

## Коммуникационный менеджмент и стратегическая коммуникация в государственном управлении

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### Роль неправительственных организаций в менеджменте знаний в ходе конфликтов

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#### Аннотация

Исход современных вооруженных конфликтов во все большей мере определяется политическими, а не военными факторами. Чтобы поддерживать состояние войны в нынешних политических условиях, требуется ощущение легитимности, справедливости своих действий, независимо от того, основаны ли они на объективной или искусственно созданной реальности. В век все более циничного отношения к преобладающим политическим партиям и СМИ новый «независимый» источник информации был найден в лице НПО (неправительственных организаций). Они используются для формирования информационного пространства современного «поля боя» с целью повлиять на общественное восприятие конфликтов, что и показано в предлагаемой статье на примере событий на Украине и в Сирии.

#### Ключевые слова

Вооруженный конфликт, коммуникационный менеджмент, неправительственные организации, общественное мнение, общественное восприятие, политическая легитимность, информационные операции.

Psychological warfare is part of civilization.

*Paul Linebarger*

#### Introduction

Nongovernmental Organisations (NGOs) create a new political reality on the global stage. They are seen to mobilize, articulate and represent people's interests at different levels (local, national and international), often their work can be taken as being an independent actor that seeks to increase accountability<sup>1</sup>. Modern armed conflicts are undoubtedly heavily politicized events, the outcome of which not only depends upon what happens on the physical battlefield in terms of military operations, but also in the minds of men for perceptions of legitimacy via information operations — all within a context of psychological warfare.

This brief paper seeks to address the issue of the role played by NGOs within selected armed conflicts (Syria and Ukraine) in terms of their role and ability to shape and influence the information flows on and about these events. How are these organisations projecting themselves in terms of their reputation and brand? Why is this important? The relationship between

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<sup>1</sup> Jordan L., Van Tuijl P. Political Responsibility in Transnational NGO Advocacy // World Development. 2000. No 28 (12). P. 2051–2065.

information, news and politics shall be initially explored, before moving to the topic of knowledge and information management. NGOs and their role in armed conflicts will be explored, with four particular organisations being the centre of analysis.

### ***Information, Politics and News***

A myth exists in Western society that news media and journalists are those agents of the fourth estate that tirelessly seek the truth and to expose government wrong doing and abuses of power. Herman and Chomsky<sup>2</sup>, however, demonstrated that they tend to play a supportive role and to defend the various interests of privileged groups in society. This is done through the highlighting some information and hiding other material, to bring an impression of legitimacy to what is being done.

There is a tradition of using the news in order to try and amplify the effects of propaganda as a means to attain political goals and objectives within the frame of an ongoing armed conflict. In the First World War, the American propaganda agency the Committee for Public Information made use of news agencies (and even created their own agencies) as a means of putting politically subjective information into circulation around the globe<sup>3</sup>. This can be effective in influencing publics, if the content consumers are unaware that they are in the process of being influenced and their opinions are being formed.

For they (opinions) are derived, not necessarily by reason, to be sure, but somehow, from the stream of news that reaches the public, and the protection of that stream is the critical interest in a modern state<sup>4</sup>.

Public opinion is an essential element in contemporary society in order to invoke the pretense of political legitimacy for what is being or about to be done, even if the information being presented is subjective or untrue. A situation that can be brought about by moulding the public sentiment<sup>5</sup>, which can in turn influence public opinion. The situation is made more difficult though, owing to increasing public distrust of mass media and news content<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, alternative and superficially more credible actors need to be established in order to manage the information flows.

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<sup>2</sup> *Herman E.S., Chomsky N.* Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media. New York: Pantheon Books, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> *Creel G.* How We Advertised America: The First Telling of the Amazing Story of the Committee on Public Information That Carried the Gospel of Americanism to Every Corner of the Globe. Lexington, KY: Forgotten Books, 2010 (original in 1920).

