

Citizen's Brain Is the Battlefield in 21st-century Warfare

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NATO has added to the traditional domains of warfare – land, sea, air, space and cyberspace – a new one: "the cognitive domain." This is not just about imposing certain ideas or behaviors, as in traditional propaganda and psy-ops, but about modifying cognition –

influencing the process by which we ourselves arrive at ideas, insights, beliefs, choices and behaviors. The target is not primarily an enemy army, but the citizen. Winning the war is no longer determined by moving a border on a map, but by ideological conversion of the target.

“Cognitive warfare is one of the most debated topics within Nato,” researcher François du Cluzel told a panel discussion on Oct. 5, 2021. He wrote a foundational paper “Cognitive Warfare” for the Nato-affiliated think tank Innovation Hub in 2020. Although cognitive warfare overlaps with information warfare, classical propaganda and psychological operations, du Cluzel points out that cognitive warfare goes much further. In information warfare, one “only” tries to control the supply of information. Psychological operations involve influencing perceptions, beliefs and behavior. The goal of cognitive warfare is “to turn everyone into a weapon,” and “the goal is not to attack what individuals think, but how they think.” Du Cluzel: “It is a war against our cognition – the way our brains process information and turn it into knowledge. It directly targets the brain”. Cognitive warfare is about “hacking the individual,” allowing the brain to be “programmed.”

To achieve this, almost every domain of knowledge imaginable is applied: psychology, linguistics, neurobiology, logic, sociology, anthropology, behavioral sciences, “and more.” “Social engineering always begins with an understanding of the environment and the target; the goal is to understand the psychology of the target population,” du Cluzel writes. The basis remains traditional propaganda and disinformation techniques, enhanced by current technology and advances in knowledge. “Behavior, meanwhile, can be predicted and calculated to such an extent,” according to du Cluzel, “that AI-driven behavioral science ‘behavioral economics’ should be classified as a hard science rather than soft science.”

Because almost everyone is active on the Internet and social media, individuals are no longer passive recipients of propaganda; with today’s technology, they actively participate in its creation and dissemination. Knowledge of how to manipulate these processes “is easily turned into a weapon.” Du Cluzel cites the Cambridge Analytica scandal as an example. Through voluntarily submitted personal data to Facebook, detailed individual psychological profiles had been created of a large population. Normally such information is used for personalized advertising, but in the case of Cambridge Analytica it was used to bombard doubting voters with personalized propaganda. Cognitive warfare “exploits the weaknesses of the human brain,” recognizing the importance of the role of emotions in driving cognition. Cyberpsychology, which seeks to understand the interaction between humans, machines and AI (artificial intelligence) will be increasingly important here.

Other promising technologies that could be used are neuroscience and technologies, or “NeuroS/T,” and “NBIC” – nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology, cognitive science, “including developments in genetic engineering. NeuroS/T can be pharmacological agents, brain-machine couplings, as well as psychologically disturbing information. Influencing the nervous system with knowledge or technology can produce changes in memory, learning ability, sleep cycles, self-control, mood, self-perception, decisiveness, confidence and empathy, and fitness and vigor. Du Cluzel writes, “The potential of NeuroS/T’ to create insight and the capacity to influence cognition, emotions and behavior of individuals is of particular interest to security and intelligence agencies, and military and war initiatives.”

Waging war on individuals’ cognitive processes represents a radical shift from traditional forms of warfare, where one tries, at least in principle, to keep civilians out of harm’s way. In

cognitive war, the citizen is the target and his or her brain is the battlefield. It changes the nature of warfare, the players, the duration and how the war is won.

According to du Cluzel, "cognitive warfare has universal reach, from the individual to states and multinational corporations."

A conflict is no longer won by occupying a territory, or by adjusting borders on a map, because "the experience of warfare teaches us that although war in the physical realm can weaken an enemy army, it does not result in achieving all the goals of war." With cognitive war, the end goal shifts: "whatever the nature and purpose of war itself, it ultimately comes down to a clash of between groups that want something different, and therefore victory means the ability to be able to impose desired behavior on a chosen audience." In effect, then, it is about bringing about an ideological conversion in the target population.

The enemy is not only civilians in occupied or enemy territory – but also their own civilians, who, according to NATO's estimates, are easy targets for cognitive operations by enemy parties. "Man is the weak link this must be recognized in order to protect the human capital of NATO."

This "protection" goes a long way: "The goal of cognitive warfare is not merely to harm militaries, but societies. The method of warfare resembles a 'shadow war,' and requires the involvement of the entire government in fighting it." War can thus be waged with and without the military, and du Cluzel continues: "Cognitive warfare is potentially endless, what for this type of conflict you cannot make a peace treaty, or sign a surrender."

