyms and stemming. BERTScore utilizes contextual embeddings from Transformer models to capture semantic similarity, providing a more nuanced assessment that often correlates more closely with human judgment.

By focusing on free, publicly available tools, the study reflects real-world use and verifiable scenarios, while remaining accessible for replication in future research; nonetheless, it acknowledges that free machine translation tools offer lower performance than commercial solutions specialized in translating specific fields, such as intelligence.

Qualitative Results

The third set of translations includes an excerpt from the article Terrorism Serving Geopolitics. The Russian-Ukrainian Conflict as an Example of the Implementation of Aleksandr Dugin's Geopolitical Doctrine and Evgeny Messner's Concept of "Rebel War", by Michał Wojnowski, published in Romanian Intelligence Studies Review (RISR), no. 14/2015, p 44, followed by the Romanian translation version, published in the Romanian edition of this journal, and the translations automatically generated by translation engines.

Set 3 of translations
Source text:
This was reached by removing all the emblems from the soldiers' uniforms, making it unable to identify the country (so-called cryptooperation) and the formation they serve for, as well as by forbidding to communicate, in any form, with the civilians. All this led to many contradictory interpretations of "green people", "soldiers in uniforms" or "gentle people" and inability to define the enemy and taking the right actions. (Wojnowski, 2015)
Target text – the official translation into Romanian:
Acest lucru a putut fi realizat prin îndepărtarea emblemelor de pe uniformele soldaților, făcând în acest sens imposibilă identificarea țării (așa-numită cripto-operațiune) și a formațiunii din care fac parte, precum și prin interzicerea relaționării, sub orice formă, cu civilii. Toate aceste au condus la numeroase interpretări contradictorii ale „omuleților verzi", „soldaților în uniforme" sau „oamenilor blânzi" și la incapacitatea de a defini inamicul și de a lua măsuri oportune. (Wojnowski, 2015)
Comment: The translation published in the Romanian Journal of Intelligence Studies reflects a good understanding of the source text and a correct adaptation to the specific nature of institutional discourse. The wording "Acest lucru a putut fi realizat prin îndepărtarea emblemelor de pe uniformele soldaților" is idiomatic and functional. The term "cripto-operațiune" is used correctly, in the sense that it refers to the concealment of military identity - and not to cryptography, as it erroneously appears in other translations. The expression "relaționarea cu civilii" may seem slightly abstract or unclear, but it is acceptable in a formal register. The ending of sentence, "incapacitatea de a defini inamicul și de a lua măsuri oportune," is not only semantically correct, but also terminologically appropriate, with a strategic nuance also present in the original text. Overall, the translation manages to maintain a balance between clarity, terminological accuracy, and formal style, making it suitable for academic publication or institutional use.
Translation with Microsoft translator:
Acest lucru a fost obținut prin îndepărtarea tuturor emblemelor de pe uniformele soldaților, făcându-l imposibil să identifice țara (așa-numita criptooperațiune) și formația pentru care servesc, precum și prin interzicerea comunicării, sub orice formă, cu civilii. Toate acestea au dus la multe interpretări contradictorii ale "oamenilor verzi", "soldaților în uniformă" sau "oamenilor blânzi" și incapacitatea de a defini inamicul și de a lua măsurile corecte. (Microsoft Translator, May 26, 2025)
Comment: The translation provided by Microsoft Translator has several stylistic and semantic limitations that affect the accuracy and clarity of the message. Phrases such as "*făcându-l imposibil să identifice țara*" are grammatically incorrect in Romanian and denote a literal translation from English; the correct construction would be "*făcând imposibilă identificarea țării.*" Terminological choices such as "*formația pentru care servesc*" are acceptable in terms of meaning, but inappropriate in a military context, where it would be preferable "*formațiunea din care fac parte.*" In addition, machine translation does not capture expressions with a cultural and contextual significance, such as "*green people*," which, in the context of Crimea, is well establish as "*omuleții verzi*," an evocative term of the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine. Although the general meaning is conveyed, the nuances, precision, and contextual adaptation - specific to translation in specialized fields such as intelligence or security studies - are missing. Consequently, human review remains essential to ensure terminological consistency, stylistic fluency and conceptual accuracy.

Translation with Google Translate:

La aceasta s-a ajuns prin îndepărtarea tuturor emblemelor de pe uniformele soldaților, făcându-l în imposibilitatea de a identifica țara (așa-numita criptooperație) și formația pentru care deservesc, precum și interzicerea comunicării, sub orice formă, cu civilii. Toate acestea au dus la multe interpretări contradictorii ale „oamenilor verzi", „soldați în uniforme" sau „oameni blânzi" și incapacitatea de a defini inamicul și de a lua acțiunile corecte. (Google Translate, May 24, 2025)

Comment: In the translation generated by Google Translate, several grammatical and semantic issues stand out. The wording "făcându-l în imposibilitatea de a identifica țara" is incoherent in Romanian: it adopts the English structure "making it impossible," but with no clear subject, it becomes unnatural. Also, "formația pentru care deserves" is not the most semantically appropriate choice for this context. The ending – "și incapacitatea de a lua acțiunile corecte" – it is functional, but stylistically flat and general. Google offers a basic translation, but the lack of contextualization and adaptation, as well as its rigidity of expression, disqualify it for use in specialized or academic contexts.

Translation with Systran:

La aceasta s-a ajuns prin înlăturarea tuturor emblemelor din uniformele soldaților, făcându-l incapabil să identifice țara (așa-numita criptare) și formația pentru care servesc, precum și prin interzicerea de a comunica, sub orice formă, cu civilii. Toate acestea au dus la multe interpretări contradictorii ale „oamenilor verzi", „soldaților în uniforme" sau „oamenilor blânzi" și incapacitatea de a defini inamicul și de a lua măsurile corecte. (https://www.systransoft.com/translate/ Systran, May 26, 2025)

Comment: Systran's translation contains an equivalence error, translating the term "cryptooperation" as "așa-numita criptare," which distorts the original meaning. In the context, "cryptooperation" refers to an operation carried out without any insignia or identifiable elements — not data encryption. This denotes a lack of recognition of specialized terms, contrary to the fundamental principles of terminological translation (Sager, 1990). In addition, constructions such as "în uniformele soldaților" (în loc de "pe uniforme" and "făcându-l incapabil să identifice" are imprecise and misconstruded. The metaphors ("omuleții verzi", "oameni blânzi") are preserved, but integrated into a text marked by confusion. The translation is professionally and stylistically inadequate.

Translation with DeepL:

Acest obiectiv a fost atins prin îndepărtarea tuturor emblemelor de pe uniformele soldaților, făcând imposibilă identificarea țării (așa-numita criptooperațiune) și a formațiunii pentru care aceștia servesc, precum și prin interzicerea comunicării, sub orice formă, cu civilii. Toate acestea au condus la numeroase interpretări contradictorii ale „oamenilor verzi", „soldaților în uniformă" sau „oamenilor blânzi" și la incapacitatea de a defini inamicul și de a lua măsurile corecte. (DeepL, May 26, 2025)

Comment: DeepL provides a coherent, balanced and idiomatic translation. The phrase "Acest obiectiv a fost atins" is a successful stylistic adaptation of "This Was Reached", which avoids literalism. The term "criptooperațiune" is used correctly and in context, and the phrase "formațiunii pentru care aceștia servesc" is grammatical and clear, even if slightly formalized. The phrase "interzicerea comunicării, sub orice formă, cu civilii" is logical and expressive, and the ending – "la incapacitatea de a defini inamicul și de a lua măsurile corecte" – clearly convey the intent of the original. The translation is one of the most balanced of the analyzed set: fluent, stylistically adequate and free of major errors. The main limitation remains the lack of a deeper adaptation of metaphors ("green people", "gentle people") to the target culture.

Translation with Reverso:

Acest lucru a fost atins prin îndepărtarea tuturor emblemelor din uniformele olds', făcându-l în imposibilitatea de a identifica țara (așa-numita cripto-operație) și formarea pentru care servesc, precum și prin interzicerea de a comunica, în orice formă, cu civilii. Toate acestea au dus la multe interpretări contradictorii ale "green people", "soldați în uniformes" sau "people" blând și incapacitatea de a defini inamicul și de a lua acțiunile corecte. (Reverso, May 27, 2025)

Comment: The translation provided by Reverso is affected by obvious processing errors and the lack of a functional adaptation. From the outset, the distortion of the word "soldiers'" as "olds'" compromises the meaning, and the expression "făcându-l în imposibilitatea de a identifica țara" is unidiomatic and confusing. These formulations do not meet the criterion of clarity defined by Chesterman (2016). In addition, "formarea pentru care servesc" is a mistranslation of the term military "formation," replaced by a false friend. This violates the principles of terminological consistency highlighted by Sager (1990). Retaining English words ("green people", "soldați în uniformes") reflects a lack of adaptation, affecting both cohesion and coherence. From Baker's (2018) perspective, the lack of equivalence of the original discourse and the failure of the author's intention, ambiguity, strategic confusion, make translation not functional in any professional context.

Translation with ChatGPT-4o:

Această situație a fost posibilă prin eliminarea tuturor însemnelor de pe uniformele soldaților, ceea ce a făcut imposibilă identificarea țării (așa-numita criptooperațiune) și a unității în care aceștia activează, precum și prin interzicerea oricărei forme de comunicare cu populația civilă. Toate aceste măsuri au condus la interpretări contradictorii referitoare la „omuleții verzi", „soldații în uniforme" sau „oamenii blânzi" și la incapacitatea de a identifica inamicul și de a adopta reacțiile adecvate.

ChatGPT- (GPT-4o, released in June 2024) (The translation is produced by ChatGPT-turbo model (version 09.04.2024) using the official ChatGPT interface available on May 26, 2025).

Comment: This translation stands out for its stylistic balance, semantic fidelity and professional register. The phrase "eliminarea tuturor însemnelor de pe uniformele soldaților" is accurately adapted, and "criptooperațiune" is logically integrated into the sentence. "Unitatea în care aceștia activează" is a good choice adapted to the military context. Phrases such as "omuleții verzi" and "adoptarea reacțiilor adecvate" are expressive and consistent with the register of academic discourse. Although it does not introduce creative equivalences, the translation maintains clarity, a sober tone, and functional terminology, offering one of the most robust automated variants, comparable to the human translation in terms of style.

Qualitative Results

Graph 1. Graphical representation of the quantifiable parameters resulted from the computerized evaluation of the machine translations in Set 3

	DeepL	Microsoft	Google	Systran	Reverso	ChatGPT-4o
Total	2.4937	2.2145	2.1671	2.1559	2.0022	2.8451
● BERT F1	0,8849	0,8559	0,8553	0,8473	0,8239	0,8311
● ROUGE-1 F1	0,6372	0,5487	0,5487	0,531	0,5	0,4522
● METEOR	0,6066	0,514	0,4908	0,4927	0,4784	0,4248
● BLEU	0,365	0,2959	0,2723	0,2849	0,1999	0,137
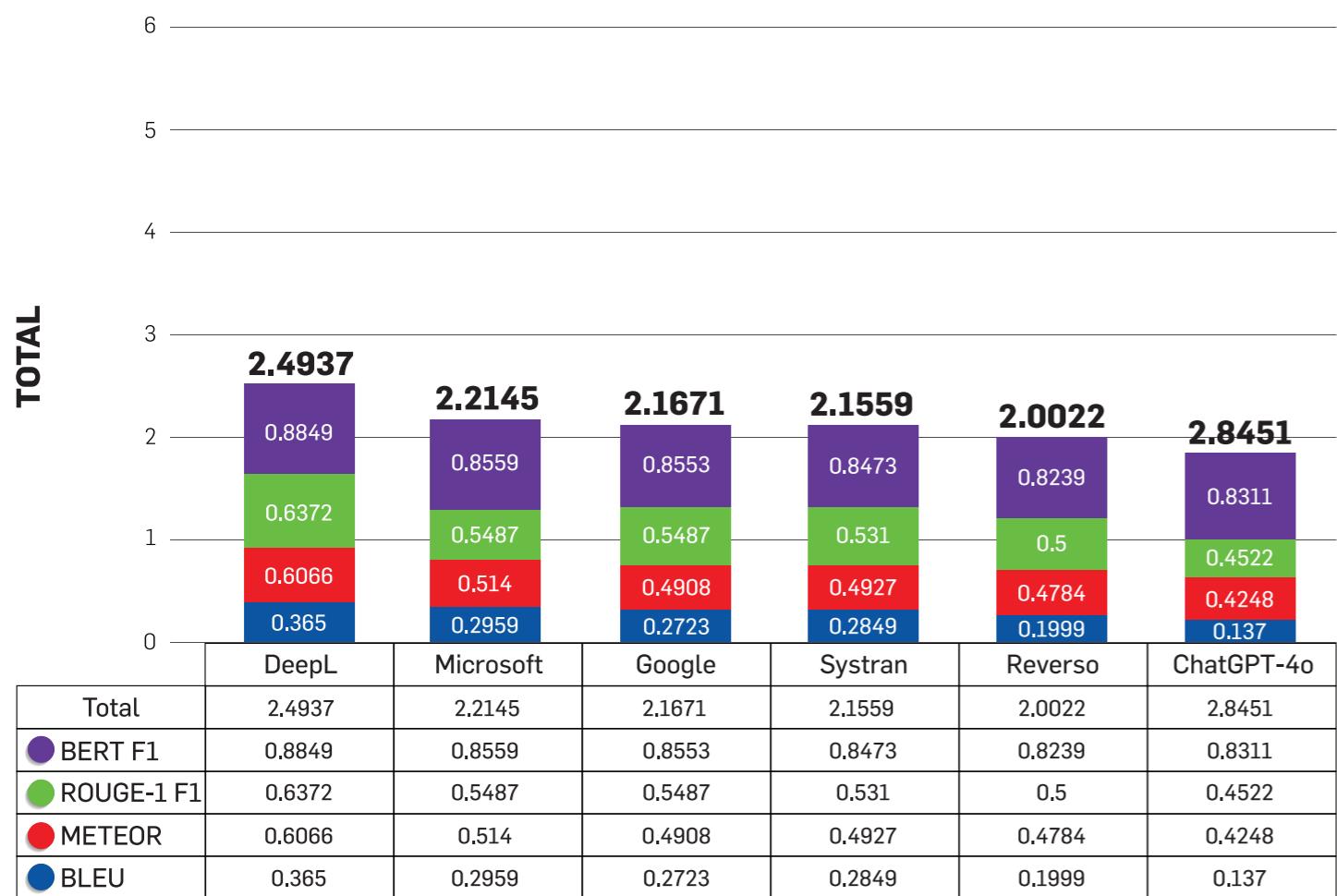
Discussion

The analysis of the seven translations confirms that, in the translation of intelligence texts, terminological fidelity, stylistic clarity, and contextual adequacy are essential for the accuracy and effectiveness of communication. A clear balance distinguishes official human translation between semantic consistency, correct terminological adaptation, and expression in a professional register. Terms such as "cripto-operațiune" are correctly adapted, and the sentence structure respects both the original meaning and the conventions of specialized translation. Although the wording is slightly stiff in some passages, the translation overall is superior. Among the machine translations, ChatGPT's provides the clearest, most coherent, and most adapted rendering of the source text. Phrases such as "adoptarea reacțiilor adecvate" or "unitatea în care aceștia activează" denote a good understanding of the military register and an increased capacity for idiomatic

adaptation. However, this variant also remains limited terminologically, as it does not provide cultural context or reinterpretations of metaphors. DeepL stands out for its clarity and fidelity, but remains close to a literal translation. Google Translate, Systran, and Reverso have serious shortcomings: grammatical mistakes, terminological confusion ("deservesc," "criptare"), and calques that undermine the text's coherence. These limitations make them unsuitable for translations in sensitive areas, such as intelligence. In conclusion, this study confirms that, although machine translation has advanced significantly, specialized translations in the field of intelligence and security remain dependent on human expertise, especially for interpreting metaphors with significant connotations, adapting acronyms, and selecting institutionally accepted terminology. AI-based tools can serve as practical support, but they cannot replace the contextual competence and interpretive responsibility of the human translator in areas of high geopolitical and terminological significance.

Findings of the quantitative analysis – graph interpretation

Graph 1 (Graphical representation of the quantifiable parameters resulting from the computerized evaluation of the machine translations in Set 3) reflects the comparative performance of the six translation tools evaluated, based on the scores obtained in the four metrics: BLEU, METEOR, ROUGE-1 F1, and BERTScore F1.

DeepL stands out as the leader, with a total score of 2.4937, supported by a very high BERT F1 score (0.8849), which indicates efficient retention of semantic meaning, as well as solid performance on METEOR (0.6066) and ROUGE (0.6372). However, the BLUE score (0.365) remains relatively modest, suggesting that the formulations are not necessarily formally close to the reference but may be freer or paraphrased.

On the following positions are Microsoft translator (2.2145), Google Translate (2.1671), and Systran (2.1559), with similar scores between them, all having balanced values at the level of general significance (BERT) and lexical content (ROUGE), but lower performance in terms of formal fluency (BLEU). Reverso, although with a more modest overall score (2.0022), comes closer to the others with a decent BERTScore (0.8239), confirming the trend observed in previous sets: it retains the general meaning but with a simpler, less formal expression. ChatGPT-4o, on the other hand, is once again in last place (1.8451), with low scores, especially for BLUE (0.137) and METEOR (0.4248), suggesting a freer, less faithful translation in terms of structure and terminology.

It is important to emphasize that, even in this case, the scores from automatic assessments do not always reflect the true quality of the translation. Some systems can score high because they reproduce text almost exactly, preserving the words' form but ignoring natural flow, logical clarity, or stylistic adaptation. We also highlight that, in specialized translation—especially in the field of intelligence—human evaluation is crucial for terminological accuracy, contextual relevance, and discursive coherence, beyond what the algorithms' figures suggest.

SWOT Analysis: AI in Intelligence Translation

Table 2. SWOT Analysis

STRENGHTS	WEAKNESSES	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
rapid processing of large volumes of text in various languages;	inability to interpret ambiguities or cryptic language;	acceleration of human analysis in crisis situations;	risks regarding the confidentiality of translated data;
access to extensive and up-to-date terminology databases;	reduced sensitivity to the geostrategic and operational context;	development of secure internal AI models;	potential for bias influencing the decision-making process;
efficiency in translating repetitive content;	tendency toward literal translations;	support for rare languages or dialects;	excessive trust without human validation;
integration with automatic analysis and detection systems.	errors in rendering novel or specialized terms.	evaluation and traceability in machine translations.	cyber vulnerabilities associated with the use of AI-based translation platforms.

To rigorously evaluate the potential and limitations of using artificial intelligence in specialized translation within the intelligence field, a structured SWOT analysis was conducted, aligned with the European Union's AI and cybersecurity regulations and strategic directions. This approach enabled the identification of significant advantages of applying AI in intelligence translation, including the rapid processing of large volumes of multilingual texts and access to updated terminology databases (Strengths). However, machine translation engines still face significant challenges in interpreting complex language and often produce overly literal or incomplete translations, thereby compromising the terminological precision essential to this domain (Weaknesses).

Regarding opportunities, the integration of artificial intelligence, supported by continuous human monitoring and revision, represents both a development opportunity and a strategic necessity, especially in crisis situations where speed and accuracy are crucial (Opportunities). Tactically, developing in-house models that comply with cybersecurity standards and are continuously updated terminologically can ensure successful implementation. In the context of rapid technological expansion, threats should not be underestimated: unwarranted reliance on AI may generate errors that can be exploited for disinformation or diminish human judgment in final evaluations (Threats).

These conclusions are directly correlated with the EU legislative framework. Under the EU Artificial Intelligence Act — the first regulation on AI — AI used in the intelligence field is classified as a high-risk system, requiring strict compliance with accuracy and cybersecurity standards from design to operation. Under the European regulatory framework, AI systems must prevent cyberattacks, errors, and data breaches and include robust procedures for backup, detection, response, and recovery (European Commission, 2025). The European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) emphasizes that the continuous development of AI security standards is necessary, not only to protect infrastructures but also to maintain public trust and professional interoperability. In the field of intelligence, these legislative provisions and best practices translate into a responsibility to ensure the confidentiality of sensitive information, data protection, and traceability in automated translation (ENISA, 2022).

Conclusions

To obtain a comprehensive view of machine translation system performance, the quantitative analysis was complemented by an in-depth qualitative assessment that included comparisons with reference human translations. These excerpts, taken from sources published between 2014 and 2016, were chosen precisely to avoid contamination by recent machine translation technologies, thereby ensuring an authentic human standard before the widespread adoption of neural machine translation tools. In the automated assessment, these human versions were introduced as a benchmark, and the translations generated by the AI systems were treated with the candidate code. The evaluation assessed how closely a machine translation aligned with the coherence, accuracy, and contextual adaptation of the human version provided.

This correlation between the two methods supports the core conclusion of the research: machine translation cannot operate without human judgment. The quality of a translation, especially in sensitive areas like intelligence, depends not only on algorithms and databases but also on the human ability to understand context, interpret nuances, and make responsible stylistic and terminological choices. Humans should not compete with automated tools but should master and critically use them, including during the evaluation stage. In this way, the mixed research method, which combines quantitative analysis with qualitative interpretation, offers a broader and more balanced perspective, validated by both objective data and reasoned human judgments. This integrative approach enables both measuring performance and gaining a deep understanding of the meaning and limitations of AI-assisted translation.