<sup>4</sup> *Lippmann W.* Liberty and the News. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920. P. 70.

<sup>5</sup> *Edwards L.* Media Politik: How the Mass Media Have Transformed World Politics. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001. P. 316.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* P. 322.

### ***Knowledge and Information Management***

As noted by Kenneth Payne, “today’s military commanders stand to gain more than ever before from controlling the media and shaping their output”<sup>7</sup>. This lays the foundations for the demand for and application of knowledge and information management. One of the trends has been the rise of activist networks that are engaged in influencing public perception and opinion on various events and issues. Those actors need to maintain a perceived distance from governments and authorities in order to cultivate a reputation of independence and therefore credibility.

Those activist organisations engage in information politics, and have a role in bringing an issue to public attention and in setting the media and public agenda. This is achieved through their ability to frame those people, events and issues, and often lobbying with a strongly emotionally-based set of values and norms<sup>8</sup>. In order to be effective at influencing opinions and perceptions of events and issues, there needs to be an effective management of information and its subsequent transformation into knowledge.

An assertion exists that knowledge is the key to effective competition and performance<sup>9</sup>. Through the effective management of information and knowledge economies intellectual capital can be influenced and shaped<sup>10</sup>. Knowledge and information management is situated in an organisational context, which is shaped by the prevailing organisational culture (to meet organisational goals and aims) and by the operational context that determines the nature of the information / knowledge and manner of dissemination<sup>11</sup>. This enables the transformation of information.

Information is the raw ingredient, which, when it becomes ingrained in the individual and collective memory in society, is transformed into knowledge. There are two types of knowledge — *tacit* that is intuitive and contextual, and personal and embedded in the minds of people. The other type of knowledge is *explicit*, that “can be easily expressed, articulated or encoded, gathered, organised, transferred or shared with others through social interaction”<sup>12</sup>. There needs to be a seemingly credible point of origin for information to flow from to the mass media that are the conduit for that information intended to reach the wider public in order to

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<sup>7</sup> Payne K. The Media as an Instrument of War // Parameters. 2005. Vol. 35. No 1. P. 81.

<sup>8</sup> Keck M.E., Sikkink K. Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998. P. 18–22.

<sup>9</sup> Demarest M. Understanding Knowledge Management // Long Range Planning. 1997. No 30 (3). P. 374.

<sup>10</sup> Quintas P., Lefrere P., Jones G. Knowledge Management: A Strategic Agenda // Long Range Planning. 1997. No 30 (3). P. 386.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.; Gold A.H., Malhotra A., Segars A.H. Knowledge Management: An Organisational Capabilities Perspective // Journal of Management Information Systems. 2001. No 18 (1). P. 185–214.

<sup>12</sup> Singh S.P. What Are We Managing — Knowledge or Management? // VINE. 2007. No 37 (2). P. 171.

influence perception and opinion. An increasing trend for the point of origin is to create and employ NGOs as those information producers.

### *NGOs in Contemporary Conflicts*

A problem with think tanks and NGOs is that they can be perceived as being independent, but this does not necessarily mean that they or their scholars are. Various stories have uncovered individuals and organisations of think tanks and NGOs that promote a donor's agenda<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, supposedly neutral and objective organisations can be used to try and shape the information flows in the public sphere in order to influence public perception and opinion<sup>14</sup>. As noted by Lippmann, "true opinions can prevail only if the facts to which they refer are known, false ideas are just as effective as true ones, if not a little more effective"<sup>15</sup>. Investigative journalist Robert Parry issued a dire warning on the role played by seemingly "innocent" and "independent" groups in shaping the media narrative with subjective information.

But the problem goes much deeper than a couple of Web sites and bloggers who find it professionally uplifting to reinforce propaganda themes from NATO and other Western interests. The bigger danger is the role played by the mainstream media in creating an echo chamber to amplify the disinformation coming from these amateurs<sup>16</sup>.