Dutch citizens are also targeted

According to the Cognitive Warfare report, China, Russia and non-state actors (non-state actors) also value cognitive war. Therefore, NATO sees it as an important task to be able to face this form of warfare. According to correspondence that emerged from FOIA requests, the doctrine of cognitive warfare is already strongly entrenched in the Dutch military. The independent news site Indepen. nl reports, "The Lieutenant General of the Land Forces Command writes on August 4, 2020 in a memo to then Minister of Defense Ank Bijleveld that 'information-driven action' (IGO) takes place in 3 dimensions: the physical, the virtual and the cognitive. Acting in the land domain involves operating within these three dimensions to achieve desired effects achieve within a political-strategic objective. Because country action takes place, by definition, among human actors and groups, effectiveness in the cognitive dimension is crucial.

At its core is taking away the will to fight at or impose our will to opponents. By the way with this, we are following the NATO doctrine for the land domain'." This modus operandi, in which the entire government is involved in information and cognitive war, and seeing the citizen as a possible enemy, who must be manipulated toward correct behavior must be manipulated, we see strongly in the corona period. Not for nothing did the Netherlands organize in the spring of 2020 organized a Navo Innovation Challenge, focused on Covid-19. "We are looking for innovative solutions to identify, assess and identify, assess and manage biological threats, so that NATO forces, allies and civilian units are protected are protected," the announcement reads read. It specifically seeks for "surveillance, inclusive measures to monitor health monitoring" and "collaborative opportunities between military, civilian health and research institutions, officials at the local and national level and surveillance analysts."

The Dutch newspaper NRC Handelsblad reported in November 2020 that, without legal basis, the Land Information Maneuver Centre (LIMC) had been established – a department that is under the land forces that surveilled Dutch civilians during the corona period, using Behavioral Dynamics Modeling. BDM is an approach developed by the British SCL group, the parent company of the aforementioned Cambridge Analytica, and with which the military gained experience during missions in Afghanistan, civilians were not only monitored but also actively influenced. FOIA documents released in early 2022 revealed that the LIMC worked closely with police and the NCTV (Unit combatting terrorism, similar to Homeland security).

The invisible war

How is it possible that for some it is very clear that we are facing a coup, revolution or even Third World War, while for others everything is seeming ‘normal’?

“My father prepared me for the previous war,” Sebastian Haffner writes shortly before his escape from Nazi Germany in 1938. In the book *‘Defying Hitler’*, he describes how he experienced World War I as a boy of seven, growing up during the interwar period and how he experienced the rise of Nazism. He imagined by war a trench warfare, and was not prepared for terror, mass hysteria and demagoguery.

We imagine war as a demagogue. For example, look at all the unwanted leaders that are demonized- Trump, Putin, Assad, etc. – who are branded “a new Hitler” by the mass media. War is an army invading, soldiers in the streets, cities being bombed.

We are now in the midst of a revolution – in the classic sense – a radical upheaval of the organization of the state system and power relations. Kees van der Pijl clearly explains in his book “States of Emergency” how this revolution, unlike, for example, the French and American revolutions, has not been initiated from below, but from above, by the oligarchy. They implement policy through co-opted governments and organizations such as the U.S. government, the EU, WHO and WEF, supported by Big Tech companies. The system being worked toward is totalitarian, technocratic and centralized. Relatively few people realize how radical the upheaval we are living through, probably because this war has not been initiated by direct physical force, but by cognitive war, directed at civilians. The doctrine of cognitive warfare shows that modern war is waged primarily as an advanced psyop. It does not conform to the classical image of warfare. That is why it is not visible to most.

Do they remember what freedom is?

None of the documents on cognitive warfare shows any sign of awareness of how far this methodology diverges from the basic values that are the foundations of a free society: centering on the rights and freedoms of the individual to do, think, organize his or her own life, without external interference.

Cognitive warfare is sold as a way to “win war without fighting,” so that there will be fewer (civilian) casualties. This seems positive at first, but, this approach, especially when applied on a large scale AND to its own citizens, does not give any space to the individual to gather information for himself, assess it and act accordingly. The citizen is no longer an independently thinking human being, but a vulnerable subject with “limited rationality.” Behavior that deviates from what the NATO, the LIMC or the government identifies as problematic should be “corrected.” Is the government or the military rational? Is rationality a prerequisite for making choices, decisions or beliefs? Why is a citizen not allowed to have

a dissenting opinion without being labeled as “potentially state dangerous”? Wanting to correct “state dangerous” citizens with “wrong” beliefs are reminiscent of the literature on Soviet Russia, Mao-China, Pol-Pot. It has no place in a free society.

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