An important finding from this comparison is that, although technology has advanced significantly and modern translation engines have real-time access to large linguistic and terminological databases, translation errors still occur, especially in the rendering of specialized terms in the field of intelligence.

While this study offers valid arguments for assessing AI-assisted translation in specialized areas, certain limitations must be recognized. First, the research was confined to three sets of texts and a small number of translation engines. Although this selection reflects the main translation tools available to the general public, it does not cover the entire range of AI translation technologies, especially those used by government or defense agencies, which often remain inaccessible due to security restrictions. Additionally, the reference translations used as benchmarks were drawn from human translations published several years ago (2014-2016). While this choice ensures independence from recent AI influence, it may not fully represent the current development of intelligence terminology or language use. Moreover, human translations are subject to interpretation and stylistic differences, introducing some subjectivity into the evaluation. Future research should aim to expand the dataset to include more diverse source texts and less common language pairs, particularly those relevant to security settings. In contrast, the automated evaluation

metrics used (BLEU, METEOR, ROUGE, and BERTScore) offer valuable insights but are not perfect. These metrics can penalize contextually appropriate reformulations and often overlook semantic nuance or accuracy, which are crucial in intelligence contexts translation.

The theoretical and methodological new aspects of this study arise from using quantifiable parameters to evaluate and analyze machine translations, leading to new research questions in this field. For example, research studies can be conducted to evaluate the performance of machine translation evaluation systems. All these steps are necessary to assess, implement, and continuously train and adjust AI-based systems. Ideally, machine translation (MT) systems are not static entities. The technology behind MT is constantly evolving, enhancing its performance and adaptability over time. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that TM systems will also improve as research advances, and this is where research plays a crucial role. Researchers need a clear framework to identify areas for evaluation and improvement. Quantifiable parameters enable an objective comparison between different approaches, allowing researchers to determine which method is more effective and adjust the system accordingly.

By exploring the potential of implementing AI to improve the speed and accuracy of translations in the fields of intelligence and national defense, future research could have several important implications for both translation practice and the broader field of translation technology. The findings from this research can serve as a relevant starting point for academic and professional discussions on the use of artificial intelligence in specialized translation, particularly in intelligence. Additionally, these results can be shared at conferences on applied linguistics, translation technology, and ethical AI, thereby enhancing dialogue among researchers, practitioners, and stakeholders within institutions.

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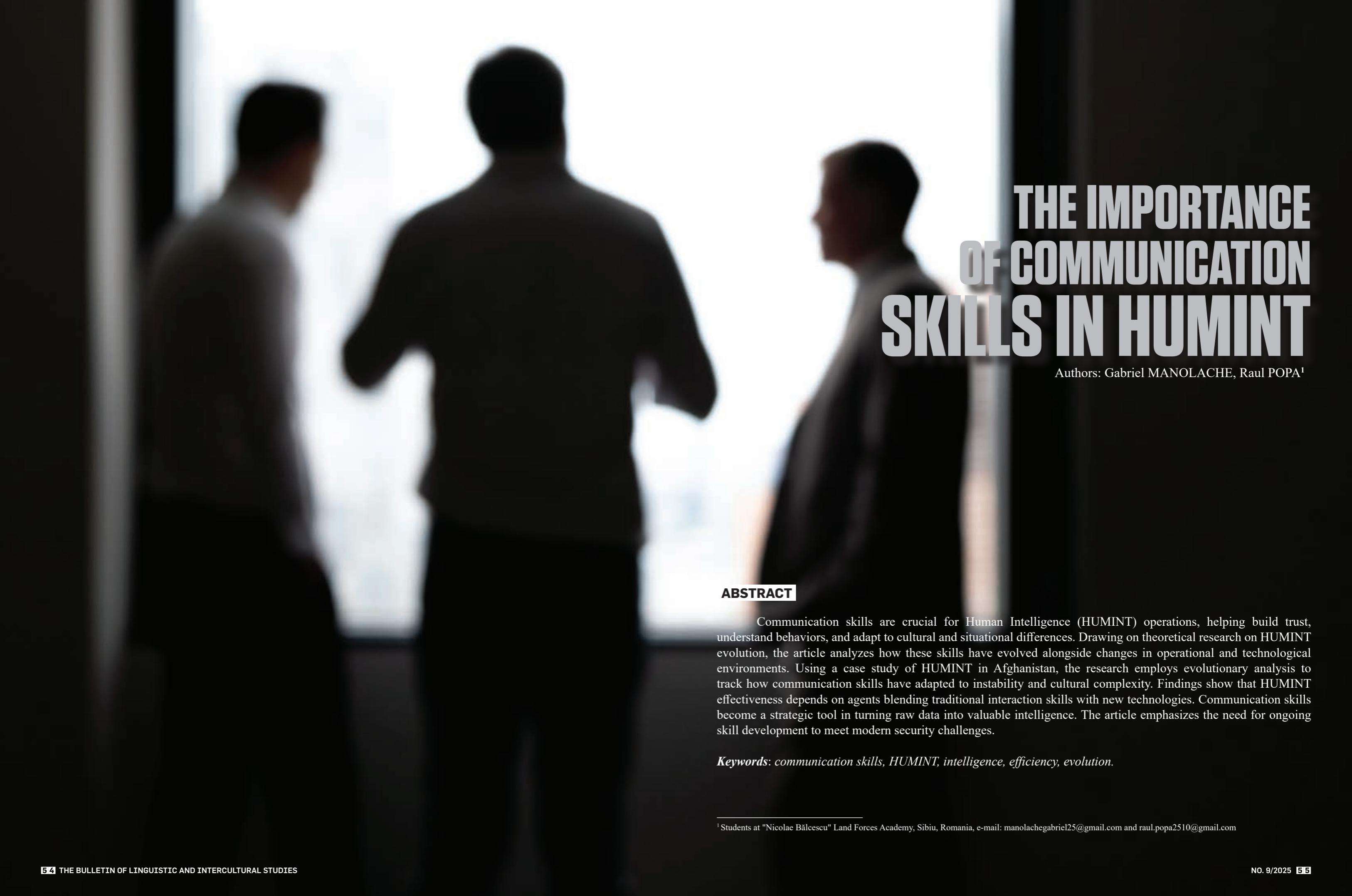
THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN HUMINT

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ABSTRACT

Communication skills are crucial for Human Intelligence (HUMINT) operations, helping build trust, understand behaviors, and adapt to cultural and situational differences. Drawing on theoretical research on HUMINT evolution, the article analyzes how these skills have evolved alongside changes in operational and technological environments. Using a case study of HUMINT in Afghanistan, the research employs evolutionary analysis to track how communication skills have adapted to instability and cultural complexity. Findings show that HUMINT effectiveness depends on agents blending traditional interaction skills with new technologies. Communication skills become a strategic tool in turning raw data into valuable intelligence. The article emphasizes the need for ongoing skill development to meet modern security challenges.

Keywords: *communication skills, HUMINT, intelligence, efficiency, evolution.*

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Introduction

Communication is the foundation of intelligence gathering activities through Human Intelligence (HUMINT). In this field, it is not just the raw information that matters, but also how it is obtained, processed, and transmitted, making communication skills vital in the intelligence cycle. Each stage of this process relies on the intelligence agent's ability to build relationships, read behavior, exploit vulnerabilities, and tailor messages to the context.

This article examines the significance of these skills in streamlining HUMINT intelligence-gathering operations and analyzes their development over the decades, from traditional to modern methods. In the context of globalization, characterized by informational advances and asymmetric warfare, the ability to adapt and integrate is essential for refining intelligence collection techniques. To emphasize the importance of this topic, the article offers a detailed analysis of communication skills in HUMINT, focusing on interactions that foster trust and on transforming raw data into information relevant to decision-makers. Therefore, continuous improvement of communication skills is no longer just a professional necessity but has become an essential part of obtaining information from human sources.

I. HUMINT and the role of communication skills

I.1. The basics of HUMINT

HUMINT is the collection of information through direct interaction with human beings, whether they are sources, informants, or persons of interest. Unlike technical methods (SIGINT, MASINT, IMINT, etc.), HUMINT relies on relationships, communication, and interpreting human behavior. According to Byman (2014), HUMINT refers to information obtained directly from people. The author stresses that "HUMINT essentially means any information that comes from a human being. This includes, first and foremost, classic espionage—a human agent infiltrating another organization, be it a state or a terrorist group" (Byman, 2014, p. 15). However, gathering information through HUMINT is not limited to classic sources, but "the information comes from human sources, and the public often associates this type of information gathering with clandestine activities" (Lewis, 2004, p. 176). From these definitions, it follows that HUMINT is discreet and risky by nature, relying on direct interactions and understanding human behavior.

Information is "raw or unprocessed data that, through processing and analysis, becomes intelligence" (Jensen, McElreath & Graves, 2021, p. 6). From this perspective, we can say that information, in its initial form, is not useful until it undergoes evaluation and interpretation. Mark M. Lowenthal states that "information becomes intelligence only when it is collected, evaluated, and integrated into a context that gives it meaning" (Lowenthal, 2017, p. 10). Therefore, transforming raw information into intelligence is essential to providing decision-makers with relevant, actionable data, and HUMINT is at the heart of the intelligence cycle.

I.2. Communication skills in the context of HUMINT

Communication skills are a complex concept with many components. We can say that "the essence of communication skills is the ability to organize speech activities according to specific communication tasks and situations, based on acquired knowledge and abilities" (Babaniyazova, 2019, p. 162). Therefore, from this perspective, we could define communication skills as the sum of abilities and knowledge, but this definition does not fully capture the complexity of the concept itself.

Also, to define communication skills more precisely, we will link them with related terms like efficiency and appropriateness, considering that "efficiency describes the result of communication skills, while appropriateness links it to the situational conditions of real social interaction" (Rickheit & Strohner, 2008, p. 15). Therefore, communication skills are not just about conveying a message clearly but also about adjusting it to the context in which communication occurs.

In HUMINT, communication skills are more accurately described as "the appropriate ability to convey ideas to others through speech or writing" (McCroskey, 1984, p. 265). Therefore, they become essential to intelligence gathering operations, as the success of missions relies on the relationships established with human sources, as well as on the effectiveness and appropriateness of communication. The ability to build trusting relationships, listen actively, and understand both the spoken words and subtle cues in the source's behavior is critical for operational success. These communication skills can be learned and improved through education and practice. Operational officers are trained not only in espionage techniques but also in managing complex social interactions, understanding cultural and psychological variables, and employing effective strategies of influence and persuasion.

II. The evolution of communication skills in HUMINT

II.1. Methods of gathering information in the Roman Empire

Traditional methods of gathering information rely on direct contact between the agent and the source, using communication and psychological techniques to collect information. Supporting this principle, we see that "HUMINT involves personal meetings between the agent and the source, requires excellent communication skills and the ability to build trust in hostile environments" (Department of the Army, U.S. Army Intelligence Activities Regulation, 2007). According to the U.S. Army Intelligence Activities Regulations (2007), the most essential traditional methods are: interviews, which involve gathering information through structured conversations; interrogations, which include obtaining information from captured individuals; personal observation, where agents monitor the behavior and interactions of sources; and recruitment operations, through which human sources are attracted to provide information.

HUMINT activities date back to ancient Rome, when information gathering relied entirely on human interactions due to the lack of advanced technologies and resources. "In ancient Rome, in the absence of modern technologies and sophisticated information resources, the process of gathering information was based almost exclusively on human interactions, and the movement of information depended on the movement of people" (Bartolini, 2021). In this setting, individuals from different social levels—merchants, messengers, travelers, or ordinary citizens—were part of informal espionage networks, operating under various covers to gather data about adversaries, troop movements, and the political situation in controlled or targeted areas.

HUMINT was a key part of Rome's survival and expansion strategy. The Roman Empire understood early on the importance of information gathered through human interactions, using spies and informants — known as *delatores* — to observe both external and internal threats. The Romans relied on human agents to gather information on "enemy troop movements, the loyalty of local leaders, and possible internal conspiracies" (Sheldon, 2005, p. 7). However, these agents' activities were not limited to the battlefield; they were also tasked with "surveillance of political rivals and prevention of revolts" (Charles University, 2023, p. 23).

After conquering the East, the Roman Empire increased its use of civilian human sources. The captured lands were "soon filled with Roman merchants, land speculators, tax collectors, and agents of Roman financial magnates" (Charles University, 2023, p. 27). These seemingly harmless individuals carried out covert intelligence-gathering missions, blending into local communities to collect data without raising suspicion.

Therefore, since ancient times, HUMINT has shown that the success of intelligence operations relies not only on opportunity but mainly on the agents' ability to communicate effectively, build trusting relationships, and interpret the behavioral nuances of their interlocutors.

II.2. The transformation of communication skills in the technological age

In today's technological era, communication skills have evolved significantly and are used not only for constructive purposes but also to exploit social engineering attacks.

Social engineering is a tactic used by individuals or groups to manipulate and deceive others into disclosing sensitive information or taking actions that compromise their security. It depends more on psychology and human behavior than on technical skills (National Cyber Security Directorate, n.d.). This approach emphasizes human vulnerabilities in facing modern threats. Joshua Spark R. Cruz explains: "Social engineering is a form of cybercrime used by hackers to collect confidential information, which can target anyone from a single person to a large business. Once this information is obtained, social engineers can use it to blackmail the target or for their own purposes, whatever those may be" (Joshua Spark R. Cruz, 2017). Therefore, social engineering acts as an information-gathering tool, focused solely on achieving its specific goals.

Moreover, we learn from Ratliff (2014) that "social

engineering is the art of gaining trust or acceptance to convince someone to provide information or take action for the benefit of the attacker" (p. 45). Last but not least, social engineering has a persuasive character, relying on specialized communication skills to obtain information from the chosen target.

III. The role of communication in HUMINT operations — lessons from Afghanistan

HUMINT operations in Afghanistan have undergone continuous evolution in information gathering methods, influenced by technological advances and the ever-changing geopolitical landscape. These operations represent an emerging model of shifting from traditional adversary-focused intelligence gathering to one that incorporates social, multimedia, and political aspects. Initially, intelligence gathering in this theater relied on traditional HUMINT techniques, but over time, more modern strategies were adopted in line with technological developments. Early methods centered on direct interactions between agents and sources to obtain information. Technological progress has led to the incorporation of new techniques—"the communication skills of HUMINT agents have expanded beyond face-to-face interactions to now include complex techniques of influence through digital media" (Washington Institute, 2009). Furthermore, the transformation of intelligence officers to operate both in the field and digital environments signifies a significant shift in communication strategies. This includes face-to-face interactions with sources, exploitation of social networks, use of digital and multimedia platforms for influence, and analysis of the political context to inform strategic decisions.

Afghanistan can be seen as a "laboratory" for developing and adapting HUMINT intelligence gathering methods. The lessons learned since operations began have significantly influenced how intelligence efforts are carried out, leading to a shift toward using advanced systems to improve efficiency and success. "In Afghanistan, the success of HUMINT has depended on integrating new technologies into traditional strategies, thus adapting to the complexity of the conflict" (Globalsecurity review, 2019). This integration was achieved by adapting verbal and physical communication techniques to digital media, such as social media platforms, where direct contact with sources or gathering information about them proved effective and low-risk. "The role of communication skills has expanded to include not only direct interaction with sources, but also the massive manipulation and interpretation of data from digital media" (Small Wars Journal, 2010). According to Small Wars Journal (2010), HUMINT agents' communication skills have grown considerably, extending beyond direct interactions. Today, they use digital media to collect additional information and influence behavior, which diminishes the risks of physical contact and boosts operational efficiency. "The most important source of information comes from the local population, not from interceptions or technical surveillance, and to be successful, the intelligence community must develop deep and lasting relationships with it" (Flynn et al., 2010). The local population is the most valuable information source, and the success of operations hinges on establishing strong, enduring relationships with it.

Another crucial element observed in the field was the ability of HUMINT officers to manage intercultural communication in environments marked by suspicion, collective trauma, and language barriers. In many cases, officers had to quickly understand cultural norms, nonverbal language, and social hierarchies so as not to compromise their interaction with sources. This cultural intelligence, combined with empathetic and adaptable communication, enabled the building of lasting relationships with the local population. The result was not only the acquisition of timely information but also the development of a steady flow of data, supported by mutual trust and carefully cultivated loyalty. A fundamental aspect of communication in HUMINT operations in Afghanistan was the ability to influence and shape the social environment in favor of coalition forces. This was achieved by identifying so-called "anchor points"—that is, individuals, tensions, or social dynamics that could be used to fracture popular support for the Taliban. For example, in a district in Helmand, analysts discovered that elders were dissatisfied with the Taliban "threatening their traditional authority structure" (Flynn et al., 2010, p. 14) by placing young fighters and religious leaders in key social roles. Exploiting this discontent allowed US forces to support the re-establishment of the traditional local council and thus significantly reduce insurgent activity. This type of intervention clearly reflects the application of social engineering principles for strategic purposes—identifying influential leaders, analyzing vulnerabilities, and persuading key groups to shift the local power dynamics. Direct interaction with the local population, Afghan partners, and NGOs is essential for verifying and contextualizing information. In this sense, communication is no longer a secondary tool but becomes the core of any effective intelligence operation.

Moreover, cooperation between military structures and non-state actors, such as local leaders, requires refined diplomatic skills. Communication is not only used to gather information but also to prevent conflicts from escalating and to strengthen tactical partnerships. In a fluid environment like Afghanistan, every word, gesture, or communication decision could tip the balance between cooperation and hostility.

Combining agents' technical skills with the ability to build relationships, interpret behavior, and understand human psychology led to a better grasp of local dynamics and the identification of local leaders. Therefore, continuously adapting communication skills was crucial for operational success.

Conclusion

This article emphasizes the critical role of communication skills in HUMINT intelligence gathering operations, beginning with their theoretical foundation and culminating in their practical application in a specific operational setting, such as the theater of operations in Afghanistan. The case study results demonstrated that, despite technological advancements and the development of sophisticated digital intelligence tools, the human factor remains indispensable.

Communication skills go beyond merely transmitting a message; they also include the ability to build trusting relationships, operate effectively in diverse cultural environments, interpret behaviors accurately, and adapt discourse to changing situations. The evolutionary study conducted in Afghanistan has demonstrated that officers who combine empathetic communication, social understanding, and strategic use of modern technologies can turn human interactions into valuable sources of intelligence.

The article also highlights that developing communication skills in HUMINT is an ongoing, adaptable process, shaped by the specifics of each mission and ongoing changes in the security environment. In particular, managing relations with the local population, intercultural interaction, and using persuasive communication in digital spaces demonstrate that the modern HUMINT officer must be a well-rounded specialist—both an expert in human relations and knowledgeable about the virtual information environment.

Looking ahead, a dual challenge is emerging: the need to stay in direct contact with human sources while expanding communication methods through digital media and online platforms.

In this context, continuously improving communication skills becomes not only a professional requirement but also a strategic condition for maintaining the relevance and effectiveness of HUMINT in an increasingly volatile and fragmented operational environment.

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STRENGTHENING KIM JONG-UN'S CULT OF PERSONALITY IN NORTH KOREA THROUGH MEDIA CONTROL

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ABSTRACT

Propaganda, censorship, and excessive control are mechanisms used by a totalitarian regime to consolidate the image of the leader and legitimize his power over the country and its people. North Korea finds itself among the countries that use these instruments to strengthen Kim Jong-Un's cult of personality. This article[1] examines strategies for conveying the leader's portrait by analyzing press material published by the North Korean news agency, The Pyongyang Times. It discusses the phenomenon's context while addressing a contemporary publication packed with stylistic tools meant to enrich the leader's image in the eyes of North Koreans and internationally.

Keywords: cult of personality, propaganda, Kim Jong-Un, North Korea, media.

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[1] The article is part of the author's graduation paper of the postgraduate programme *Introduction to Intelligence Analysis*, within the Faculty of Intelligence Studies, "Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence Academy, Bucharest, 2025

Introduction

The cult of personality is a phenomenon of political and social propaganda, used since ancient times, which involves "a situation in which people are encouraged to show extreme enthusiasm and love for a famous person, especially a political leader" (OLD). Thus, through the cult of personality, a leader is glorified and deified through means such as propaganda and excessive control over information. The phenomenon occurs in totalitarian regimes where various psychological tools are used to consolidate the image of the supreme leader and to induce the population to unconsciously follow orders without inquiring into the real situation. Following World War II, the Korean Peninsula was divided into two parts, with the northern part placed under Soviet control. Thus, in 1948, a totalitarian regime was established in North Korea after the formation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, a regime that continues to this day. The cult of personality in North Korea manifested itself through means common to other dictatorships, such as media control, censorship, excessive control, visual propaganda, and the deification of the leader. However, while in other countries where the cult of personality is manifested, the origins of the leader were usually common, with the leader climbing the social ladder and gaining access to great power, in North Korea, the origins of the leaders are shrouded in myths, legends, and mysteries that shock the public, attract attention, and provoke various reactions internationally.

This article aimed to analyze how media control has contributed to the consolidation of Kim Jong-Un's cult of personality in North Korea. The approach offered a diachronic perspective, tracing the evolution of the phenomenon and propaganda mechanisms since the establishment of Kim Il-Sung's regime in 1948, followed by the reigns of Kim Jong-Il and currently Kim Jong-Un.

To achieve the article's aim, we examined the methods of censorship and the propaganda mechanisms present in all aspects of North Korean citizens' lives. This analysis of historical data and North Korean media discourse provided an overview of the cult of personality in North Korea and answered the following research question: What impact does censorship have on consolidating Kim Jong-Un's cult of personality?