In relation to the above quotation, Murray Edelman noted that "virtually all political groups and individuals benefit at times from misleading and inaccurate assumptions and accordingly have an incentive to create and disseminate such beliefs"<sup>17</sup>. The deliberate policy of creating organisations to influence information flows during periods of political tension and armed conflict can be considered as an aspect of psychological warfare. By definition, it "comprises the use of propaganda against an enemy, together with such other operational measures of a military, economic, or political nature as may be required to supplement propaganda"<sup>18</sup>. However, he was also quick to note the limitations of this strategy. "PsyWar is not magic. It is a valuable auxiliary to modern warfare and a useful concomitant to modern

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<sup>13</sup> Lipton E., Williams B. Researchers or Corporate Allies? Think Tanks Blur the Line // The New York Times [Site]. 07.08.2016. URL: [www.nytimes.com/2016/08/08/us/politics/think-tanks-research-and-corporate-lobbying.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/08/us/politics/think-tanks-research-and-corporate-lobbying.html) (accessed: 07.08.2016).

<sup>14</sup> NGOs: Grassroots Empowerment or Tool of Information Warfare? // YouTube [Site]. URL: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ro1byfe5vUM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ro1byfe5vUM) (accessed: 10.11.2016).

<sup>15</sup> Lippmann W. Op. cit. P. 70.

<sup>16</sup> Parry R. Will NYT Retract Latest Anti-Russian "Fraud"? // Consortium News [Site]. 22.06.2016. URL: <http://consortiumnews.com/2016/07/22/will-nyt-retract-latest-anti-russian-fraud/> (accessed: 10.11.2016).

<sup>17</sup> Edelman M. The Politics of Misinformation. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001. P. 3–4.

<sup>18</sup> Linebarger P.M. Psychological Warfare. Nevada City: Gateways Books, 1954. P. 40.

strategy”<sup>19</sup>. Previous research has shown that NGOs and transnational advocacy groups produce informational products that match the mass media’s needs and tastes. Some organisations, such as the *International Crisis Group* have been quite successful in influencing and directing the narrative and media agenda on specific conflict hotspots<sup>20</sup>. The subsequent exposure of those organisations in the media then has the effect of enhancing their reputation and brand recognition within the market place of ideas.

Four organisations have been selected on the basis that they represent supposedly neutral and independent information producers that are widely covered by the mainstream media. They are involved in two on-going armed conflicts (Syria and Ukraine) that have a strong Western government presence and interest in the eventual outcome. These are — *Bellingcat*, *StopFake*, *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights* and the *White Helmets*.

**Bellingcat.** The organisation known as Bellingcat was founded in 2014 by Eliot Higgins, who was an unemployed administrator from a non-profit organisation that worked for housing for asylum seekers. It has a slogan “by and for citizen investigative journalists”<sup>21</sup>. There is an attempt to project their organisation as “independent” and “objective” as a means to provide a façade of credibility and therefore trust. However, there is nothing about where the group derives funding in order to conduct its activities on its website. Some sources of Bellingcat include receiving funding from the Atlantic Foundation, a Neo-Conservative think tank<sup>22</sup> based in the United States.

Informational products produced by Bellingcat tend to support US and UK foreign policy, and are regularly featured in mainstream media without any critical reflection by those media outlets or journalists. However, some scathing criticism has been received from other sources, such as Consortium News, which has slated the biased and unprofessional nature of the research method and conclusions<sup>23</sup>. The methods and tools of analysis used by Bellincat have come under criticism too, including the founder of FotoForensic.com who states that he distances himself from the findings and conclusions of their reports and described it as a good example of “how to not do image analysis”<sup>24</sup>. Evidence of their faulty research results came on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 2014 when they claimed they knew where the execution of James Foley had taken place,

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<sup>19</sup> *Linebarger P.M.* Op. cit. P. 299.