Therefore, this article highlights specific instances of censorship and propaganda in the media to capture how they have contributed to the consolidation of the cult of personality in North Korea. The proposed text was sourced from North Korean media outlets available to the international public, reflecting how propaganda is introduced into people's lives through these channels. Therefore, this paper illustrates how strict control over media information contributes to the consolidation of the cult of personality in North Korea during the Kim Jong-Un era, studying the mechanisms by which propaganda influences people's opinions and the social reality.

Propagandistic discourse in North Korean state media during Kim Jong-Un's rule

As mentioned earlier, the cult of personality is unique to the North Korean political regime and appears in many aspects of citizens' lives. This includes visual symbols like paintings, statues, or even flowers dedicated to leaders, as well as censored media articles and controlled discussions. These methods are just part of the broader strategies used to portray the leader as the supreme, perfect, and essential figure of the nation. Since the regime's founding, shaping an idealized image of the leader has been a key focus of the ideology. Over time, the techniques for strengthening the cult of personality have changed with each leader but have consistently served as a strong tool for maintaining societal control. This article examines passages from the official North Korean press to reveal how the image of leader Kim Jong-Un is reflected. Through this analysis, we identify and interpret the strategies in the discourse and rhetoric used to reinforce the cult of personality. Among others, this paper looks at linguistic patterns, specific phrases, repetitions, hyperbole, superlatives, recurring themes, and other methods that help legitimize the leader power.

In this context, media outlets such as Rodong Sinmun, the Korean Central News Agency, and The Pyongyang Times are the main channels through which the leader's image is conveyed to shape public perception in accordance with ideological goals. The articles published by these media outlets are heavily regulated and censored to depict a positive, ideal, essential, and all-present image of Kim Jong-Un and to prevent any deviation, opposition, or rebellion against the regime. Additionally, since North Korea has no independent press, citizens accept the disseminated information as the absolute truth, as they lack access to alternative sources of information sources.

Therefore, information is strictly controlled, and the population has limited access based on regulations set by the party. Access to the internet and foreign information is restricted, with most people only able to use the internal network, which features a selection of approved websites. As a result, North Korean citizens live within a restricted information environment, having their perception of reality shaped around Kim Jong-Un. The powerful censorship system creates an ideal setting for the growth of a totalitarian narrative in which the leader is deified.

Kim Jong-Un is a central figure in any context, whether we discuss official visits, interactions with citizens, inspections at factories or construction sites, or participation in official parades. Articles published after these events describe the leader in highly laudatory terms, using repetitive language that relies on hyperbole and superlatives. Over time, the media has created and reinforced an image of an exceptional leader, a brilliant military strategist, and a ruler with a deep understanding who listens to the needs of the people. This discourse aims to portray an ideal leader, legitimize his power, and grant him authority and respect both among North Korean citizens and Western audiences. Therefore, propaganda discourse is not confined to the domestic sphere but also extends beyond North Korea's borders, shaping perceptions of the regime internationally (Gause, 2006). The passages analyzed were taken from official North Korean websites and provide an important perspective on the mechanisms behind cultivating the cult of personality, as well as on how the regime constructs external perceptions world.

To build this chapter and identify the mechanisms used in the North Korean press, we employed a qualitative approach, specifically discourse analysis, which helped identify symbols, methods of idealizing the leader, and tools used to construct his image. Whether portraying the supreme leader, the leader with the people, or the leader in an international context, the selected texts emphasize his qualities and contributions to his country, as well as significant moments in the regime's history focusing on the successors Kim Jong-Il and Kim Il-Sung. After analyzing the passages, numerous propaganda mechanisms were identified, including: presenting the leader as a father figure, military strategist, genius, and savior of the North Korean people; using propagandistic language; and employing narratives in articles centered on Kim Jong-Un. By uncovering these propaganda tools, we highlighted the impact of the cult of personality on citizens and how media discourse contributes to shaping and reinforcing an idealized image of both the leader and the Juche ideology[2].

"The press is the party's sharpest weapon. The press is the means by which the party speaks to the masses every hour of the day and speaks in their language." This was Stalin's "teaching" that underpinned the organization of the media in countries behind the Iron Curtain (Țiu, 108). This section provides insight into the strategies used, highlighting the importance and prevalence of the cult of personality in the lives of North Korean citizens. Based on concrete content, it is evident that Kim Jong-Un's image is glorified in the public sphere, while state publications present only an idealized version of the leader. The article selected for this analysis was chosen for its relevance and focuses on the current leader's public activities, his presence at events, and his official speeches. The article illustrates linguistic and stylistic notions, various themes, and discourse narratives that contribute to the representation of Kim Jong-Un as the supreme figure of North Korea.

The selected sources are official North Korean media channels whose publications undergo numerous filters before dissemination. The Pyongyang Times is a weekly news channel dedicated to the international audience, promoting a type of external propaganda. This source also promotes the glorification of the leader, the celebration of domestic achievements, and sustainability and self-sufficiency through propaganda that reflects the cult of personality. Overall, these forms of media help to consolidate a homogeneous, repetitive, and laudatory propaganda discourse about the leader, presenting him as an indispensable figure to the state.

To highlight the mechanisms of propaganda discourse, this section focuses on the strategies that shape the image of the leader as the nation's protector. Propaganda discourse is marked by rhetoric and hyperbole, methods characteristic of totalitarian regimes. The role of media articles is not only informative, but rather to glorify the leader, thus illustrating the image of a strong political ruler, a symbol of the state and national ideals. After analyzing these texts, we identified various methods that contribute to the development of the cult of personality. These strategies include: laudatory and hyperbolic language, portraying the leader in multiple guises (ideologist and demiurge, father figure and protector of the nation, military strategist, absolute ruler, etc.), repetition, numerous epithets, attribution of absolute merits, emotional language, cosmic references, or references to the founding myth.

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[2] Apolitical philosophy based on independence, autonomy, and confidence in one's own abilities.

Analysis of the article belonging to The Pyongyang Times news agency

This article, which illustrates strategies for strengthening the cult of personality, is published in The Pyongyang Times, a weekly newspaper dedicated to international readers, as it is printed in English. The newspaper also has an online news page, and the article selected for this analysis is entitled: "Inauguration Ceremony of Regional-industry Factories in Jaeryong County Held" (The Pyongyang Times, 2025). The article's title summarizes its content and briefly describes the event, but does not include the leader's name or any references to the leader, which are included in the subtitle and the rest of the article. The article reports on the great leader's participation in the inauguration ceremony, on how those around him reacted to seeing him, and on his visit to the factories and his analysis of production. This article illustrates how the official press in North Korea transforms a seemingly mundane event into a celebration of the supreme leader. The leader's image is constructed and reinforced through a series of discourse strategies specific to the cult of personality.

Firstly, an indispensable element in consolidating the cult of personality around Kim Jong-Un is the centralization of all achievements on his account. The article suggests that this industrial revolution and revitalization of regional industry are happening thanks to Kim Jong-Un: "a great revolution which can be made only by Kim Jong-Un"; "the great painstaking efforts that Kim Jong-Un has made to bring about transformation" (The Pyongyang Times, 2025). These phrases imply that change has been achieved solely through the leader's will and exceptional abilities. Through this strategy, all the regime's successes are attributed to the leader, to enhance his image as a ruler, while the rest of the citizens merely carry out his will. These exceptional achievements are also associated with the leader and presented in laudatory language that uses superlatives and various epithets to convey the message to readers. Thus, expressions such as "a year of great turn," "a wonderful reality," "a great inspiring event," "the outstanding leader," and "outstanding ideology and theory" are identified (The Pyongyang Times, 2025). These epithets exaggerate the features of the event and of the leader to emphasize reality and highlight an image as close to perfection as possible. Thus, the inauguration of local factories coincides with a unique event in the context of a propaganda speech. This laudatory language is also an ideological tool and strategy for rewriting reality to convey a particular image of the leader.

Another strategy for consolidating the cult of personality that The Pyongyang Times news agency uses is to portray the leader as a protective parent and caring leader. From the very first paragraphs of the article, it is reported that, upon his arrival at the ceremony, the leader was greeted with cheers and applause from those attending. These displays of veneration for the leader continue even after he cuts the ribbon, and the participants seem to show their gratitude to the supreme leader. He is called "the great father" and "the benevolent leader," appellations that remain in people's subconscious and create an image of a parent-leader whose concerns extend beyond politics and economics to the welfare of the citizens under his command. Thus, a totalitarian but also protective figure is constructed. In addition, reference is made to the traditional values of the Korean people, specifically filial piety, which requires descendants to respect and care for their parents. The leader assumes the goal of the people's happiness and well-being, and his gestures and efforts are interpreted as sacrifices for the citizens.

In other words, the fact that the leader personally participates in this event and does not choose to send someone else to officiate at the inauguration is another strategy that underscores Kim Jong-Un's omnipresence. His physical presence emphasizes that he is consistently with his citizens. Additionally, the fact that he cuts the ribbon symbolizes that things begin with him and that he ensures continuity in this regional industrial development process. Every comment or suggestion the leader makes while analyzing production becomes the main guideline for employees. The leader inaugurates production, supervises it, and guides it. By offering new directions for action, the leader can be seen as a visionary who anticipates the country's needs. The article suggests that the great leader Kim Jong-Un is more than just a political manager; he is above political structures and spreads ideology each time he participates in such events that place him in the spotlight. Additionally, his actions are met with enthusiasm: "When Kim Jong Un arrived at the venue of the ceremony, all the participants raised enthusiastic cheers, extending the greatest glory and respect to the outstanding leader and great father who opened up a new era in which the whole country develops" (The Pyongyang Times, 2025). The article presents the participants' reaction at the event as one of emotion, intended to express appreciation and submission to the leader. The participants share the same feelings, which connect them into a unified group expressing their gratitude to the great leader. Additionally, the person who steps up to give a speech in honor of the factory's opening first shares his overwhelming emotion and states that this achievement could only have been made by Kim Jong-Un and solely through his efforts. The article also mentions how the participants burst into cheers of joy: "All participants extended grateful thanks to the benevolent leader of the people" (The Pyongyang Times, 2025). The reactions are reported to demonstrate that this adoration of the leader is unanimous among the population and to show international readers that citizens respect their commander. Thus, the text repeatedly indicates that the expected reaction to the leader's presence is loyalty and gratitude for his involvement, without which there would have been no progress. Also, at the end of the article, it is mentioned once again that the leader's participation is a momentous occasion that instills confidence in a guaranteed victory and optimism among the people of the country (The Pyongyang Times, 2025).

In addition, the article from The Pyongyang Times is accompanied by suggestive photos taken during the inauguration ceremony. The article contains 19 images, and the leader Kim Jong-Un appears in 16 of them, each time surrounded by officials or factory employees. The large number of photos featuring the great leader is, in itself, a strategy to consolidate the cult of personality, as it shows the importance the people attach to him and also that he is an omniscient and omnipresent figure. The photos are relevant to analyzing the cult of personality because they visually illustrate the strategies described in the article. Thus, whether the images show a mise-en-scène in which the leader is the visual center, a crowd of people with North Korean flowers and flags, or the leader immortalized inaugurating the ceremony or among workers, all these poses highlight his qualities as a leader and the appreciation of the people around him. The photographs contribute to a propaganda discourse in which the figure of the leader is central and associated with change, personal sacrifice, and the welfare of the people. The relationship between Kim Jong-Un and the other participants is presented as hierarchical in all the images. Whether he is in the middle of a speech or giving instructions, the others listen to him and take on board the leader's suggestions, who is presented as the sole source of knowledge. He is pictured listening attentively to what employees have to say and interacting directly with the products, which underscores his desire to be involved at every stage.

The image above is a screencap of the front page of The Pyongyang Times, featuring the article in question. This screencap includes the article's title and subtitle, along with two representative photographs depicting strategies for consolidating Kim Jong-Un's cult of personality. A first aspect worth mentioning is that the leader is referred to by his full title: "Respected Comrade Kim Jong-Un" (The Pyongyang Times, 2025), and that his name is set in a larger font than the rest of the subtitle to stand out. The first photo on the left shows the leader in the middle of the stage, surrounded by a crowd waving flags and bouquets in his honor. The photo depicts a process of leader veneration where citizens express loyalty and respect. It also reflects Juche ideology and patriotism. The second image is a close-up showing the leader with several officials as he cuts the ribbon to inaugurate the ceremony. The leader is the focus; he's leading a new era of development. The officials' eyes are on him, and his presence turns an ordinary event into a moment of almost historic importance. Kim Jong-Un's central position in both photos highlights that the state revolves around his figure, shaping the cult of personality.

Results

The analysis of the selected article from The Pyongyang Times shows how North Korean media helps build Kim Jong-Un's personality cult. The passages depict the leader in various roles, whether as a military genius, a caring parent, or a skilled diplomat. These portrayals serve as propaganda tools that suggest he is all-knowing and always present in every part of his followers' lives. The strategies used in the article—such as laudatory and emotional language, various epithets, repetitions, hyperbole, superlatives, traditional Korean values, national symbols, and the way events are described—are all forms that shape the propaganda discourse. Whether the leader is visiting a military base, factories, or participating in a diplomatic event, his actions are portrayed using the strategies mentioned earlier to craft the image of a strong and dedicated leader who meets his responsibilities and remains connected to his people, as well as to his international partners. This article was carefully reviewed and written in honor of the leader, ensuring that nothing that could harm his image reaches the North Korean media.

Complementing these discourse strategies, the article is accompanied by suggestive photographs that reinforce the message and enhance the significance of the events. This visual approach helps legitimize the leader's power while also showing readers worldwide the close bond between the great leader and the people or between him and other world leaders. The photos depict homogeneous crowds showing respect for the leader, emotional reactions from citizens, and interactions between the esteemed comrade and officials. Therefore, North Korean media functions not only as a source of information but also as a key tool in building the cult of personality that justifies power and shapes perceptions of the internal and external collective. The glorifying discourse combined with visual elements creates an image of a leader who embodies qualities of a military figure, diplomat, dedicated manager, and national guardian watching over his citizens. Consequently, these written and visual representations help sustain the socialist regime in North Korea.

Conclusions

This paper aims to illustrate how Kim Jong-Un's cult of personality is built and sustained in North Korea through the media. The cult of personality is a defining element of North Korea's socio-political system, which helps legitimize the leader's absolute power and foster loyalty. Through discursive analysis, we identified the mechanisms of propaganda and dissemination of the cult of personality evident in press articles.

The findings provide an initial insight into how North Korean media institutions construct and uphold the cult of personality. The regime uses these tools strategically to foster citizen loyalty, suppress opposition, and strengthen the socialist regime. These mechanisms make the cult of personality a tool of control, constantly injecting fear and manipulation into people's lives. This analysis explores various discourses and narratives that justify the leader's absolute authority, while also impacting citizens physically, psychologically, and socially. In North Korea, propaganda tools maintain control over the population through subtle yet effective methods that remain relevant today.

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RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA
IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA:
SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of the rapid growth of digital technology and the significant changes that digital platforms bring to society and individual lives, the line between the real world and the digital world has become very thin. Digital platforms, as designed, rely heavily on attention and emotion. Using emotionally charged language to evoke an emotional rather than rational response from a large audience in a very short time is the main goal of propaganda. This article[1] aims to analyze how Russia uses social networks to run propaganda campaigns and their social implications, with a focus on identifying the themes and narratives promoted in the Republic of Moldova since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. The topic is relevant because it highlights a mechanism by which a foreign state can undermine a country's sovereignty and stability from within, without resorting to armed conflict.

Keywords: Russia, The Republic of Moldova, propaganda, social networks.

Introduction

In the current geopolitical climate, characterized by regional tensions and major security and stability challenges, the Republic of Moldova is experiencing a significant period in its recent history. Although propaganda is not a new phenomenon, it takes on new significance in Moldova's vulnerable information landscape. Over the past twenty years, Russia has adapted its influence techniques to leverage new communication technologies, employing increasingly diverse and hard-to-detect strategies to advance its interests in the region. This influence is demonstrated through various means, including media control, online disinformation, and subversive messages aimed at weakening democratic institutions. Moscow is not afraid to use any of these tools to maintain its influence in the former Soviet space and to curb the spread of Western values promoted by the European Union and the United States (Giegerich, 2016).

In recent years, more and more observers have noted that Russia is using hybrid warfare strategies, where information plays a key role. The rapid growth of technology and social media has increased the influence of propaganda, making it a vital tool for shaping public perception, especially in countries where Moscow seeks to maintain its influence (Chivvis, 2017). Moldova has become an increasingly prominent example, particularly after Maia Sandu was elected president in 2020, signaling the country's shift toward the West. Since the outbreak of war in Ukraine, Russia's activities in Moldova's information space, especially in the Transnistrian region, have escalated with the goal of destabilizing the country by undermining the government and fueling internal divisions (EUvsDisinfo, 2023a).

This article aims to analyze how Russia conducts its propaganda campaigns, focusing on their impact in the Republic of Moldova within the context of the information war and the increasingly complex dynamics in Eastern Europe. The main objective is to understand the methods, tactics, and messages frequently used by the Kremlin in the Moldovan information space since the invasion of Ukraine began.

Propaganda – concepts and theoretical framework

Propaganda is a complex form of communication that greatly influences how individuals and social groups develop their opinions, attitudes, and behaviors. It can be seen as an intentional and organized way of communicating aimed at shaping the perceptions and reactions of a target audience based on political, economic, cultural, or religious goals (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2018).

With the political and social developments of the 20th century, propaganda gained wider applicability, especially in situations of conflict. During the two World Wars and later, during the Cold War, it was a key tool in ideological confrontations, serving as a means of mobilising the population and consolidating support for various causes (Ellul, 1965). Jacques Ellul[2] draws attention to the fact that modern propaganda goes beyond the simple manipulation of information, becoming a sophisticated strategy that combines rational and emotional elements to produce specific effects on the public.

Jason Stanley, a philosophy professor at Yale University, emphasizes the cognitive aspect of propaganda, demonstrating how it influences perceptions of reality through techniques like omission, partial selection, or exaggeration of information (Stanley, 2015). Similarly, Edward Bernays, considered a pioneer of modern public relations, argued that the deliberate manipulation of public opinion is unavoidable in an advanced democratic society. From this viewpoint, propaganda is no longer just a political tool but also a key mechanism for shaping collective perception, applicable across various fields from economics to social life (Bernays, 1928).

Analysis of propaganda reveals several types and forms, distinguished by the context of use, the goals they aim for, and the transparency of the source delivering them. Harold Lasswell (1971) offers a widely accepted classification into four main categories: political, economic, cultural, and religious propaganda.

Political propaganda is the most well-known among these, used to sway voters' opinions or rally the population in favor of a party, a political leader, or an ideology. It is often seen during election campaigns, times of political crises, or during armed conflicts (Lasswell, 1971).

Economic propaganda serves commercial or financial interests and mostly appears through aggressive advertising, aiming to promote specific economic policies or boost consumption by creating artificial needs or overstating the advantages of certain products and services.

Cultural propaganda seeks to promote the values and social norms specific to a group or nation, used in educational settings or to enhance a country's image internationally.

Finally, religious propaganda aims to spread religious beliefs and practices to target communities, often to strengthen collective identity (Lasswell, 1971).

Depending on how transparent the source is, literature identifies three main types of propaganda: white, gray, and black (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2018). White propaganda is transparent about its source and intentions, such as in official communications from institutions. Gray propaganda, however, maintains a deliberate ambiguity about where it comes from and its true purposes, which can create confusion and mistrust. Black propaganda is the most extreme form, based on false information from unknown sources, often used to discredit opponents or destabilize entire societies (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2018).

The effectiveness of propaganda mainly relies on the use of well-researched psychological techniques designed to subtly yet effectively influence public perceptions and behaviors. One of the most common strategies involves appealing to emotions, where propagandists exploit strong feelings such as fear, anger, or pride, which diminishes the population's ability to critically evaluate the information they receive (Pratkanis & Aronson, 2001).

Constant repetition of messages is another key technique that helps reinforce the messages being promoted. Through repeated exposure, statements that may initially be challenged come to be seen as true (Ellul, 1965). Similarly, simplifying complex situations, often by reducing them to binary oppositions, such as us versus them, is an effective way to mobilize the masses and foster consensus around a cause or ideology (Stanley, 2015).

Another effective tool is the use of familiar symbols and patterns that facilitate the rapid transmission of meaningful messages. These can generate collective emotional reactions, fueling solidarity or, conversely, hostility towards specific groups or ideas (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2018).

In the online environment, propaganda leverages sophisticated technologies, including algorithms, bots, and social media platforms, to artificially amplify the dissemination of specific messages, thereby facilitating the viral spread of propaganda content and enhancing its influence on public opinion (Bakir & McStay, 2018). The deliberate spread of fake news has become a common phenomenon in this context, with harmful effects on democratic processes, such as elections, as well as on social cohesion in general (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

Understanding these mechanisms is crucial for effectively combating the influence of propaganda and mitigating its negative effects on society.

The rapid development of technology significantly impacts all sectors of society, including security. One of the most crucial changes driven by technological progress is the emergence of the concept of information warfare, a topic that is highly debated in academia. New information technologies have fundamentally transformed how conflicts are fought, providing opportunities to enhance the effectiveness of traditional weapons, while also enabling unconventional strategies that do not involve direct physical violence.