<sup>20</sup> *Simons G.* The International Crisis Group and the Manufacturing and Communicating of Crises // *Third World Quarterly*. 2014. No 35 (4). P. 581–597.

<sup>21</sup> Bellingcat [Site]. URL: [www.bellingcat.com/about/](http://www.bellingcat.com/about/) (accessed: 10.11.2016).

<sup>22</sup> Atlantic Council [Site]. URL: [www.atlanticcouncil.org/about/experts/list/eliot-higgins](http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/about/experts/list/eliot-higgins) (accessed: 10.11.2016).

<sup>23</sup> *Parry R.* Op. cit.

<sup>24</sup> *Bidder B.* Expert Criticises Allegations of Russian MH17 Manipulation // *Spiegel Online* [Site]. 06.04.2015. URL: [www.spiegel.de/international/world/expert-criticizes-allegations-of-russian-mh17-manipulation-a-1037125.html](http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/expert-criticizes-allegations-of-russian-mh17-manipulation-a-1037125.html) (accessed: 10.11.2016).

based on the “evidence” of a video that was later proven to be fake<sup>25</sup>. The informational product is very subjective and without exception critical of Russia (in both the Syrian and Ukrainian conflicts), whilst having little to no negative reflection of actors such as the United States.

**StopFake.** This Ukrainian NGO is available in 10 different languages and is situating itself as an organisation that is in a “struggle against fake information about events in Ukraine.” Their website can be found at <http://www.stopfake.org/>. This organisation was created in March 2014, in the aftermath of the coup that overthrew President Victor Yanukovich. They project themselves (as with Bellingcat) to be a grassroots organization — “The fact-checking website Stopfake.org was launched in March 2014 by faculty and alumni of The Mohyla School of Journalism and students from the Digital Future of Journalism program for journalists and editors. The team was then joined by other journalists, marketing specialists, programmers, translators, and those concerned about the fate of Ukraine and its people”. They maintain a very strong presence on different social media platforms, such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Google Plus and others.

The group admits to some foreign financial backing. “This ongoing project relies on viewer support. In 2015, StopFake also received financial support from the International Renaissance Foundation, the National Endowment for Democracy, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. Nevertheless, StopFake maintains its editorial independence: the organizations and governments supporting the project stipulate how funds are allocated, but not StopFake’s content”. However, not all foreign backers are declared, such as financial support from NATO<sup>26</sup>. The British government awarded StopFake over £ 100 000 over 2015–2016<sup>27</sup>. This organisation is covered positively and widely in Western mainstream media.

StopFake’s informational product is very much centred on and against all aspects of Russian communication and anything construed as being “anti-Ukrainian” (in the sense that it contradicts the narrative or interests of the US or President Poroshenko’s government). Other allied media outlets are used to amplify the deeds, reputation and brand of StopFake, such as Euromaidan Press<sup>28</sup>. In spite of the pledge of independent and grassroots civic activism, the links in funding and the nature of the information do cast some doubt on the claims to “objectivity”.

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<sup>25</sup> James Foley FAKE Execution — Video Analysis Reveals the Truth // Live Leak [Site]. URL: [www.liveleak.com/view?i=097\\_1408853926](http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=097_1408853926) (accessed: 10.11.2016).

<sup>26</sup> This issue was raised in a private conversation with an army officer in Brussels.

<sup>27</sup> UK-funded Projects in Ukraine 2015–2016 // GOV.UK [Site]. URL: [www.gov.uk/government/world-location-news/uk-funded-projects-in-ukraine-2015-2016](http://www.gov.uk/government/world-location-news/uk-funded-projects-in-ukraine-2015-2016) (accessed: 11.11.2016).

<sup>28</sup> For example see: “StopFake” Exposé: 75 False Russian Media Reports about Ukraine, In One Video // Euromaidan Press [Site]. URL: <http://euromaidanpress.com/2014/12/09/top-75-fakes-of-false-russian-media-reports-about-ukraine-in-one-video/#arvlbdata> (accessed: 11.11.2016).