The significance of this type of warfare stems from the increasing ability to rapidly disseminate propaganda, but also from the efficiency with which messages are directed at specific social groups. Information warfare seeks to achieve political objectives without resorting to military force, employing tactics that target computer systems, undermine social structures, and manipulate public perception through disinformation, propaganda, and cyberattacks (Wilson, 2019). All of these can influence the decision-making processes of states, leading to instability and gaining a strategic advantage over adversaries.

According to Hutchinson and Warren (2001), information warfare involves manipulation at four essential levels: data, context, knowledge, and information. Data manipulation involves falsifying, deleting, or altering data; context manipulation distorts the interpretation of data to mislead; knowledge manipulation utilizes propaganda to change perceptions; and information manipulation aims to compromise sources and create suspicion, thereby generating an advantage for the offensive actor (Hutchinson & Warren, 2001).

The internet and social media have really changed things, giving countries like Russia, Iran, and China super-effective tools for info ops, which they've learned to use to further their geopolitical interests. By utilizing virtual space, they exploit the social, economic, and cultural vulnerabilities of their adversaries, influencing public opinion and eroding trust in democratic institutions.

The role of social media in Russia's propaganda strategy

Information warfare and the exploitation of social networks to influence public opinion, political decisions, and social structures have become essential tools in the Russian Federation's strategic arsenal. The Kremlin has established a cyber command responsible for conducting offensive operations in cyberspace, including propaganda campaigns and cyberattacks aimed at compromising the critical command and control infrastructures of adversaries. The Russian armed forces have simultaneously

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[2] French philosopher, sociologist, and theologian of the 20th century.

developed a unit specializing in digital operations, thus consolidating Moscow's ambitions to achieve supremacy in the information space through tactics that allow it to compensate for economic and military constraints, thereby achieving its geopolitical objectives at a low cost (Blank, 2017).

Russia uses a variety of channels, including social media platforms, state news agencies such as Russia Today and Sputnik, as well as NGOs, cultural and religious institutions, to disseminate false information in an organized manner for political purposes (Bachmann & Gunneriusson, 2015). The strategy is to create deliberate confusion by mixing visual, textual, and audio-video content distributed on social networks, traditional and online media platforms, making it increasingly difficult to distinguish between truth and lies (Paul & Matthews, 2016).

The Internet Research Agency (IRA), first identified in 2013, is a central institution in this propaganda architecture. The IRA works closely with the Russian authorities, operating discreetly from a building in St. Petersburg, even though it has no official government status. The agency utilizes platforms such as Twitter, Telegram, and VKontakte, leveraging its more than 1,000 employees, to conduct coordinated disinformation campaigns. These campaigns employ networks of fake accounts, bots, and digital trolls to influence public opinion in favor of the Kremlin (DiResta et al., 2019). Similar tactics were implemented in interventions in the US presidential elections (2016) and in electoral processes in several European countries (Polyakova & Boyer, 2018). Social networks have become a crucial vector of contemporary propaganda in this context, raising significant national security concerns. Technological progress has enabled authoritarian regimes, such as those in Moscow, to exploit social platforms to destabilize countries by polarizing public discourse and eroding social cohesion.

The dissemination of pro-Kremlin messages in the Republic of Moldova is primarily facilitated by the Russian-speaking population, particularly in the Transnistria region. This segment of society is vulnerable to Moscow's discourse due to its close historical and cultural ties with the Russian Federation. Russian-language media in the region are often controlled directly by Russia or through local pro-Russian intermediaries, a phenomenon also visible online, where social networks are used to amplify these messages (Matveyenko, 2023).

Digital propaganda often originates in traditional media outlets, which reproduce content on their own online channels, thus ensuring rapid, efficient, and low-cost dissemination. Direct support from the Russian state for media institutions explicitly created in the Republic of Moldova, which function as seemingly local sources but promote Moscow's messages, is an essential tool in this strategy (Todd C., 2018).

The influence of Russian propaganda also operates through indirect channels, involving pro-Russian local politicians, Kremlin-connected oligarchs, and other media outlets that spread Moscow-friendly content via social networks and their own news platforms. This approach is especially clear in Transnistria, where the media sector is directly controlled by local political authorities and aligns with the editorial stance established by Russia. A specific example is the 2014 signing of a memorandum of cooperation between the Transnistrian public media service and the Russian Federation's Ministry of Communications (Deen & Zweers, 2022).

Telegram has become a notable platform for propaganda in recent years. Its capacity to gather large groups, combined with minimal or no moderation, makes it perfect for spreading propaganda content (DFRLab, 2023). Telegram is one of the most popular platforms among Russian speakers and is widely used by Kremlin-linked groups to stay in touch with the Russian-speaking diaspora outside Russia (ISD, 2022).

Recurring themes and main categories of messages

An analysis of the content disseminated by pro-Russian channels in Moldova reveals that the dominant messages can be grouped into four main thematic categories: Moldova's domestic politics, the economy, the war in Ukraine, and relations with the West, with a particular focus on the US, NATO, and the European Union.

The narratives about the domestic politics of the Republic of Moldova focus on the pro-Western government and its decisions. They are strategically designed to discredit the Moldovan authorities by portraying their policies as illegal, externally imposed, or very harmful to the national interest. The idea is that, although democratically elected, the current leadership does not truly represent the will of the people but follows directives from the West.

Propaganda discourse thus seeks to undermine the political legitimacy of the government and fuel the perception of a divide between leaders and the population. These messages aim to create confusion and uncertainty among the public, compromise the legitimacy of political decisions, and gradually weaken public confidence in the country's current leadership through a deliberate mix of fictional elements and factual information. The main goal is to reduce public support for the government's pro-European stance and foster a climate favorable to the rise and strengthening of pro-Russian forces within the state.

These campaigns are increasingly leveraging advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence, to manipulate and spread disinformation. A clear example is the dissemination of fake videos showing President Maia Sandu making controversial statements, a tactic used to damage her public image and supply propaganda material to pro-Russian actors who later exploit these fakes (Scott, 2024).

Another recurring narrative is the portrayal of the government as hostile to the Russian-speaking minority. These propaganda-driven accusations reflect an attempt to project onto Moldova alleged discriminatory practices similar to those invoked by Russia in the case of Ukraine, in the Donbas region (Cenusa, 2024). One message claimed, for example, that the Moldovan authorities had introduced fines for citizens who use Russian in public spaces, a completely unfounded claim, but one that was effective in inducing a sense of persecution among the target audience (Veridica, 2023).

The frozen conflict in Transnistria is frequently used in these campaigns, with the authorities in Chișinău, along with the European Union, being blamed for blocking a peaceful resolution of the dispute (Cenusa, 2024). This kind of rhetoric seeks to weaken the credibility of the government's diplomatic efforts and question its ability to handle national crises in a balanced and responsible way.

All these messages converge into a broader strategic effort to weaken confidence in the democratic institutions of the Republic of Moldova by fostering mistrust, suggesting corruption, and increasing perceptions of instability. The propaganda aims to create a climate of insecurity and social frustration that would support political change. The ultimate goal of these campaigns is to delegitimize the current leadership and create internal conditions that could allow pro-Russian political forces to return to power.

The Moldovan economy faces significant difficulties and is often cited as one of the most fragile in Europe, with one of the lowest gross domestic products per capita on the continent. The population's access to economic opportunities remains deeply unequal despite periods of relative economic growth over the past two decades. High levels of poverty and significant unemployment continue to affect a large portion of the population, with the economy facing serious challenges, including low productivity, an unstable business environment, fiscal distortions, and low competitiveness in regional and international markets. These systemic vulnerabilities hinder sustainable development and directly affect the quality of life of the population, and the impact of the war in Ukraine has only exacerbated these difficulties.

Russia exploits these economic weaknesses as part of its propaganda strategy, using social and economic tensions to undermine Moldova's internal stability. Messages disseminated through pro-Russian propaganda channels often focus on the idea that the current pro-European leadership, including President Maia Sandu, bears full responsibility for the country's precarious economic situation and are designed to shift the perception of blame from external factors, especially Russia itself, to the government in Chisinau.

Propaganda narratives targeting the economic sphere focus in particular on the energy crisis, a direct consequence of Russia's war against Ukraine, which has affected both Moldova and the rest of Europe. These messages highlight the changes in Chisinau's energy policy, particularly the pro-European government's decision to reduce its dependence on Russian gas and seek alternative supply sources. Until the outbreak of the war, Moldova was heavily dependent on gas supplied by the Russian Federation. The narratives promoted in this context aim to undermine public confidence in the government, intensify public discontent, and diminish public support for the country's European path.

The increase in natural gas prices following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine is a telling example. Although this increase was directly influenced by the Kremlin's energy policy and the use of gas as a geopolitical tool, a considerable part of the Moldovan public was convinced that the blame lay solely with the Moldovan authorities, reflecting the effectiveness of the narratives used to erode the government's legitimacy and alter public perception.

Moscow promoted a narrative that the European Union imposed these measures and would inevitably lead to higher costs for citizens if Moldova decided to gradually phase out Russian gas and diversify its energy sources through partnerships with European suppliers. By spreading such messages, it attempts to cultivate fear of the consequences of Western integration and fuels high skepticism towards the EU, insinuating that European integration does not bring economic benefits, but rather exacerbates the material difficulties of the population.

Pro-Russian propaganda constantly promotes the idea that maintaining or resuming close economic ties with Russia would be a beneficial and more viable alternative for Moldova. These messages highlight the supposed advantages of economic relations with

Moscow, arguing that Russian support could provide stability, access to preferential markets, and favorable prices for energy resources. This binary approach, with the West as the source of difficulties and Russia as the savior partner, is central to the Kremlin's information influence mechanism and has been used with increased intensity since Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Cenusa, 2024).

Russian narratives associated with the war in Ukraine have taken on central importance in Moscow's propaganda strategy since February 2022, when the invasion began. As part of Russia's propaganda campaigns related to the war in Ukraine, the Telegram platform features a series of precisely formulated narratives, each designed to convey a favorable image of Russia. These messages seek to discredit Ukraine and the West to present the Russian Federation as the positive character in the war, a defender of justice facing corrupt, aggressive, or immoral external forces.

The main objective of these messages is to justify military aggression against Ukraine by reinterpreting the conflict in terms of self-defense and liberation. Russian propaganda thus resorts to emotional language to portray Russia in a favorable light, as a defender of traditional values and Russian-speaking minorities. At the same time, Ukraine and its Western allies are described in negative terms, as aggressors or instruments of hostile geopolitical plans.

The reinterpretation of the war as a special military operation, a formulation intended to eliminate connotations of invasion and convey the idea of a mission to protect the Russian-speaking population of eastern Ukraine from alleged acts of oppression or even genocide committed by a so-called Nazi regime in Kyiv, is a central element of these messages (Kumankov, 2023; Pupcenoks, Seltzer, 2021; Zavershinskaia, 2024). At the same time, the notion that the West, particularly NATO, is primarily responsible for escalating the conflict is being heavily promoted. Western democracies are accused of using Ukraine as a pawn in a larger power game aimed at weakening or even destroying Russia as a sovereign entity (Kumankov, 2023; Zavershinskaia, 2024).

This narrative also has strategic applicability in the case of the Republic of Moldova, which has become a direct target of Russian propaganda because the authorities have openly condemned Russia's invasion and supported Ukraine's position internationally. The campaigns carried out by pro-Kremlin actors on social media and in the digital media space aim not only to delegitimize the government in Chișinău but also to cultivate a climate of insecurity, fear, and mistrust among the population. By linking Moldova's support for Ukraine with potential risks of involvement in the war or with the deterioration of socio-economic conditions, these messages seek to undermine internal cohesion and destabilize the pro-European consensus in society.

A central component of the Russian propaganda mechanism is the category related to the West, which primarily includes the United States, the European Union, and NATO, accused of seeking to impose their values and model of governance on other states to expand their global supremacy. A more detailed analysis of propaganda narratives about the West reveals a series of messages aimed at undermining trust in Western institutions and promoting a pro-Russian attitude. The image of the West is constructed as aggressive, expansionist, and disrespectful of the national sovereignty of the states concerned, with NATO being presented as an offensive military alliance whose main purpose is to threaten Russia's security through its unjustified expansion in the vicinity of Russian borders. Russian propaganda claims that rapprochement with NATO poses significant risks to the stability and security of the Moldovan population, fueling the perception that this collaboration could lead to Moldova's involvement in an armed conflict or the loss of its constitutional neutrality. This type of discourse aims to cultivate fear and uncertainty by appealing to collective anxieties related to the conflict in Ukraine (Kumankov, 2023; Torbina, 2024).

The European Union is the target of a similar set of disinformation messages aimed at discrediting Moldova's European integration efforts. These narratives question the authenticity and sustainability of the European commitment to Moldova, suggesting that candidate country status is a consolation prize with no real consequences. Russian propaganda also claims that EU accession would require Moldova to make a series of unilateral concessions, including compromising its sovereignty, accepting disadvantageous economic policies, or adopting cultural values considered foreign (Cenusa, 2024). These themes are reinforced by the spread of media falsehoods, which claim, for example, that Moldova will be forced to send troops to Ukraine, that it will become a destination for migrants, or that Europe's harmful industries will be relocated to Transnistria (Veridica, 2023).

A recurring element of these campaigns is the notion that European integration will erode Moldova's traditional values, religion, and national identity, a narrative designed to provoke emotional reactions and mobilize conservative segments of the population against the state's pro-Western orientation. The West thus becomes an omnipresent negative character in propaganda messages, serving as a common target for consolidating anti-Western discourse and maintaining ideological loyalty to Moscow.

Conclusions

The analysis has highlighted that Russia is increasingly using propaganda as part of its hybrid and information warfare strategy, intending to expand its regional and global influence. Neighboring countries that have a history of being under Moscow's influence but now wish to strengthen their relations with the West are more vulnerable to these hybrid actions. Propaganda messages are adapted to the local context and designed to be easily received by the target audience.

Russia manages to impose these narratives not only by controlling the topics discussed but also by carefully crafting messages that often rely on strong emotions such as fear, insecurity, or feelings of betrayal. The Kremlin's strategy involves a well-structured agenda, through which topics are consistently promoted and intensively so that they can dominate the public space and influence collective perceptions over time.

Russia uses propaganda on social media, especially Telegram, to exploit social and political divisions in Moldova, weakening democratic institutions, challenging the country's pro-European orientation, and promoting its own geopolitical interests. To mitigate these risks, coordinated action among the government, digital platforms, and civil society is necessary. Authorities must continue their efforts to regulate propaganda and adopt transparent and effective policies to identify and counter dangerous messages. One priority is to support independent journalism, particularly in Russian-speaking regions and communities, where Russian media dominate. Additionally, promoting media education and digital literacy should become a crucial component of public policy to enhance people's resistance to disinformation.

Developing mechanisms that enable users to report and verify online disinformation, particularly on platforms like Telegram, which remain poorly regulated and continue to be heavily exploited by Russian propaganda, is another crucial aspect. Despite international pressure, Telegram has yet to implement effective measures against this phenomenon.

The conclusions of this analysis contribute to a deeper understanding of how Russia utilizes social media, particularly Telegram, to influence public opinion in Moldova. They also provide a clear picture of the types of messages that circulate and how they are constructed to influence political decisions and dynamics in the region. For this reason, academia, decision-makers, and international partners must treat Russian propaganda as a strategic foreign policy tool with the potential to destabilize not only the Republic of Moldova but the whole of democratic Europe. Failure to adequately combat this phenomenon could have serious consequences for regional stability and European democratic values.

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THE DYNAMICS OF THE SUNNI-SHIITE RIVALRY IN IRAQ

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ABSTRACT

The article examines how Sunni–Shia sectarian divisions affect Iraq's security and national unity within a volatile regional setting marked by ongoing external interference. The study uses a comprehensive qualitative approach, including documentary research, geopolitical analysis, and PEST analysis, to identify the main causes of instability and the country's internal weaknesses. It also looks into how systemic dysfunctions arise from sectarian rivalry, weak institutions, and the role of non-state actors in governance and decision-making. Three possible scenarios are considered: stagnation, controlled decentralization, and conditional national reconciliation. Each depends on reducing outside interference, reshaping internal political structures, and professionalizing the security forces. The results indicate that the state's survival depends on moving beyond sectarian divisions, creating inclusive governance, and integrating Iraq into a stable, balanced regional geopolitical system.

Keywords: sectarian division, Sunni–Shia conflict, state cohesion, systemic vulnerability, national reconciliation.

Introduction

Contemporary society is facing an interconnected, evolving world marked by rapid change and development. These shifts occur at both individual and societal levels, leading to significant alterations in security governance and international relations. The overall phenomena influencing the security environment demonstrate a shift in how the world is divided and contribute to replacing the international perspective with a more intranational focus, thereby adding multidimensionality to the concept of security. Currently, this environment is highly dynamic and unpredictable, with intensified globalization manifesting in various ways and carrying significant potential to spread geographically (Decision 22/2020). The theory presented in this paper emphasizes the importance of a crucial yet poorly understood link between inter- and intra-state conflict—specifically, how external interventions can fragment sectarian divisions and contribute to issues such as rebellions, civil war, and the rise of terrorism.

Following the withdrawal of U.S. forces in 2011, Iraq was left to stand alone in uniting its country amid three dominant ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups with their own political agendas. The current geopolitical struggle in Iraq can be seen as an effort to manage the political aftermath left by Western powers. As a result, Iraq remains fragile due to unresolved sources of instability, with its main ethnic groups—Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds—disagreeing on the country's political structure, identity, and future. The ongoing conflict is not solely due to insurgency and terrorism but also stems from disputes among ethnic and religious groups, which continue to be the most complex issues Iraq faces. Recognizing and respecting ethnic and cultural diversity remains one of the most urgent challenges for the Iraqi state today, requiring attention at the constitutional and institutional levels (Sherko, 2013).

The roots of the conflict

Iraq was established with the help of the three Ottoman provinces of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra at the end of World War I, in 1921. These three provinces have never been governed as a single cohesive unit, and their attachment has remained problematic since their merger. Great Britain played a central role in creating the Iraqi state, as a result of the Sykes-Picot agreement, following the end of the First World War. British interests in Iraq encompassed political, economic, and strategic considerations, making it significant for the development of the Middle East. To unify Iraq under a trusted leader, the British installed King Faisal I as the constitutional monarch. He was a Sunni Arab, and his installation as monarch placed him under the influence of various ethnic and religious groups, including Sunni and Shia Arabs, Kurds, Christians, Jews, Yazidis, and Turks. Despite a dominance by the Sunni elite over the entire population, the monarchy marked a period of stability for the country. While there were numerous uprisings by different ethnic groups, the monarchy overcame these revolts, and the nation's institutions were developed further while its borders were clarified. Although many achievements were made, there was a distinctive social polarization between the land-owning elite and the rest of the population, which contributed to the fall of the monarchy after a military coup led by General Abdul-Karim Qasim in 1958. Subsequently, the first two years of the republic saw a significant rise in nationalism and the implementation of various reforms, including limiting the power of religious courts. However, within the borders, an opposition bloc formed that exploited differences among the free officers, which is why the freedom created by the opposition and the failed coup attempts led to the rise of a repressive government led by General Abdul-Karim Qasim. This government was eventually overthrown by the Ba'ath Party, which received help from a non-Ba'athist army officer, Abdul Salam Arif. His military government pursued a rapid policy of nationalizing industry, which later caused economic stagnation. His death in 1966 marked the start of another coup d'état by the Ba'ath Party and ultimately the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. Under this regime, the party's ideology was strictly enforced upon the population, blurring the lines between party and government by the end of the 1970s. Ultimately, the Ba'athist regime led to the politicization of differences among Iraqi communities through discrimination and ethnic favoritism (Lockhart, 2014).

Iraq has always been a deeply divided country. The issue of Sunni-Shiite Arab sectarianism has been a constant, with the identities of these two groups often influencing politics. Under Saddam Hussein's leadership, Shiites were gradually pushed out of the Ba'ath Party, forming their own organizations to oppose the regime, such as Da'wa in the 1970s and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution of Iraq in the 1980s. Additionally, Shiite Arabs opposed Saddam after the Gulf War (1990-1991), and their subsequent repression added to sectarian tensions. These ethnic and sectarian divisions shaped the resistance to Saddam, with the Iraqi National Congress emerging as an opposition umbrella created after the Gulf War, supported by the United States. It lacked a true

national foundation, instead being a coalition of ethnic and sectarian parties. Consequently, these identity-based divisions continued to drive the electoral process, which was at the core of the post-occupation crisis (Ottaway, Kaysi, 2012).

At the same time, neighbors of the Iraqi state fully exploit ethnic and sectarian rivalries to advance their own interests. Türkiye is the country most involved in Iraq, seeking to strengthen relations with all parties. Contrary to previous actions, before the U.S. invasion, Türkiye was a strong opponent of Kurdish autonomy, supporting Saddam Hussein. They have always feared that Iraqi Kurdish autonomy could inspire their own Kurdish population to similar actions or provide aid to Turkish Kurdish rebels. After the president's removal, Turkish acceptance of Kurdish autonomy unexpectedly increased due to a new foreign policy focused on building good relations and expanding trade ties with neighbors, or perhaps because of the weakened central government in Iraq following the occupation. Although Türkiye has tried to stay neutral in the Sunni-Shia conflict, the polarized atmosphere after U.S. troop withdrawal and the rise of the Rule of Law Coalition led to accusations that Türkiye supported Sunni politicians.

At the start of establishing the mandate in Iraq, Sunnis and Shiites shared a common goal: opposing foreign influence. However, the Sunnis worried that the Shiite leadership might reignite sectarian divisions and push toward a theocratic government. Initially, conflicts mainly erupted in areas with a Shia presence, responding to the growing power and influence of the central government during Iraq's transition from a mostly tribal society to a more developed state. As tribal rebellions increased, the force used to suppress them also grew harsher, leading to ruthless crackdowns. This heavy-handed approach by the Sunni-led government resulted in a temporary ceasefire in the southern tribal region (Lockhart, 2014).

The 1950s and 1960s experienced multiple revivals of Shiite groups, as the regime's strong secular stance and support for left-wing policies provoked a significant backlash from conservative Shiites, along with a religious revival among young Shiites. The emergence of the Shiite Islamic group Da'wa, led by Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr, shifted the focus toward reshaping Islam and its teachings to address the needs of the modern world, while also aiming to protect and promote these ideas. It later evolved into a political party committed to establishing an Islamic state, driven by an increasing desire for a stronger Shiite identity—growing in direct response to Sunni dominance and discrimination against Shiite groups. Notably, the concern about Sunni elite dominance only materialized after the American invasion and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003. The ongoing mistreatment of Shia Arabs by Sunni Arabs throughout the 20th century ultimately led to a particularly violent sectarian conflict, as religiously oriented Shiite parties became the leading force in Iraqi politics after the invasion.

Rivalry for internal hegemony

The West has been preoccupied with Islam ever since Samuel P. Huntington predicted a so-called clash of civilizations, which turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. This tendency to overestimate the role that religion has is particularly pronounced in the analysis of the sectarian division between Sunnis and Shiites, which the unitary conception mentions as a war within Islam, the two communities being rivals since time immemorial. What is true is that the rift between the two communities has deep historical roots, starting shortly after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, being centered on the issue of legitimate succession. Today, however, religion is only a tiny part of a highly complex geostrategic and political picture. The sectarian wars that are currently taking place are due to modern nationalism, not Islamic theology. These sectarian conflicts have turned into proxy wars between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which are two distinctly nationalist actors pursuing their own strategic rivalries in places where the government is collapsing. Thus, the instrumentalization of religion, as well as the sectarianization of political conflicts, is a fair way to address the problem rather than to project religion as the driving force and main cause of the situation. Sunnis and Shiites have coexisted harmoniously for most of their history, based on a minimum political order, which has ensured the livelihood and security of both communities (Taşpinar, 2018).

During the 1980s, most political analysts believed Iraq was deeply divided along sectarian lines. Although Sunnis were a minority, they were seen as ruling Iraq and systematically discriminating against the Shiite majority. For many years, Sunni Arabs from a small area in the Golden Triangle—around Baghdad, Ar Rutba, and Mosul—held power. In the 1980s, Saddam Hussein was not only from the Sunni branch but also served as vice chairman of the ruling Ba'ath Party. During this time, key security, defense, and military positions were mostly held by Sunnis. Although the Shiite majority was mainly in the south, the idea of intersecting conflicts was challenged by the behavior of Iraq's Shiite community during Iran's counter-invasion in 1982 and the subsequent fighting. Even during major military failures, Shiite Arabs continued to defend Iraq and the Ba'ath Party, despite Iranian propaganda urging them to join an Islamic revolution. As a result, by the late 20th century, loyalty was primarily driven by nationalism rather than sectarian identity. It is important to note that Iraqi Shiites are Arabs, not Persians, and have long been enemies of Persia. The Iraqi government skillfully exploited this ancient enmity by using propaganda that framed the war as part of a long-standing struggle between the Persian and Arab Empires. This kept the majority of Iraq's population, including Sunnis and Shiites, rooted in religious practice and faith. Before the war, the Ba'ath Party moved to integrate the Shiite community, creating a demand for labor that could only be met through recruitment of Shiites. By early 1988, it seemed likely that, once the war ended, Shiites would become full citizens assuming the Ba'ath Party survived the conflict (Metz, 1990).

In the lead-up to 1979, Iraq did not pose a threat to Iran. However, after the Islamic Revolution that same year, Tehran was left without Western support and with a weakened military, while Arab countries felt threatened by Iran's revolutionary agenda. Taking advantage of this situation, Iraq launched a campaign to annex the province of Khuzestan. The war between the two countries lasted for eight years and resulted in many casualties. A significant aspect of this conflict is that Iraq is home to the world's second-largest Shiite community, after Iran, and many of its members are supporters and allies of Iran. This is especially important considering that the rest of Iraq's population is mainly Sunni, and aligns more closely with Saudi Arabia's influence (Bercean, 2017). Therefore, the conflict between Iraq and Iran directly stems from the geopolitical shifts caused by the rise of revolutionary Shiism in the region. The long-standing Sunni-Shiite divide is crucial for understanding events across the Muslim world. Iraq's invasion of Iran was motivated by Saddam Hussein's concern that involving the Shiite population in the revolutionary movement could lead to the disintegration of his state. In fact, the events of 1991, when the US withdrew support for the Shiite uprising after previously helping to trigger it, fostered strong anti-American sentiment among Iraqis. This sentiment was further reinforced by the effects of the international embargo on Iraq, which remains evident today in Shiite opposition to the US presence in Iraq (Lazar, 2004).

Dynamics of the security environment

It is important to recognize that the entire disagreement over the identity, ownership, and legitimacy of the Iraqi state, which incidentally predates the US-led invasion of 2003, was the root cause of political violence in post-war Arab Iraq. The politics during this period were mainly driven by competition between Sunni and Shiite forces, focused on sectarian lines, which explains the ongoing cycle of Shiite state-building as well as Sunni rejection of this project. As long as violence continues, the mistrust that characterizes politics and sectarian relations will keep benefiting external actors. Both the creation of a Shiite-centric state and Sunni rejection of the post-2003 order stem from processes that took place throughout the twentieth century, including efforts to homogenize the nation, promoted by successive Iraqi governments, and the rise of a sect-based Shiite opposition in exile. Therefore, the sectarianization of the Iraqi state was not unavoidable, but the regime change following the American invasion sped up the independence of new actors and solidified the sectarian-oriented nature of existing ones (Haddad, 2016).

"Throughout its existence, the modern Iraqi nation-state has struggled to adequately manage community pluralism."
Haddad, 2016

The security environment linked to the Iraqi issue is closely tied to the concept of sectarian identity. In such a context, sectarian identity itself becomes exaggerated, influencing people's political and social perceptions. Although the various causes of conflicts in this region are controversial, what matters is the tendency to view them as driven by sectarian identity. This has made this aspect particularly influential in how political decision-makers and the public in the post-American invasion Arab world perceive the conflict. This influence is evident in the prominent role of sectarian sentiment in local communication and in understanding regional geopolitical rivalries. Therefore, it can be said that no single factor, nor simply the existence of sectarian groups, fully explains the sectarianization of the Iraqi state after 2003 (Haddad, 2016).

For a clearer understanding of the dynamics of the security environment from the Sunni-Shia rivalry perspective, it is useful to mention the two components of the muhasasa system: *muhasasa ta'ifiyya* (sectarian distribution) and *muhasasa hizbiyya* (party distribution).

These two elements are key drivers of intra- and inter-sectarian political competition. Over time, the first has been the most prominent, especially after 2003, when the basic sectarian power balance was challenged. Analyzing Iraq's election process reveals a clear pattern of shifting from inter-sectarian to intra-sectarian competition. These dynamics became even more evident during government formation, often defying ethnic and sectarian divisions. A concrete example is the struggle for ministerial posts following the elections, which resulted in unexpected alliances between Sunni and Shiite politicians typically accused of collusion with Daesh and Iran (Haddad, 2019). The post-DAESH Iraqi government now faces the challenge of eliminating sectarianism and identity politics, which arose due to external influences that weakened the country economically, militarily, and politically. If these group rivalries remain unresolved, Iraq risks ongoing instability and the possible emergence of another faction that could divide the country again, similar to previous divisions (Timreck, 2024).

Intervention of Shiite militias

One of the responses developed to address the Sunni threat caused by the terrorist group Daesh was carried out through the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), a series of non-governmental combat groups. These militias, mostly made up of Shiites, reported directly to Shiite leaders in Iraq and Iran. Although they were formed to fight DAESH, they soon worsened issues related to identity politics. This is evident in Mosul, a city taken over by Daesh in 2014, which exemplifies the height of sectarian tensions and the dominance of certain factions within the army and the PMF. As a Sunni-majority city, the use of the PMF for its liberation from Daesh highlighted sectarianism and identity politics within the military. These militias often recruit members based on identity, many of whom are supported by Iran, which seeks to expand its influence. While the PMF has played a key role in freeing cities like Mosul, their unchecked presence in Iraq weakens efforts to rebuild and increases the country's vulnerability to Iranian influence. Therefore, to reduce the pervasive influence of sectarian politics on Iraq's defense, the PMF should be fully disbanded-either by integrating members into the official security forces or by removing them from the military entirely (Timreck, 2024). Within these militias, three main Shiite factions exist, each with different goals and loyalties: those loyal to Ayatollah Khamenei of Iran, Ayatollah Al-Sistani of Iraq, and the Iraqi cleric Muqtada Al-Sadr.

Although these three factions are Shiite, the pro-Sistani and pro-Sadr factions categorically support the government and show a desire for integration into the army, while the pro-Khamenei militias seem resistant to integrating into the state. Thus, their unregulated presence, with many directly reporting to Iran, clearly contributes to weakening the Iraqi authorities and creating instability, which allows them to restore security in their preferred way. Over time, encouraged by military successes against Daesh, the PMF significantly extended its influence beyond battlefield support and, ultimately, faced accusations of human rights violations, both as revenge for Daesh attacks and to collect money from the families of those they kidnapped. One such militia is the Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq (League of the Righteous), established in 2005 during the U.S. invasion in connection with General Qasem Soleimani, the former commander of Iran's Quds Forces. Following a suicide attack in January 2016 on a café owned by Shiite citizens in Diyala governorate, several militias, including this one, killed and kidnapped Sunni men, while destroying Sunni mosques and properties in Muqdadiya. As the subsequent report shows, there were no prosecutions or convictions of PMF members involved in these attacks, with fears of reprisals against the Sunni population remaining high (Timreck, 2024).

Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi's victory in Mosul in 2017 was a significant achievement for the Iraqi army. Although this liberation was carried out in coordination with American forces, the role of the militias was debated. Initially, it was decided that the PMF would not be involved in the effort to free Mosul, but Baghdad dismissed the concerns of the Nineveh council and included these additional forces. In this context, identity politics played a crucial role, especially since the sectarian identity of those participating in the fight against Daesh was already a point of contention. With a Sunni majority, the residents of Mosul were genuinely apprehensive about integrating the PMF and their allies, the Kurdish Peshmerga. Because rebuilding Mosul would be a complex and lengthy process requiring national unity, Prime Minister Abadi believed that many PMF volunteers fought for Iraq, while others were driven by different interests. This is why he aimed to bring these militias under state control (Timreck, 2024).

"The Sunnis had no choice but to defend themselves and use weapons. They have reached a point of being or not being."
Tariq Al-Hashimi,
former vice-president of Iraq

Following the loss of power under Saddam Hussein and the confrontation with mass destruction after Daesh, the Sunnis have failed to reach a consensus on the best way forward. Without a strong identity and willingness to participate in politics after a period of unchallenged rule, they are forced to find their voice and contend with the increasingly powerful Shiites. In fact, Sunni leaders are hesitant to support Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi's government in Baghdad due to perceptions of corruption and inadequate Sunni representation. However, without a Shiite ally, they risk losing their political influence entirely. An example of a successful Sunni coalition is the Iraqiya bloc, which was the main favorite among Sunnis, winning the most seats in parliament in 2010. This coalition managed to appeal to both Sunni and Shiite supporters because of its non-sectarian stance and focus on issues beyond sectarian rhetoric that dominated politics at the time. It set a precedent for addressing the Iraqi issue, unlike efforts to create Sunni unity under the guidance of Jordan, Türkiye, the U.S., or the UAE, which ended without consensus following Daesh's rise. Ultimately, the Shiites condemned the coalition for its sectarian exclusivity, leaving Sunnis deeply divided and significantly weaker heading into the upcoming elections (Timreck 2024).

Security services

Structural reforms in Iraq's security services are extremely difficult but essential to strengthen the country's national security. One of the biggest challenges for Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani's government is restructuring Iraqi security institutions, which include the Joint Operations Command, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Defense, and the intelligence services. To ensure the stability and sovereignty of the state, as well as the enforcement of laws, it is crucial to implement sweeping reforms and new policies at the level of national security institutions—especially if Iraq is to regain its role as a key pillar of stability and security. Iraqi security institutions face multiple issues directly linked to sectarianism in Iraqi politics. Most current institutions are highly politicized, with leadership appointed by political parties based on the electoral balance within the political blocs of Iraq's Council of Representatives. Consequently, these leaders tend to prioritize the agendas of the parties that supported their appointments, which hampers the ability of national security institutions to uphold professional standards and pursue national goals. For example, the Ministry of Defense avoids supporting military production because arms dealers offer generous commissions, keeping the country reliant on foreign arms imports. Due to political appointments, many security leaders lack the necessary qualifications. For instance, the Ministry of Interior in Al-Sudani's government is managed by military officers with no experience in security, law, or policing. The intelligence services are run by criminal law judges with no background in intelligence work. Since 2003, Iraq's national security policy has been trying to move beyond traditional approaches. In addition to the lack of expertise, endemic corruption affecting the entire Iraqi state further undermines security efforts. Overall, Iraq's security situation remains fragile, with intelligence services failing to effectively eliminate major threats such as DAESH cells. Key structural challenges for Al-Sudani's security reform include the absence of political consensus, uncertainty about the future of the government, the weakening of the administrative system, and the lack of professional coordination among national security agencies (Al-Zubaidi, 2023).

Emerging trends in the security environment

Beginning with the sectarian divisions among Iraqi citizens, one of the major problems affecting Iraq today is the violent activity of terrorist groups (DAESH), Iranian-backed militias (Kata'ib Hezbollah, Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq, Harakat Al-Nujaba, Badr Organization, Saraya Al-Khorasani), nationalist Shiite factions (e.g., Saraya Al-Salam), Kurdish groups operating on Iraqi territory (e.g., Kurdistan Workers' Party/PKK, Sinjar Defense Units/ YBS, Peshmerga), Sunni tribal groups (in opposition to the central government due to insufficient resources and marginalization), local tribal militias (cooperating with Al-Qaeda or DAESH, with the aim of protecting their own interests), as well as political and paramilitary entities (Popular Mobilization Committees/PMF, Sunni Provincial Councils, Coordination Framework, Sadrist Bloc, Kurdish Regional Government/KRG).

Although the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime and the elimination of Osama bin Laden and his followers were intended to usher in an era of prosperity for Iraq, alliances were reshuffled. Iraq is now plagued by a fierce insurgency, lacking an effective government and basic services. The Iraqi conflict is ongoing, with human and financial costs for the US and its allies continuing to increase. Therefore, developing a long-term strategy is crucial because the counterterrorism problem in Iraq will not vanish after US military withdrawal. Jihadists worldwide have found fertile ground here to develop

new skills, build networks, and train for future conflicts, aiming to fight both in the next war and to defeat the US and its allies. Much of the violence in Iraq resembles a civil war between Iraqi communities, with jihadists often leading efforts to provoke sectarian violence. Such violence seeks to undermine the government (Bayman, 2007). In September 2024, the Iraqi and American governments announced that the Coalition against Daesh would conclude its military mission in Iraq by September 2025. The negotiations began following armed clashes between Shiite militias, known as the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, and the US, while also reflecting internal pressure for US forces to withdraw (Loft, Brooke-Holland, 2025).

Future prospects

Ethnic and sectarian division remains a fundamental issue at the national level, but it also contributes to the emergence of all other political, economic, socio-cultural, and technological problems. This issue must be fully understood in relation to all structures of Iraqi society to help restore the essential functions of the state. While security stability cannot be guaranteed categorically in the future—regardless of political negotiations or agreements—the numerous challenges Iraq has faced in the past should serve as a basis for understanding future challenges threats.

From a political perspective, there is a risk of increasing misunderstandings among the various political groups that have recently reached a consensus on how they should operate. However, due to external influences and divisions between ethnic and sectarian groups, tensions between Sunni and Shiite factions might intensify, especially regarding the implementation or approval of laws, given the limited Sunni representation in the Iraqi Parliament. We should also remember the parliamentary elections scheduled for late 2025, where political clashes among different factions are likely to surface. Additionally, from a political standpoint, it is important to consider the agenda of the new Trump administration, as it could significantly impact Iraq's future, with Washington threatening to escalate security and economic pressure. Moreover, considering Iraq's geographical position between Iran, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and Syria, it can be expected to continually face external pressures. In 2025, Iraq will need to prepare for another round of parliamentary elections, whose results could reshape the political landscape, as they have in previous years. Looking ahead at existing sectarian divisions, it is likely that no single candidate will secure a majority in this fall's elections, leading to a series of private negotiations to establish a new government. Many Iraqis may feel their voices are ignored, fueling further discontent, conflict, and violence. This cycle of weak governance and polarization is likely to persist society.

Another problem Iraq has faced in recent years is the escalation of Turkish military operations in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq / KRI to fight the PKK. Although the decision to disband the terrorist group is being carried out, the Baghdad government is expected to play a key role in overseeing the disarmament process of the terrorist organization (Butler, Spicer, 2025). At the same time, it is important to highlight the political violence directly linked to the Iranian-led Axis of Resistance in Iraq, Yemen, and Syria. Violence among Shiites resurfaced with the 2023 provincial elections, when Prime Minister Muhammad Shia Al-Sudani's position was challenged. A year later, he moved toward rapprochement with Türkiye and agreed to a plan with Washington for the gradual withdrawal of U.S. troops, while also emphasizing the strengthening of Iraqi forces against Daesh. However, the resurgence of the terrorist group and the rise in attacks by pro-Iranian militias against the U.S. and Israel strained the government, especially as Israel threatened to conduct strikes if attacks came from Iraqi territory (ACLED, 2024).

Although there has recently been a decline in violent attacks in Iraq, one issue that continues to be of interest for the future is the terrorist phenomenon, which is only one aspect of sectarian problems within Iraq. Even though violent conflicts have lessened, we must remember that DAESH has been defeated but not completely vanquished. Therefore, the potential resurgence of DAESH remains a future concern, as evidenced by reports of its activities in mountainous and desert regions. One advantage they have is the camps where family members of former jihadist fighters reside, which DAESH could exploit to create new factions. Additionally, considering the prisons in neighboring Syria, managed by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), we must also consider the possibility that thousands of DAESH fighters could be released, potentially crossing into Iraq. Taking all these factors into account, it is clear that the militias in Iraq have a justified reason for maintaining influence at the security level, as well as the benefits derived from sectarian divisions.

Another element of interest is the expansion of Türkiye's position within Iraqi borders, particularly in Kurdish and predominantly Sunni areas. These developments are directly linked to Iran's goal of reducing Turkish influence, and the actions taken on Iraqi territory present a problem that needs resolution. With the potential to become a battleground between Ankara and Tehran, Iraq could face major clashes between Iranian-backed militias and Sunni factions, including the KDP and Turkish-backed opposition forces.

And, last but not least, the biggest and most crucial problem, which has existed from the start and will likely continue in the same way, remains the issue of sectarian divisions between Sunnis and Shiites. These tensions have kept growing, primarily in the political realm, fueled consistently by a series of unresolved disputes. Therefore, as Iran pulls out from Iraqi territory, conflict escalation will probably happen more rapidly. While a unified state where these sectarian divisions can be healed and coexist peacefully is desired, the chances for a future resolution seem unlikely, especially through amicable means. Since foreign interventions from the beginning, all the years that have passed have deepened the divide that may never be bridged again, influencing whether the Iraqi state can ever be restored achieved.

Conclusions

Following the events of 2003, Iraqi politics revolved around the identity communities of the exiled opposition: Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds. Over the ensuing decades, as factions vied for power, none managed to set aside their identity-based visions when recruiting leaders or members from other communities. Despite numerous attempts by Iraqis to challenge sectarian power structures, these factions have always successfully defended a system where identity overwhelmingly surpasses all other political considerations. It has become evident that what benefits sectarian factions often does not serve the broader population living in mixed communities, whose livelihoods and security depend on national stability. Consequently, these sectarian divisions are primarily reflected within the political sphere, which is why the ongoing sectarianism of Iraqi factions differs from the preferences of most Iraqis, who mainly seek security and efficient services on a national level instead of community-based advantages. Today, Iraq stands as a nexus of historical, geopolitical, and identity crises, all of which threaten internal stability and regional influence. The current cycle persists because those factions holding most resources after Saddam Hussein's fall viewed ethno-sectarianism as the simplest route to power. Despite facing increasingly difficult challenges to the ethno-sectarian system over time, they were supported by an electorate frightened by armed groups threatening their communities based on identity, as well as factions distributing resources according to existing divisions community.

The existing rivalries among ethno-sectarian groups have worsened due to ongoing foreign interventions, fragile and fragmented governance, societal polarization, corruption, and the expanding influence of non-state actors, all exacerbated by the unstable security and political environment. The sectarian divisions of the past fifty years have shown that they mainly formed as reactions to external threats, serving as responses to community solidarity. By the time the U.S. withdrew in 2011, these divisions had become deeply rooted and increasingly confusing. Each militia and major political group identified with a sectarian or ethnic label, drawing members exclusively from one community. These groups often held conflicting views on nationalism and sectarianism. Sunni Arab communities produced sectarian extremists such as Al-Qaeda and Daesh, alongside Sunni Arab nationalists and reformers. Shiite factions included a mix of Islamists and Islamist-nationalists, who were distinguished more by their opinions on territory, economy, and security than on politics and identity. Despite major differences, Shiite factions often invoked nationalist rhetoric and sought to align themselves with non-Shiite groups. Ultimately, all Iraqi factions supported the status quo established by the Americans— a sectarian system where power is shared and positions are allocated primarily based on identity, then faction. This system contradicts the overall interests of Iraqis, who need effective governance, security, and strong state institutions to effectively address ongoing challenges crises.

Although efforts to rebuild democracy have been launched relatively recently, they have continually faced a lack of consensus on Iraq's future. Sectarian divisions have contributed both to conflicts and to hindering the development of a shared civic identity. A moment of sectarian unity occurred during the rise of nationalism when Iraq was struck by Daesh. Fully shocked by the terrorist group's brutality and the concurrent collapse of many Iraqi institutions, citizens united against a common threat. Several Shiite volunteers from the south fought far from home, in provinces like Nineveh and Anbar, with the goal of freeing Sunnis from Daesh control. These fighters, regardless of community affiliation, organized themselves to combat terrorism. This showed that the Iraqi state could potentially organize in a similar way, aimed at serving common interests and maintaining security and stability. However, the nationalist surge during the fight against terrorism did not symbolize a revival of state institutions. Instead, many Iraqis feared trusting a strong national government that could inspire a sense of chauvinism.

In conclusion, the crisis in forming the government highlights and confirms the ongoing problem of sectarian divisions in Iraq, serving as a clear example of how the sectarian system prevails over the popular desire for a less sectarian society. These divisions have always existed and have never diminished, mainly because controlling power in the state is their primary goal. Despite its complexity, sectarianism between the two main communities, Sunnis and Shiites, continues to be a powerful force behind conflict and insecurity, fueling all the political, economic, social, cultural, and technological problems that Iraq currently faces facing.

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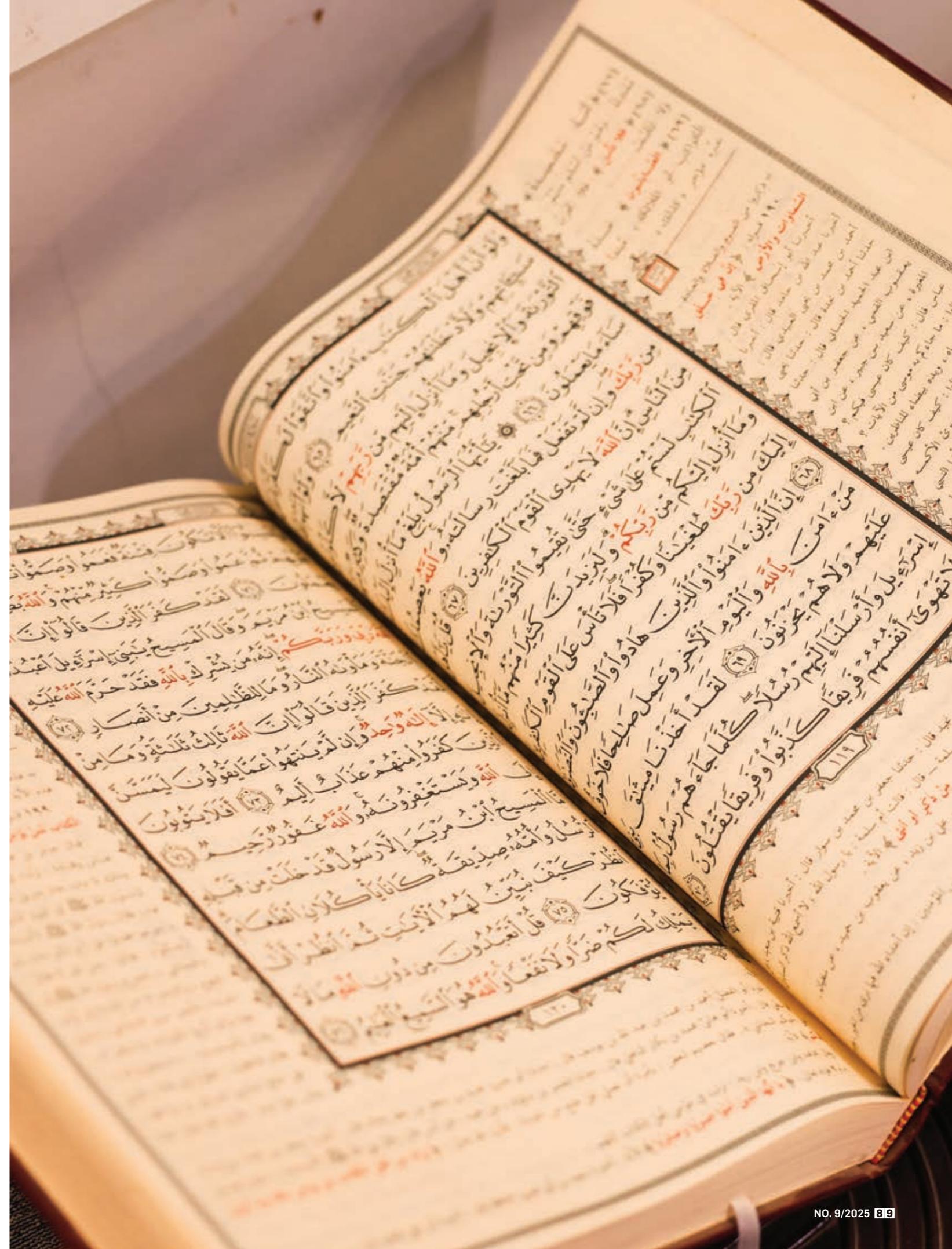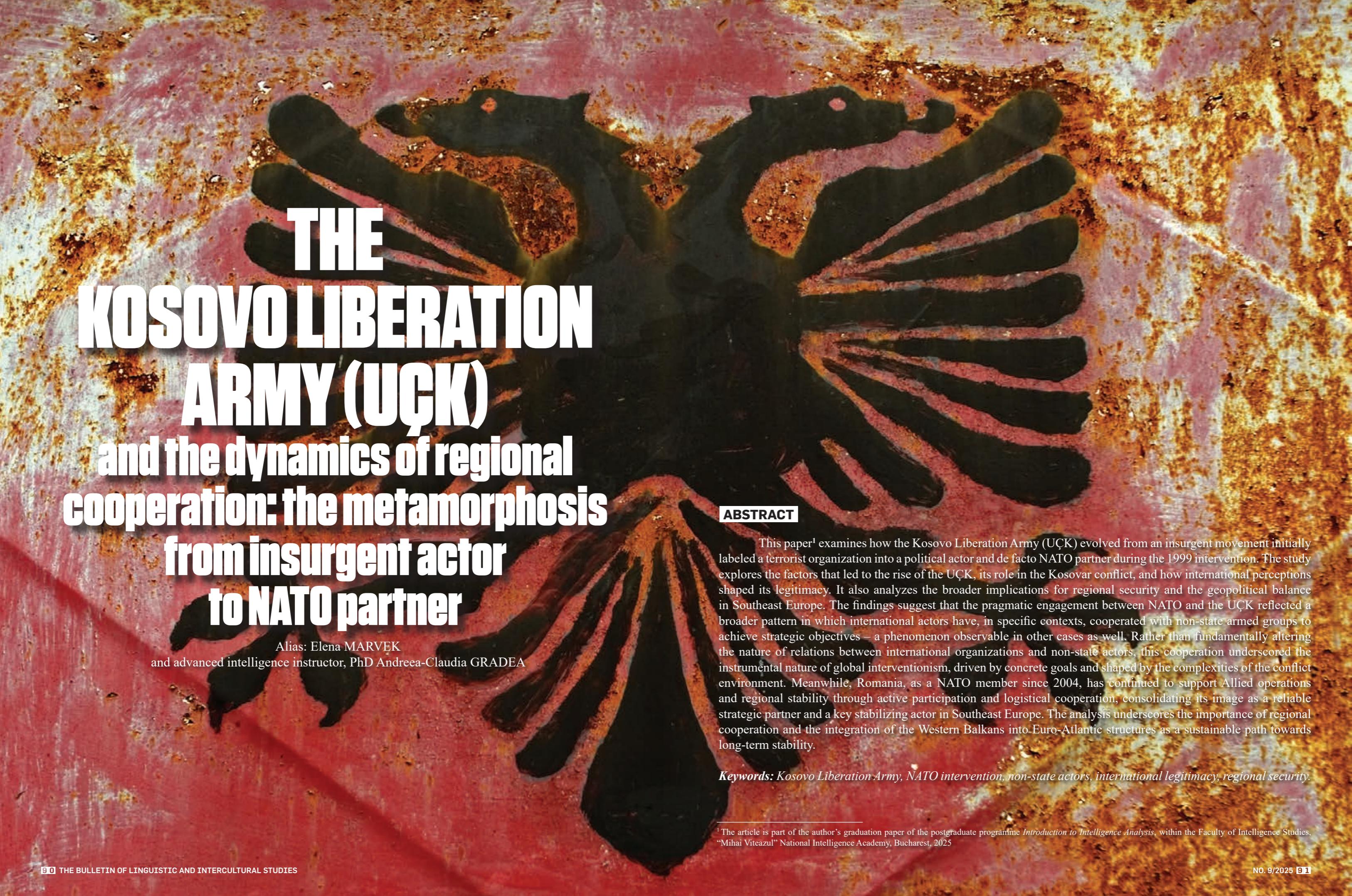
THE KOSOVO LIBERATION ARMY (UÇK)

and the dynamics of regional cooperation: the metamorphosis from insurgent actor to NATO partner

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ABSTRACT

This paper[1] examines how the Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK) evolved from an insurgent movement initially labeled a terrorist organization into a political actor and de facto NATO partner during the 1999 intervention. The study explores the factors that led to the rise of the UÇK, its role in the Kosovar conflict, and how international perceptions shaped its legitimacy. It also analyzes the broader implications for regional security and the geopolitical balance in Southeast Europe. The findings suggest that the pragmatic engagement between NATO and the UÇK reflected a broader pattern in which international actors have, in specific contexts, cooperated with non-state armed groups to achieve strategic objectives – a phenomenon observable in other cases as well. Rather than fundamentally altering the nature of relations between international organizations and non-state actors, this cooperation underscored the instrumental nature of global interventionism, driven by concrete goals and shaped by the complexities of the conflict environment. Meanwhile, Romania, as a NATO member since 2004, has continued to support Allied operations and regional stability through active participation and logistical cooperation, consolidating its image as a reliable strategic partner and a key stabilizing actor in Southeast Europe. The analysis underscores the importance of regional cooperation and the integration of the Western Balkans into Euro-Atlantic structures as a sustainable path towards long-term stability.

Keywords: Kosovo Liberation Army, NATO intervention, non-state actors, international legitimacy, regional security.

Introduction

The region's strategic importance stems from its geographic location at the crossroads of Central Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East. This position makes the Western Balkans not only a transit route but also a crucial area for the security and stability of the entire continent. Additionally, the abundance of natural resources and the potential for economic growth heighten international actors' interest. From a geopolitical perspective, the Balkan region has consistently been an area of intervention by major powers. The main centers of development – Athens in ancient times, Constantinople during the Byzantine era, Habsburg Vienna, and Hungarian Budapest – shaped historical events, and the Ottoman period was the only moment of relative cohesion (Hayden, 2013). Western Europe perceived the Balkans through a "divide and rule" approach, treating the region as a periphery, as a different territory, where European interest led to ignoring local actors or selectively supporting certain state entities (Kolstø, 2016).

Over the last twenty years, the countries in this region have steadily pursued Euro-Atlantic integration, aligning with the European Union and NATO through political and institutional reforms aimed at promoting democratization and reinforcing the rule of law. However, the process remains complicated and often fragile, continuing to limit internal stability and influence the development of regional cooperation.

The literature indicates that the political and economic transition in the Western Balkans is among the most complex in Europe. After the armed conflicts of the 1990s, the countries in the region have worked towards institutional reform and consolidation, the implementation of the rule of law, economic recovery, dispute resolution between states, and the management of inter-ethnic tensions. The European Union, NATO, and other international organizations have offered concrete support to the Balkan countries for comprehensive (political, social, and economic) recovery and integration into the Euro-Atlantic community.

Scholars have often conceptualized the region as a framework for understanding post-conflict reconstruction, which is why research primarily focuses on significant issues such as ethnic conflicts, EU and NATO enlargement, migration, post-socialist transition, and economic development. All these areas of research are relevant from both theoretical and practical perspectives, with implications for European and international policies. Analysis of the region concerns not only the local area, but also the stability and security of the entire continent.

Although the Western Balkans have been extensively studied, and the UÇK has been discussed in numerous works, particularly in analyses of interethnic conflicts in the region, certain aspects of the movement's evolution and international perception remain less systematically explored. Much of the existing literature situates the UÇK within the broader context of the Yugoslav conflicts, often without an in-depth examination of its internal dynamics or its evolving role vis-à-vis international actors.

In general, studies on the conflict in the province of Kosovo focus mainly on the role of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK) in the dynamics of the fighting and on the internal mechanisms of the conflict. This approach has provided a detailed picture of the balance of power and military strategies. Still, it has placed the immediate impact on the regional environment and neighboring states on the back burner. Furthermore, the process by which the UÇK went from being a contested actor to a recognized interlocutor on the international stage remains insufficiently explored in terms of its effects on the criteria for legitimizing external interventions. Furthermore, the relationship between the UÇK and external actors remains insufficiently documented, making it difficult to understand the actual impact that this organization had on the conflict's evolution and the region's stability.

The study aims to examine the political, economic, and social developments in the Western Balkans during the post-conflict period, with a focus on European integration dynamics, external actors' influence, and the region's development prospects. It also seeks to identify the obstacles hindering this process and to provide an overview of the Western Balkans' future within European and global contexts. The study of the Western Balkans attracts the attention of researchers in political science and international relations, as well as of European institutions and international organizations involved in regional stabilization and integration efforts. The growing interest in this area is driven by its strategic importance to Europe's security framework and by the internal challenges that continue to impact the development of states in the region.

Consequently, the study is guided by the following central research question: To what extent did the key stages in the evolution of the Kosovo Liberation Army mirror and interact with the broader regional dynamics of Southeast Europe?

The primary purpose of this research is to examine the evolution and impact of the Kosovo Liberation Army's (UÇK) activities from both regional and international perspectives, while also considering their direct implications for Romania's national security, particularly regarding regional stability and post-conflict challenges in the Western Balkans. The research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the UÇK's role during the Kosovo conflict (1996-1999) by employing an analytical framework that integrates historical context, strategic dynamics, legal dimensions, and the movement's interaction with international actors.

This approach seeks to highlight how the UÇK's evolution reflected broader regional transformations and how its emergence shaped, rather than redefined, international responses to the Kosovo crisis.

The proposed analysis includes, in the first stage, a historical and political contextualization of the Western Balkans, from the breakup of Yugoslavia to the emergence of the UÇK. Subsequently, the international perspective on this subject will be examined, along with the influence of its progressive recognition on Euro-Atlantic decision-making. A separate section will be devoted to Romania's role, which, although not directly involved in the conflict, supported NATO and contributed to strengthening regional cooperation.

The research makes a fresh contribution by analyzing the interaction between the process of legitimizing the UÇK and the regional security architecture, while also offering a perspective on Romania's role in this context. The final interpretation will focus on interdependence and cooperation as sustainable solutions for stability and common development in the Western Balkans.

For the multidimensional analysis of the impact of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK) on regional and Romanian security, a qualitative methodology based on documentary research was used. The purpose of the method is to understand the role of the UÇK in the political and security transformations in the Balkan region and to assess the indirect impact on Romania's national security. Sources such as parliamentary reports, academic studies, and Romanian contributions are analyzed, with an emphasis on correlating historical, legal, and strategic narratives.

Sociologist Septimiu Chelcea, in his course *Sociological Research Techniques* (2001), notes that qualitative research is an investigation that uses interpretive and naturalistic methods, aiming to understand social phenomena in their natural context by exploring the meanings individuals assign to their experiences. This process involves using various sources to build a holistic, complex view of the reality being studied. At the same time, the sociologist describes descriptive research as the initial stage in the process of sociological knowledge, with the primary purpose of observing and describing social phenomena without trying to explain their causes.

It is characterized by the lack of pre-established models and the difficulty of organizing facts in a clear context. Through content analysis, theoretical and empirical perspectives on the evolution of the UÇK, international perceptions of this group, and implications for the regional security environment were identified and correlated, with an emphasis on Romania's strategic positioning in the period leading up to its accession to NATO. Septimiu Chelcea defines content analysis as a set of quantitative and qualitative techniques used for the systematic and objective study of communication, intending to identify and describe content in order to draw conclusions about individuals, society, or the communication process itself. To substantiate the content analysis, information was collected from sources accessible through specialized online databases, such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, Scopus, and ProQuest, complemented by journalistic publications translated from English and Serbian. This methodology provides an appropriate framework for a coherent investigation of the discourses and themes related to the role of the Kosovo Liberation Army in the Kosovo conflict.

The research process: the Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK)

Nation-states emerged late, in a context where Europe itself can be seen more as a cultural and historical construct than as a fixed geographical entity. In this sense, the Balkans have often been associated with an Orientalized identity (Pleić, 2021), characterized by religious diversity that has profoundly shaped collective identity and historical development. Ethnic and religious variety has heightened tensions, with the legacies of the Byzantine, Ottoman, and Austro-Hungarian empires leaving unresolved territorial and identity issues.

Throughout the 20th century, the Western Balkans was one of the most sensitive geopolitical regions in Europe, characterized by ethnic tensions, political instability, and diverse imperial legacies. After World War I, the formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes—later renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia—brought together communities with often conflicting identities, traditions, and political goals under a single state. From the very beginning, Kosovo was a constant source of tension, due to the nationalist claims of the Albanians and the challenge to the Yugoslav state's authority by various radical groups.

The breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s rekindled

these divisions and brought Kosovo to the forefront of international attention. The creation of the seven successor states posed significant challenges, particularly regarding ethnic and demographic issues. Despite these hurdles, all of the new states declared independence and gained international recognition, except for Kosovo. The West aimed for a rapid democratic transition, but weak institutions led to ongoing instability (Krastev, 2002). The continued inter-ethnic tensions, particularly in northern Kosovo, underscore the complexity of post-conflict social dynamics integration.

Developments in the 1990s brought significant changes that affected European security and international cooperation. The armed conflicts of that time highlighted the vulnerability of the Western Balkan states, leading to NATO and other international organizations intervening (Đoković, 2017). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Dayton Agreement ensured peace but left a fragile structure (Đoković, 2017): "The Dayton Agreement is weaker than the Ohrid Agreement. In the Western Balkans, territory is always at stake. The Albanians in Macedonia did not gain territory, but rights, while in Bosnia and Herzegovina, an entity was formed, which means the chances for monopoly and control over the territory have increased" (Đoković, 2017). In Kosovo, Serbian-Albanian tensions, fueled by historical myths such as the battle of 1389, escalated and resulted in NATO's intervention in 1999 (Vladisavljević, 2004). The conflict in the province of Kosovo was a turning point in the restructuring of Southeast Europe's security architecture in the late 1990s. The suppression of the province's autonomy in 1989, followed by repressive policies against the Albanian population, created a climate of insecurity and marginalization that facilitated the emergence of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK). It quickly transformed from a clandestine armed movement into a recognized political actor, playing a decisive role in escalating the conflict and attracting the intervention of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) 1999.

Thus, the province of Kosovo was not only a site of local conflicts but also a catalyst for redefining principles of international intervention and reevaluating the security architecture in Southeast Europe. The transformation of the UÇK and its gradual international legitimation are crucial for understanding the relationships between international organizations and local armed groups, as well as for evaluating the impacts of regional cooperation. The activity of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK), which evolved from an insurgent force into an informal partner in NATO's intervention, sparked both internal political changes in the former Yugoslavia and significant international repercussions. In this context, Romania, amid its efforts to integrate into the Euro-Atlantic sphere,

faced its own strategic and security challenges. From the symbolic risks tied to the Kosovar precedent to cross-border criminal threats, the conflict's impacts extended beyond local borders. Therefore, analyzing the evolution of the UÇK, international perceptions of it, and its effects on regional stability offers a crucial framework for understanding Romania's position in a geopolitical environment marked by profound instability.

According to the study *The Kosovo Conflict. Consequences for the Regional Security Environment,* the radicalization of the UÇK was an effect of the failure of Ibrahim Rugova's peace strategy, supported by Ibrahim Rugova, combined with the increase in repressive measures. In January 1998, open fighting between Serbian security forces and the UÇK resulted in over 1,500 deaths and approximately 400,000 refugees. Events such as those in Račak generated strong reactions from the international community and helped the UÇK gain recognition in the eyes of some Western states. Following this episode, the organization gained visibility in the international media, benefiting from growing support from members of the Euro-Atlantic framework (Dăncău, 2014), which transformed this change in its global image into encouragement for NATO intervention. In 1998, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1199, which stated that the humanitarian crisis in the Kosovo region, caused by the Belgrade authorities, represented a clear threat to peace and security in the area. A year later, NATO launched an air campaign against Serbia without the explicit approval of the UN Security Council, justifying the action by invoking international humanitarian law and the precedent set by the severity of the crisis. Resolution 1244 of the same council officially ended the conflict, ordering the transition of the province to international administration and calling for the rapid disarmament of the UÇK and the cessation of attacks (Gamurari & Osmochescu, 2008).

The transformation of the UÇK into official structures did not suppress the previous networks and leaders. Approximately 5,000 former members were integrated into the Kosovo Protection Corps (in Albanian Trupate Mbrojtjessë Kosovës, TMK), thus retaining the political and military power of the former guerrilla group. The emergence of the Kosovo Liberation Army in the 1990s was not a singular phenomenon, but the result of a cumulative historical process, marked by the gradual exclusion of the Albanian population from political, institutional, and social life of the province of Kosovo. The key moment in this development was the authorities in Belgrade's revocation of the province's constitutional autonomy in 1989. This decision was followed by a series of repressive measures directed

against the Albanian majority population, manifested in particular by their exclusion from public institutions and "the introduction of emergency measures in Kosovo, including the mass dismissal of Kosovar Albanians from their jobs and the blocking of Albanian-language media institutions" (Youngs, 1998). These policies created a climate of insecurity, marginalization, and discontent among Kosovar Albanians. In response, the province's moderate political elite, particularly Ibrahim Rugova and the Democratic League of Kosovo (in Albanian, Partia Demokratica e Kosovës), advocated a strategy of peaceful resistance through the establishment of alternative institutions. These operated outside the legal framework imposed by Serbia and included their own networks of education, health, administration, and symbolic political representation: "In response, the Albanians of Kosovo detached themselves from state institutions, established a parallel system of education and health care, and continued to hold elections for a shadow government" (Youngs, 1998). However, this non-violent strategy was perceived by a significant portion of young Albanians as ineffective. As repression continued to escalate and the international community maintained an uncertain attitude toward the situation in the province, feelings of insecurity about peaceful methods quickly escalated. Initially, "Kosovars generally supported a policy of non-violent action in an attempt to gain greater recognition of their rights. With their campaign ignored by the international community, they now consider this policy a failure. Kosovo Albanians have found that only the use of weapons attracts attention" (Youngs, 1998). In this context, starting in the mid-1990s, the UÇK emerged and grew, an underground military movement that promoted armed resistance against the Serbian authorities, with the stated goal of achieving independence for the province of Kosovo.

A turning point in the consolidation of the UÇK was the 1997 crisis in Albania, which led to the collapse of state authority and the massive theft of weapons depots. This situation allowed easy access to weapons and ammunition for paramilitary movements in the province of Kosovo, including the UÇK, which began to launch direct attacks on Yugoslav forces. Later, these weapons were used by the UÇK to inspire its insurgency (Alpaslan, 2008), which was concentrated in the regions of Drenica, Dukagjin, and around the Albanian-Kosovar border. The strategy was guerrilla-style, targeting police stations, Yugoslav army convoys, and checkpoints. Against this backdrop, the UÇK was seen by a significant part of the Albanian population as a defender of their rights. The use of national symbols and anti-colonial rhetoric intensified this popular support. In areas where Yugoslav authority

was weak, the UÇK even began to establish informal local administrations (Alpaslan, 2008).

Despite the widespread perception that the UÇK represented a force for liberation, its actions were not without controversy. Reports by international organizations and journalistic investigations, such as the PRIF REPORT (Peace Research Institute Frankfurt), have documented cases of violence committed by UÇK fighters against the Serbian minority, but also against Albanians considered collaborators of the Serbian regime or political opponents of the group. There have even been accusations of coercive methods being used to secure support among the population, including the forced recruitment of young people and threats against political opponents (Gromes, 2019). Forced recruitment, especially of young men, created a climate of pressure in areas under UÇK control. At the same time, moderate political leaders who refused to collaborate with the UÇK were threatened or excluded from local public life.

The evolution of the UÇK from an emerging armed group, in the context of systematic repression of the Albanian population, had significant consequences not only locally but also internationally. As the conflict intensified and popular support for the UÇK grew, international actors' views changed significantly, directly influencing NATO's and the UN's diplomatic and strategic decisions. In the early stages of the conflict in the Kosovo province, many international actors, especially NATO, saw the UÇK as an unstable group. At the same time, numerous Western governments labeled it as a terrorist organization. However, as the humanitarian crisis in this small region worsened, particularly after the Račak massacre in January 1999, NATO's view of the UÇK changed significantly. Although initially considered a radical group and marginalized by international actors, the UÇK began to be seen by NATO as an operational partner on the ground: "NATO gradually moved from distancing itself from the UÇK to operational cooperation with it, especially during the air campaign" (Alpaslan, 2008). This change in attitude is also confirmed by the evolution of the UÇK's political status, reflected in its inclusion at the Rambouillet negotiating table (Perritt, 2005), as well as by PRIF documents noting that, despite its insurgent past, the UÇK was treated as a de facto ally in the air intervention (Gromes, 2019). This change was determined not only by strategic considerations on the ground, but also by pressure from Western public opinion, which demanded intervention in response to the systematic violence committed against the Albanian population. As the UÇK intensified its military operations, NATO began a tacit operational collaboration that significantly changed its official position towards

this non-state actor (Alpaslan, 2008).

Concerning the legal framework of NATO's intervention, an analysis of international law reveals a significant tension between the principles of state sovereignty and the justification for humanitarian intervention. According to the UN Charter, any military intervention must be authorized by the Security Council. However, in the case of the province of Kosovo, this condition was not met, citing the urgent need to protect the civilian population: "The violation of the Charter was clear and obvious. NATO did not request or receive authorization from the Security Council and did not act in self-defense" (Wippman, 2001). Thus, the legality of the intervention was called into question. Still, the moral legitimacy invoked was supported, including through the media coverage of atrocities on the ground, in a climate in which the UÇK had become a *de facto ally*.

In terms of the negotiation process, the inclusion of the UÇK in the Rambouillet format was a key moment in the process of international recognition. Initially marginalized from diplomatic initiatives, the UÇK was later admitted to the negotiating table, marking a transition from an insurgent group to a viable political actor. This legitimization was made possible mainly by the reality on the ground, where UÇK-NATO cooperation was decisive in advancing the intervention's strategic objectives. Even if this collaboration was not formally recognized at all stages of the conflict, its effects on the negotiations and the post-conflict political architecture are undeniable (Perritt, 2005).

The transformation of the UÇK into both a military and political actor during the Kosovo conflict did not eliminate the threats its structure posed to regional stability. Though officially dissolved after the signing of the Demilitarization Agreement in June 1999, the UÇK was reformed into the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC). On the ground, informal networks continued to influence the regional security environment. A report by the House of Commons in 1999 noted that the withdrawal of Serbian security forces and the Yugoslav army from Kosovo created a power vacuum, which allowed international KFOR forces to intervene and a provisional administration to be set up under the UN. In many areas, the UÇK seemed to assume local administrative and security roles, leading to the development of parallel structures alongside international and regional institutions, especially in rural areas with limited KFOR (NATO Kosovo Force) and UNMIK (United Nations Mission in Kosovo) presence (Youngs, 1998).

An academic analysis published in Military Operations in Kosovo and the Danger of Mission Creep clearly shows that "the UÇK and its successor organizations continued to exert influence beyond their official demobilization, maintaining control over local security in certain areas and being connected to organized crime networks" (Robinson, 2014). This informal influence has led to the emergence of trafficking networks with cross-border ramifications, particularly in relation to weapons and drugs.

Due to its strategic position and poorly monitored borders, the province of Kosovo has been a hub for the trafficking of weapons, people, and narcotics in the post-conflict period (Kemp, 2017). These activities have had an impact not only on Kosovar territory but also on neighboring states, including Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and, indirectly, Romania. In the context of NATO's intervention, Romania's airspace was authorized for overflight, which drew Belgrade's attention and sparked public and diplomatic debate (Perritt, 2005).

The recognition and activities of the UÇK also raised concerns about regional security and potential unconventional threats, including uncontrolled migration, radicalization, and the infiltration of organized crime networks. The trafficking routes developed in the border areas of the province of Kosovo with Albania, North Macedonia, and Montenegro could be extended to Central and Eastern Europe (Avădănei, 2023). Thus, the UÇK's activities posed multilateral risks to regional security, and the states in the area, including Romania, had to manage these challenges in a tense geopolitical context, balancing international cooperation with the management of their own strategic interests (Avădănei, 2023).

The logistical support provided by Romania strengthened its profile as a stable and reliable state committed to Euro-Atlantic collective security, facilitating its integration into NATO and establishing it as a dependable partner in the Western Balkans. The experience of the conflict highlighted the interdependence between national, regional, and European security, emphasizing the importance of cooperation and solidarity in crisis management. Although not directly involved in the fighting, Romania made significant contributions to international efforts, thereby consolidating its role as an active player in promoting stability in the Western Balkans.

Conclusions

The study argues that the UÇK's transformation from an insurgent group into a political actor illustrated the complex interactions between local dynamics and international intervention in Southeast Europe. While the movement's influence on Western security strategies was limited, its evolution offers insight into the challenges global organizations face in engaging with non-state actors during humanitarian crises. The Kosovo Specialist Chambers proceedings against former KLA leaders (including the 2025 stage of the Hashim Thaçi et al. trial) underscore that accountability for wartime abuses remains central to Kosovo's rule-of-law agenda and to international perceptions of the conflict's legacy.

Regionally, security dynamics since 2023 have been driven less by the UÇK as an organization and more by tensions in northern Kosovo, notably the Banjska/Banjskë attack and subsequent unrest—events that prompted NATO (KFOR) reinforcements and a more robust posture to preserve a safe and secure environment under UNSCR 1244.

Politically, the EU-facilitated normalization process—the 2023 Agreement and its Implementation Annex—provides a framework for de-escalation, minority protections, and pragmatic coordination between Pristina and Belgrade. Implementation, however, remains uneven, limiting the agreement's stabilizing potential and keeping the risk of renewed crises elevated.

For Romania, the consequences of the Kosovo conflict and the activities of the UÇK were mainly indirect, including increased regional instability, the emergence of cross-border threats, and the need to adapt foreign policy positions amid its Euro-Atlantic commitments. Romania's logistical and political support for NATO operations during the crisis consolidated its image as a reliable partner aligned with Western security objectives.

Taken together, these developments suggest three prudent takeaways for Euro-Atlantic actors: (1) accountability and minority-rights implementation are the most credible pathways to durable stability; (2) deterrence and crisis-management capacities (KFOR) will remain necessary as long as the political process stalls; and (3) normalization, not legacy insurgent politics, is now the primary variable shaping regional security—placing the burden on sustained EU and NATO engagement to translate frameworks into practice.

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SOFT POWER 2.0

THE NEW WAVE OF GLOBALIZATION AND ITS IMPACT ON SOFT POWER

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the impact of globalization on the expansion of soft power, focusing on how state and non-state actors exert influence globally. It also highlights society's indirect or direct 'consumption' of these cultures, fostering positive images associated with them. The study was carried out by theoretically framing the concepts, interpreting case studies, and conducting a comparative analysis between Netflix and TikTok. The results obtained reveal that the interconnectedness resulting from globalization determines the development of vast soft power instruments, the present paper limiting itself only to (1) Hollywood films and the Netflix platform of the United States of America, (2) Confucius Institutes and the TikTok platform of the People's Republic of China, and (3) South Korean pop music. Lastly, our research yields a broader understanding of globalization and its role in expanding the potential of soft power to shape collective mentalities.

Keywords: soft power, globalization, culture, influence, People's Republic of China.

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Introduction

The current state of international relations is characterized by instability in power distribution, as the post-World War II global system has shifted from a unipolar to a bipolar, and then to a multipolar configuration. Recently, hybrid models have gained increasing attention—those which incorporate both state actors and regional blocs, such as the US, the Russian Federation, and the EU, or the US, China, Russia, and the EU (Neguț & Neacșu, 2022, p. 208). Currently, we are witnessing significant global changes driven by the rapid rise of emerging powers, the increasing influence of non-state actors on the world stage, and, most importantly, the intensification of globalization across economic, social, and cultural spheres (Atlantic Council, 2008).

Globalization has enabled some nations to expand their territory and influence through the use of material, informational, and financial resources. But what exactly is globalization? In a broad sense, "globalization refers to the broadening, deepening, and accelerating of global interconnection" (Held et al., 2004, p. 39). Thus, it represents an extension of activities across different fields, transcending borders and increasing the influence of a state or non-state actor on other entities. Transregional interconnection leads to the expansion of activity networks and the possibility of remote action (Held et al., 2004, p. 39).

One of the ways states have exerted their influence is through the use of soft power. It is a relatively new term in the dictionaries of international relations, but the practice of soft power has been used for centuries. For instance, in the 18th century, the spread of the French language and culture enhanced France's power (Nye, 2012, p. 100). This concept refers to the fact that states utilize values, traditions, culture, political tactics, informational assets, the power of media, and economic strategies to assert their supremacy and influence (Nye, 2012, p. 104).

This article aims to explain the connection between globalization and soft power. The way globalization operates creates a suitable environment for soft power, and the tools through which countries influence others are numerous. To accomplish this, we will present a theoretical framework for these concepts and examine how they are applied on the international stage.

Theoretical and conceptual framework

The concept of *soft power* was first introduced by Joseph Nye in 1980, primarily in response to the neorealist theory developed by Kenneth Waltz, which did not emphasize the role of culture, values, and institutions in shaping the behavior of states (Nye, 2021, p. 4). This influence, rooted in attraction, contrasts with hard power, which relies on force and coercion from military and economic perspectives. Over time, the term gained international acceptance, particularly from the EU and Japan, which hoped that soft power could compensate for the lack of a traditional military. China also adopted the soft power approach after 2007, particularly through the Confucius Institute (Nye, 2021, pp. 9-11).

Joseph Nye states that the key aspect of exercising soft power is credibility. When governments are seen as manipulative or when information is regarded as propaganda, credibility is compromised (Nye, 2012, p. 102). Several specific factors unique to each country can directly affect its ability to wield soft power. Typically, culture stands out as one of the most crucial resources because it reflects unique qualities, encompassing elements that vary from one nation to another. Other significant factors include the country's internal political values and its foreign policies, such as the diplomacy practiced by that country (Nye, 2012, p. 103).

Over time, the international scene has become more interconnected due to widespread globalization. State governments have not lost power; instead, their authority has been reshaped to address the complexities of governance in a more interconnected era. (Held et al., 2004, p. 33). As Kofi Annan said in a speech to the UN General Assembly, in September 1999, "A global era requires global involvement" (Keohane & Nye, 2009, p. 289). The economic, informational, and cultural dimensions of globalization have brought about significant changes in the last century. From the point of view of informational interconnection, "abundance of information leads to reduced attention" (Keohane & Nye, 2009, p. 283). This is the paradox of abundance and the problem of credibility (Keohane & Nye, 2009, p. 283). The more information is disseminated through multiple sources to a broader audience, the more credible it becomes. The more information, including false information, is communicated, the less public attention and credibility the state will receive. As noted above, the credibility of a state, whether from media or government

sources, is a crucial factor in the imposition of soft power. However, access to information is vital for state and non-state actors to promote their culture and values on a global scale.

In his article, "Instrumental Factors of Soft Power in an Era of Global Turbulence", Ofitserov-Belskiy argues that soft power is one of the most refined forms of instrumentalization of globalization. In his conception, soft power is not just an element of cultural attraction, but a form of significant power to impose norms, ideas, policies, and to control discourses (Ofitserov-Belskiy, 2024, pp. 180–186). In this context, the instrumentalization of globalization acts as a method by which particular worldviews become dominant, imposing the influence of the hegemonic state. As an example, Russia also uses the instrumentalization of globalization, but not coherently or attractively for the international scene because it has not removed traditional methods or the imposition of a historical vision of the state, which makes the soft power method more challenging to apply in this case (Ofitserov-Belskiy, 2024, pp. 189–191).

Applied research: illustrative case studies and thematic comparative analysis

Globalization has created an environment that enables actors to exercise their soft power, as a more connected world provides opportunities to utilize various tools of influence. After the Cold War, it became necessary to develop non-military methods for both states and non-state actors to impose their influence. In today's geopolitical landscape, it is internationally accepted that any global entity, if circumstances allow, has the right to use non-military force through peaceful means. The internet is the primary tool used to exercise soft power. In a globalized society, the internet enables users to stay connected to events everywhere in the world, which allows those seeking to influence on a larger scale to reach individuals quickly and broadly. While the digital environment benefits those who know how to harness it, it can also swiftly impact political dynamics, as negative information spreads just as rapidly (Bollier, 2003, pp. 16–18). However, it is essential to note that in the context of globalization, the internet is not the only tool for exercising soft power.

Hollywood films represent one of the most powerful means of imposing American soft power, as

they have been widely distributed and have influenced numerous cultures through globalization. Most of these films promote the "American Dream" and the possibility of achieving it for everyone. Furthermore, they not only promote American culture but also foster the inclusion of every individual, regardless of gender, race, or any other characteristic. The popularity and the success of these films led to the expansion of American soft power (Wu, 2023, pp. 64–65). Hollywood films promote the United States of America as a place of opportunity, freedom, and progress, which determines a positive image at a global level. The progressive perceptions that it has created facilitate international collaborations at the economic, political, and military levels, because it delivers the image of anchoring development. Likewise, in many films, America is portrayed as a hero, which at a global level affords it the possibility of military and non-military intervention from other states, carried out to help and support, rather than out of self-interest.

The music industry serves as a powerful tool for South Korean soft power propaganda. Korean pop music symbolizes, worldwide, the culture of the country, as its musical style and performance methods are a product and cultural asset of South Korea. Additionally, the government has a ministry, the Ministry of Sports, Culture, and Tourism, which provides federal funding and support to this industry (Shafie, 2025, pp. 1-2). K-Pop culture projects a positive image of South Korea through the uniqueness of its music and stage performances, characterizing it as a modern, young, and innovative nation. Globally, this phenomenon has a significant cultural impact, promoting various aspects of Korean culture, such as the language, fashion, and cuisine. The large number of fans for this musical style has also led to a tremendous increase in tourism, due to concerts held in South Korea, as well as the simple curiosity about Korean culture aroused by the admiration for K-Pop bands. Summarizing all these aspects, it is evident that this soft power instrument also has a profoundly positive impact on the South Korean economy.

One tool that China uses to exercise its soft power is the development of Confucius Institutes across various countries. The aim is to expand the reach of the Chinese language and culture to young people, especially middle school and high school students. They are organized with the help of educational institutions in the host country and also offer cultural and academic exchange programs. The Chinese state promotes the idea of creating beneficial ties with other nations, fostering multiculturalism,

and promoting a more harmonious world (Becard & Menechelli Filho, 2019). The Western perspective on the People's Republic of China is characterized by suspicion. This opinion determines that one of the purposes of the Confucius Institutes is to diminish the negative image. These institutions promote a positive image of China, characterizing it as a modern, peaceful state that is open to global cooperation. This soft power instrument, through collaboration with various universities and the education of young people in state institutions, leads to the creation of elites more inclined to accept the Chinese regime.

To demonstrate that globalization has led to the evolution of new soft power instruments, we will conduct a comparative analysis between two highly active states on the international stage. The United States of America and the People's Republic of China impose soft power through instruments such as Netflix and TikTok. To achieve this, we will analyze why the two platforms serve as instruments of soft power and why they are more effective due to globalization.

Netflix has become a key agent of Western cultural soft power through the global distribution of its content: "We are here to entertain the world, one fan at a time" (About Netflix - Homepage, n.d.); this is the message that appears on the Netflix homepage. This global streaming platform aims to captivate its audience by constantly producing new films, series, and games that are diverse enough to appeal to a wide range of social groups. Netflix is a large-scale operation present in 190 countries and available in 50 languages. The entertainment it offers is tailored to different tastes and cultures, which has contributed to its acquisition of over 500 million users. The homepage also states, "When our series and films become cultural moments, you can feel it across music, books, fashion, travel and more" (About Netflix - Homepage, n.d.). Due to its popularity, Netflix has a significant influence that often manifests in creating new perceptions of America and other cultures. Not only does it promote cultural diversity, but it also reinforces a subtle form of Western influence on international audiences (Colman, 2024, pp. 55–56). By analyzing the number of Netflix content receivers and their ability to change their perception, it becomes clear that it represents a significant soft power tool.

TikTok operates differently; its content is created by users and is based on their ability to adapt to current trends quickly. This aspect enables the application to stay on top of the most frequently used apps. The application stands out for its participatory culture and its ability to create trends, making users adapt their conceptions about it. ByteDance created TikTok in 2016, when it was initially launched in the People's Republic of China,

and it was later introduced internationally in 2018. TikTok utilizes a customized algorithm that delivers personalized content to each user. Their interactions with the delivered product are analyzed to provide the most pleasant experience with the application. In a short time, TikTok has become one of the most widely used apps, an aspect that, together with its personalized algorithm, which determines what content to send and to whom, gives it a pervasive capacity for influence (Podosokorsky, 2022, pp. 119–120). The fact that TikTok is one of the most widely used apps today, and its ability to maintain this level of popularity, characterizes it as a relevant soft power instrument.

Although very different, what Netflix and TikTok share is that both are based on international accessibility and diffusion. Neither of these platforms would have been as effective in influencing if they had not been able to reach such a large and diverse audience. Their global impact is impressive, making them instruments of soft power. The exercise of these forms of soft power would not have been possible without globalization, because without it, they would not have had such easy and quick access to so many individuals or cultures. Globalization not only benefits certain powers but also allows actors to expand their influence, compete for it, or even overlap with that of other nations.

Conclusion

Overall, we can conclude that globalization has a significant impact on the expansion of soft power, enabling both state and non-state actors to exert influence on a global scale. The soft power strategies of these actors are supported by the digital environment, as globalization has increased connectivity and facilitated rapid information exchange. Using the theoretical framework, case studies, and comparative analysis helped to highlight the variety of tools available for exercising global influence.

Currently, various instruments are employed in soft power, each with a broad impact and providing significant benefits to those who utilize them. The accessibility to the general public and these mechanisms' ability to attract attention, both at the individual level and among other international actors, further boost their influence.

Cultural influence is one of the most important aspects of modern soft power because it draws the most positive attention. Portraying a positive image of the country on the global stage also influences other components, such as diplomatic relations and the economic sector. Globalization would not be possible

without individuals, and today, social groups are strongly influenced by trends, which drive the growth and ongoing evolution of soft power.

One limitation of this paper is the challenge of objectively measuring soft power, as it is based on perceptions, external image, and cultural factors that are

hard to quantify. A related area of research could explore how globalization impacts soft power in the current geopolitical situation, such as the war between Ukraine and the Russian Federation or the changes in the United States during Donald Trump's second term.

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UNDER THE SIGN OF INTELLIGENCE. HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE ERA OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: REVOLUTION OR ILLUSION?

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ABSTRACT

What happens to human rights when decisions are no longer made in courtrooms, but behind the algorithm? Does Artificial Intelligence represent a promise of the future or a constant presence, capable of redefining existential paradigms? In this world, rewritten in binary language, freedom, dignity, and privacy are part of a power game that they did not choose. The article examines how algorithms can serve as allies of justice, yet also become actors of programmed exclusion. From cases of algorithmic discrimination to mass surveillance systems, the work questions the compatibility between AI and the fundamental values of humanity. In a landscape dominated by the illusion of transparency and dictated autonomy, technological performance is not the real stake, but rather our ability to keep the citizen at the center of the decision-making process. Artificial Intelligence may be a revolution, but in the absence of well-founded ethics, it risks becoming just another illusion.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, human rights, digital rights, digital ethics, emerging technologies.

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Introduction

The contemporary landscape is shaped by an unprecedented acceleration of technology, where Artificial Intelligence (AI) stands not only as an auxiliary tool for progress but as an active agent in a paradigmatic shift. In its operational sense, AI refers to a broad spectrum of systems capable of replicating human cognitive processes-such as learning, reasoning, and adaptation-through algorithmic programming, generative neural networks, or advanced data processing models (Goodfellow, Bengio, & Courville, 2016). From image analysis with OpenCV to predictive modeling using TensorFlow or audio interpretation via Librosa, AI is now infiltrating the most delicate layers of social and personal reality.

Yet, along with these technological advances, a host of challenges also arise. As AI gains increasing autonomy in decision-making, we begin to see potential collisions between algorithmic logic and the foundational values of human rights. These rights, rooted in the struggles for freedom, dignity, and justice, remain the structural pillars of international law and universal ethics. In an era where algorithms assess legal claims, approve or deny credit, monitor behavior, and influence political opinion, protecting these rights is not simply prudent; it is essential.

This article examines how AI might respect, threaten, reinforce, or reshape core human rights. It highlights two key responsibilities: first, to understand how emerging technologies align or conflict with the values that formed modern civilization; second, to acknowledge the duty we have in developing and managing AI systems in ways that protect human dignity. As artificial intelligence takes on an increasingly important role in shaping social, economic, and political outcomes, we must ask: can these systems truly uphold fundamental human rights? Or is it solely our responsibility to guide, constrain, and educate AI in an ethical manner? AI, by its very nature, has no innate understanding of morality or legitimacy. It is not self-aware, nor inherently ethical. It simply reflects the values, assumptions, and goals of those who create and use it. In this way, algorithmic systems serve both as a mirror of our intentions and potential agents of profound social change, some of which could disrupt the balance of human communities.

This paper aims to explore the delicate balance between the emancipatory potential of artificial intelligence and the risk that it may reduce humans to mere objects of digital processing. It is, at its core, a deliberate effort to reaffirm the importance of human rights in shaping the structure of our new digital order.

AI and human rights

To comprehend how we might transform AI from a disruptive force in citizen–state relations into a catalyst for societal progress, we must confront a pressing question: What should we do when AI morphs from an ally to an adversary? If we paused for a moment from our daily routines, we would realize that artificial intelligence no longer resides solely in science fiction or distant-future narratives. It is embedded in medical decisions, in the curation of our news feeds, and in algorithms that determine what we see and hear. We no longer ask whether AI will impact our lives; instead, we ponder how it does so and, more critically, what space remains for our rights and freedoms when the rules of engagement are increasingly dictated by code. Initial interactions with these technologies were marked by optimism. In medicine, research led by Esteva et al. (2017) demonstrated that machine learning algorithms could detect melanoma with accuracy comparable to that of dermatologists, offering real prospects for early diagnosis, especially in regions lacking medical infrastructure.

In education, adaptive systems, as described by Luckin et al. (2016), introduce the concept of personalized learning paths tailored to each student's pace and needs. For the first time, children were no longer limited to uniform learning environments; algorithms became invisible mentors, capable of adjusting educational trajectories in near real-time. In the area of human rights, organizations such as Amnesty International (2019) have utilized automated satellite image analysis to document human rights violations in inaccessible areas. In such cases, AI served as both witness and protector, stepping in where human observers could not. However, this promising image has a darker side. Studies by Buolamwini and Gebru (2018) showed that commercial facial recognition systems had disproportionately higher error rates for women and people of color. Discrimination no longer shows up in obvious ways but subtly infiltrates data models and algorithmic results, continuing old injustices and changing how racial disparities are expressed.

A more significant challenge is the opacity of these systems. Pasquale (2015) warns of the "black box" phenomenon, where algorithms make life-altering decisions without their internal logic being understandable or contestable. How can a justice system function when the basis of decisions remains hidden from those affected? Recent examples highlight this systemic issue. Clearview AI, a company that collected millions of biometric images without explicit consent, sparked significant legal and ethical debates regarding the right to privacy. In the U.S. judicial system, the COMPAS algorithm, designed to predict recidivism, faced criticism for reinforcing racial biases, undermining the principle of equality before the law.

In another context, analysis of China's social credit system by Creemers (2018) illustrates how algorithmic technologies can become subtle yet relentless tools of social control. Evaluating individual behavior based on automated parameters not only redefines the concept of citizenship but also risks eroding personal autonomy. China's use of AI extends beyond individual behavior assessment; it employs these tools disruptively, directly impacting personal freedoms. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese authorities implemented large-scale automated citizen classification systems based on presumed epidemiological risk. Through mobile phone-integrated monitoring apps, individuals were assigned color codes (green, yellow, or red) that determined, in real-time, their ability to move freely, need for quarantine, or complete restriction from public spaces. This classification, often irrefutable, turned algorithms into arbiters of freedom of movement. Moreover, non-compliance with rules imposed by these systems was automatically sanctioned: surveillance cameras and connected data networks identified individuals not wearing masks or failing to maintain social distancing, issuing fines without human intervention. Thus, public spaces became arenas of constant monitoring, where technology evolved from a public health aid to an instrument of continuous control and punishment.

Given this reality, it becomes clear that technology is not impartial. Artificial intelligence mirrors the values, priorities, and inequalities of the society that develops it. Recognizing this requires a re-evaluation of the relationship between technology and human rights within a normative framework that tackles the challenges of the digital age. Digital rights in this transformed cyberspace include the right to protect personal data, transparency in algorithms, and informational diversity. These are no longer just extensions of traditional rights; they are the foundation of freedoms in the digital world. The right to privacy goes beyond protecting one's home or correspondence—it involves control over data generated continuously by online activity. Freedom of expression means not only the right to speak but also protection from algorithmic marginalization in an information space governed by unseen algorithms. In the age of networks and platforms, true freedom depends on access to a safe and fair digital environment.

This transformation requires a redefinition of the social contract. Traditionally, the state was the protector of fundamental rights. Today, technological platforms, data corporations, and algorithmic systems have become *de facto* normative influencers. Any renewal of the social contract must acknowledge this reality: establishing clear ethical boundaries, ensuring transparency in decision-making, and empowering individuals to have real control over their data. The European Union, through initiatives such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and recent proposals for AI regulation, has begun to shape the contours of this new agreement. UNESCO (2021) has also proposed a global ethical framework for the responsible development and use of artificial intelligence, promoting explainability, fairness, and respect for cultural diversity. However, these efforts are just the beginning. Their success depends not only on defining principles but also on their practical application amid economic interests and geopolitical considerations. It is valid to ask: How can we build algorithmic systems that correct injustices instead of continuing them? How do we make sure that new forms of digital power stay compatible with human dignity and personal freedom? The answers are complicated and can't come only from the IT sector or lawmakers. They need widespread involvement from civil society, increased citizen awareness, and a public culture that critically examines technology. In this way, artificial intelligence can truly become an extension of humanism rather than a subtle form of dehumanization.

Private in name only. Artificial Intelligence and the decline of privacy: GDPR vs. AI

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) governs how EU citizens' personal data is collected, stored, processed, and protected, aiming to safeguard their rights and privacy. This regulation influences the development and deployment of artificial intelligence (AI). Although GDPR seeks to protect consumer data, it may limit AI innovation in Europe, potentially putting EU companies at a competitive disadvantage (Wallace & Castro, 2018). Many organizations struggle to fully comply with the

GDPR, particularly when adopting AI technologies, due to the regulation's complexity and novelty (Addis & Kutar, 2020). GDPR presents challenges for implementing automated decision-making and profiling, creating a responsibility for organizations to balance fostering technological innovation with protecting personal data. As a result, the rules require strict transparency, accountability, and control mechanisms to prevent risks like discrimination, automated errors, and unauthorized data use, all while respecting individuals' fundamental rights in a rapidly changing digital landscape and an era of speed (Mougdir, 2020). However, AI technologies can also assist in ensuring GDPR compliance through rule-based systems and machine learning techniques. These AI tools can aid in compliance checklists, risk assessments, automated profiling regulations, and breach detection and reporting (Kingston, 2017). As AI continues to develop, finding a balance between innovation and data protection remains a key challenge for organizations seeking to remain compliant with the GDPR.

In the professional environment, risks are associated with the use of conversational interfaces based on artificial intelligence, including the potential to violate the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Using virtual assistants, such as ChatGPT (OpenAI), Cursor, Cody, Claude (Anthropic), or Copilot (Microsoft), can be helpful in the context of large files to save time. However, this practice also involves risks and vulnerabilities related to data privacy. To prevent incidents related to the uncontrolled use of AI chatbots, organizations must adopt strict and well-founded measures. A first step is to establish clear policies on the use of these technologies by employees, ensuring a coherent and responsible operational framework. It should also be explicitly stated which types of data can be processed through these systems to reduce risks related to personal data protection. Additionally, organizations must actively work with chatbot providers to ensure that data entered into the system is not stored or used improperly, thereby safeguarding the confidentiality of the information. In the event of a data security incident resulting from unauthorized use of an AI chatbot, organizations have clear legal responsibilities to thoroughly document the incident and immediately notify the relevant authority, either the National Authority for the Supervision of Personal Data Processing (ANSPDCP) in Romania or the European Data Protection Board (EDPB) in the European Union. In some instances, companies must also inform the affected individuals, ensuring transparency and respecting their rights in accordance with GDPR regulations.

The digital footprint, the invisible trace of an increasingly exposed life

With every moment spent online, whether reading the news, shopping for clothes, or scrolling aimlessly through social media, we leave behind a trail of data. These are not just conscious inputs we choose to share, but fragments of ourselves: geolocation pings, click patterns, access frequencies, social interactions, navigation behavior (Bassi, 2020). Once aggregated, they form what is now known as a *digital footprint*.

What is essential to understand is that this footprint is not just metadata. It becomes an invisible double of the real person, one that can be stored, analyzed, and used independently of any informed consent. Even more unsettling is that this shadow rarely remains inert. It is mined, processed, and fed into predictive systems that, silently but decisively, influence our access to services, opportunities, and even visibility in the digital public sphere (Zuboff, 2019). As Shoshana Zuboff poignantly notes in her analysis of surveillance capitalism, "human experience has been claimed as free raw material for translation into behavioral data" (Zuboff, 2019, p. 8). This shift poses not only commercial risks, but it also rewires the foundations of power. Without any real control over how our data is collected or interpreted, we become increasingly vulnerable to manipulation, classification, and algorithmic exclusion—often without knowing, and even more often, without a meaningful way to resist.

We are not just dealing with a privacy issue. We are facing a fundamental threat to the concept of personal autonomy. When decisions are made based on algorithmically generated profiles, whether related to credit access, employment prospects, or the spread of our opinions in digital spaces, the scope of freedom shrinks. And it does so quietly, without user awareness, transparency, or meaningful options for response. Even more concerning, these profiles can reproduce or magnify systemic bias. Algorithms trained on incomplete or biased data often end up excluding individuals or groups from opportunities, not out of malice but due to hidden design flaws in the code.

In this landscape, the right to privacy cannot be seen just as protection of one's home or communications. It must be redefined as the right to control how one's digital identity is portrayed, analyzed, and exploited. The lack of clear legal tools to defend this representation not only exposes intimacy but also erodes dignity.

Concepts like the *right to be forgotten*, algorithmic transparency, and personal data ownership are not theoretical luxuries. They are essential mechanisms in the fight to preserve human agency in the age of predictive analytics. Protecting one's digital footprint is not about clinging to nostalgia. It is about making sure no person is reduced to a series of probabilistic assumptions. And in this fight, we are not just defending privacy; we are defending the right to remain unknowable machines.

The path between fairness and credibility

Despite the recognized societal importance of ethics in the field of artificial intelligence, research on public attitudes toward this issue remains limited. This gap is evident in situations where the ethical development of AI is expected to prioritize the collective good of society. For example, some studies show that, while Germans generally see ethical principles as equally important, they find it difficult—if not impossible—to implement them all at once. These groups differ significantly not only in which attributes they prefer but also in how important they consider each attribute (AI-Ethics by Design. Evaluating Public Perception on the Importance of Ethical Design Principles of AI, Kimion Kieslich, Birte Keller, Christopher Starke). Scandals, such as Snowden's revelations about mass surveillance by US intelligence agencies (Steiger et al., 2017) or Cambridge Analytica's collection of data from millions of Facebook users for targeted advertising and election interference in the 2016 US presidential election (Hinds et al., 2020), have recently sparked public outrage. As a result, public focus has shifted toward privacy concerns, and policymakers have increasingly taken steps to address these issues. Shortly after the Cambridge Analytica scandal became public, the European Union implemented the General Data Protection Regulation, marking a significant step toward global policy convergence and fostering a shared understanding of how to handle personal data worldwide (Bennett, 2018).

As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes increasingly integrated into society, emerging ethical concerns related to values such as respect for fundamental rights also arise, along with the social responsibility of technology developers and users. Some of these issues are especially urgent when they involve automated decisions,

algorithmic bias, data protection, process transparency, and safeguarding individual autonomy. Automated conclusions based on discriminatory information can reinforce existing prejudices and biases against fairness. Likewise, the extensive collection of personal data raises potential privacy and informed choice issues that must be addressed through precise regulation and strong protections.

At the same time, transparency in how algorithms work makes it more challenging to assign responsibility, especially when AI decisions have a significant impact on people's lives. Therefore, creating explainable and auditable systems where human accountability is central is essential. Additionally, the predictive use of AI can impact individual autonomy by altering access to opportunities and options, thereby risking the reinforcement of existing social inequalities. Furthermore, the extended use of AI can introduce cognitive biases. However, AI also provides significant benefits such as improved efficiency, personalized services, and progress in areas like medicine and mobility. To ensure these advantages are not overshadowed by disruptive impacts, it is crucial that AI development is guided by strong ethical principles, transparency, and effective oversight regulations. Artificial intelligence must be developed and utilized in a manner that respects human dignity and promotes social justice. Only through an interdisciplinary approach, where values shape technology, can AI help create a fair and inclusive society (Bidașcă, 2023).

Digital rights – the extension of fundamental rights

In the context of growing digitalization and the expansion of artificial intelligence-based technologies, establishing and strengthening the concept of digital rights is essential for protecting individual fundamental freedoms. While new technologies promote innovation and progress, they also create new threats to confidentiality, personal autonomy, and fair access to information, challenging traditional legal and human rights frameworks. Digital rights are not a completely separate set of rights but are instead a translation and extension of rights outlined in documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the European Convention on Human Rights, adapted to the digital age. Therefore, rights such as privacy, freedom of expression, data protection, and non-discrimination need to be reinterpreted in light of new forms of algorithmic

interaction and cyber surveillance.

The concept of digital rights has become an important topic in the digital and information technology era. Digital rights management (DRM) systems have been developed to protect intellectual property in the digital world, raising questions about balancing private control with easier access to information (Caso, 2006). Digital inclusion is now regarded as a new human right, emphasizing the essential role of access to information and communication technologies in today's society (López & Samek, 2009). The digital age has influenced copyright laws, as technological advances have changed how information is created, shared, and used (Santos, 2008). This shift has led to digital rights being recognized as a new category of civil rights, underscoring the need for legal frameworks to address the unique challenges of the digital environment (Konobeevskaya, 2019). These developments highlight the connection between technology, law, and society in the digital age. Although the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) does not explicitly mention "digital rights," several key articles are relevant in the context of new technologies. Article 8 guarantees the right to privacy and has been interpreted by the European Court of Human Rights to protect personal data and online communications, as seen in Podchasov v. Russia (2024), which rejected the demand for providers to create "backdoors" to encrypted data. Article 10, on freedom of expression, is crucial for regulating digital platforms, while Article 13 secures the right to an effective remedy for online violations. Article 14 also prohibits discrimination, including cases involving potentially biased algorithms. Overall, the ECHR provides a flexible framework that safeguards fundamental rights in the digital age, adapting traditional principles to new technological challenges.

The United Nations' approach to digital rights is indirectly governed by various international instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which safeguards the right to privacy and freedom of expression, also relevant in the digital realm. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) ensures the protection of personal data. Additionally, UN resolutions highlight the importance of safeguarding fundamental rights online, especially with the advancement of new technologies. Moreover, the UN Principles on Human Rights and Emerging Technologies suggest that technologies should be used in a way that upholds individuals' fundamental rights.

The European Union plans to adopt a Charter of Digital Rights, outlined in the "European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade,"

which, although not yet legally binding, provides clear guidelines on ensuring fair and universal access to digital infrastructure, protecting personal data, promoting digital skills among citizens, and maintaining a safe, inclusive, and non-discriminatory online environment.

In the context of the profound transformations brought about by the rapid digitalization of global society, international organizations, national governments, and civil society groups are increasingly working to define a conceptual and normative framework aimed at coherently and fairly regulating the complexities of new technological realities from a human rights perspective. This effort has led to essential proposals advocating for the recognition and protection of digital rights as a natural extension of the fundamental rights established in traditional international legal instruments. Modern researchers emphasize the growing significance of digital rights in international law. Kartashkin (2023) introduces the concept of "digital-information rights," supporting a comprehensive International Digital Code of Human Rights as part of the UN Global Digital Pact. Tillaboev (2024) recommends updating international standards for protecting intellectual property in the digital age, including amending existing conventions and creating new security measures. Brown & Korff (2012) underline the responsibilities of both governments and private companies in safeguarding digital freedoms, suggesting practical steps to protect online free expression and privacy. Overall, these studies highlight the need for updated international legal frameworks to address the challenges and opportunities of the digital age, striking a balance between the protection of human rights and legitimate law enforcement needs.

Digital rights can no longer be seen simply as technical extensions of traditional rights; instead, they must be recognized as essential aspects of modern life in an increasingly technology-dependent society. In a world shaped by rapid digitalization, widespread surveillance practices, automated decision-making, and the rise of digital monopolies, protecting fundamental freedoms in the virtual world is a vital democratic, legal, and ethical responsibility. The digital future should prioritize human values over commercial interests or excessive control.

Conclusions

In a digital landscape dominated by automated decisions and algorithmic surveillance, protecting fundamental rights can no longer be approached with traditional methods. Instead, it requires a profound reconceptualization tailored to new technological realities. While artificial intelligence offers significant opportunities for social progress, it also poses major risks to privacy, autonomy, and equality-risks that arise without solid mechanisms for regulation, transparency, and ethical responsibility. Therefore, digital rights must be recognized as pillars of freedom in the information age, and technological development must be accompanied by ongoing critical reflection focused on human dignity to prevent individuals from being transformed into mere objects of automatic processing. Today, aided by technological advances, we see a world where code creates unseen rules, and algorithms emerge from our dreams and fears. It is a world where the biggest challenge is not just controlling artificial intelligence but making sure humanity stays at the core of technology. The AI era is one where decisions are no longer made in courtrooms but through algorithms and mathematical formulas. The most vital resistance is in constantly reminding ourselves that the goal is not just performance but humanity and dignity. In this way, we can see digital transformation as an extension of humanism rather than an illusion of progress.

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