Some limited critique has appeared in non-mainstream media concerning the nature of the information disseminated<sup>29</sup>.

**Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR).** This group's website can be found at <http://www.syriahr.com/en/>, the SOHR was founded in May 2006 and constantly stresses that it is “not associated or linked to any political body”. Therefore, attempting to assert its credentials as being “independent” and consequently as being a trustworthy source of quality information on Syria. They use the slogan “democracy, freedom, justice and equality”, which is their basis for value and norm-based rhetoric in their communications with different publics (and especially Western ones). The Director of the SOHR is Ossama Suleiman, who came to power under mysterious circumstances, and in fact it has been accused of being a one-person show that is run from a two-room house in Coventry<sup>30</sup>. Other sources indicate he is aided by four people and a network of 230 “activists” in Syria<sup>31</sup>. He has not set foot in Syria for over a decade and pledges not to return until there is regime change.

They describe on their website their philosophy and approach to their work on influencing perception and events in Syria.

We are a group of people who believe in Human Rights, from inside and outside the country, documenting the Human Rights situation in Syria and reporting all Human Rights violations, filing reports and spreading it across a broad Human Rights and Media range.

In spite of their pretence of independence and objectivity, even by his own admission Suleiman places himself politically in opposition to President Bashar al-Assad<sup>32</sup>. As such this begins to call into question his reliability in terms of his political agenda. The statistics and other informational products that are widely reported by Western mainstream news sources without comment or critical reflection have been critiqued elsewhere. This includes the allegation that dead Jihadist fighters have been included in the civilian death toll<sup>33</sup>. SOHR has also been shown

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<sup>29</sup> “Grey Wolves” in Khersonshyna: Does StopFake Cover Islamists? // EADaily [Site]. 19.01.2016. URL: <http://eadaily.com/en/news/2016/01/19/grey-wolves-in-khersonshyna-does-stopfake-cover-islamists> (accessed: 11.11.2016).

<sup>30</sup> A Festering ‘SOHR’: Does the Word “Journalism” Still Apply to the Guardian? // UK Media Watch [Site]. 08.06.2012. URL: <http://ukmediawatch.org/2012/06/08/a-festering-sohr-does-the-word-journalism-still-apply-to-the-guardian/> (accessed: 11.11.2016).

<sup>31</sup> *MacFarquhar N.* A Very Busy Man behind the Syrian Civil War's Casualty Count // The New York Times [Site]. 09.04.2013. URL: [www.nytimes.com/2013/04/10/world/middleeast/the-man-behind-the-casualty-figures-in-syria.html?pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/10/world/middleeast/the-man-behind-the-casualty-figures-in-syria.html?pagewanted=all) (accessed: 11.11.2016).

<sup>32</sup> *Abbas M.* Coventry — an Unlikely Home to Prominent Syria Activist // Reuters [Site]. 08.12.2011. URL: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-britain-syria-idUKTRE7B71XG20111208> (accessed: 11.11.2016).

<sup>33</sup> *Al-Gharbi M.* Syria Contextualised: The Numbers Game // Middle East Policy Council. 2013. Vol. XX. No 1. URL: <http://www.mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/syria-contextualized-numbers-game> (accessed: 11.11.2016).

to be ignoring war crimes committed by Jihadists in Syria<sup>34</sup>. Some mainstream media have observed and labelled the SOHR as being “pro-opposition”<sup>35</sup>.

Sources for the SOHR are hard to find and far from transparent. Some sources have named two dress shops in the UK, the European Union and an unnamed European country as being the main sources of finance<sup>36</sup>. There is little to no transparency in terms of the external sources of financial support for the SOHR. The nature of the information product tends to serve as an enabler of the US-led policy of regime change in Syria, it serves as an informational echo chamber and a force multiplier for the perceived logic based on “humanitarian” grounds.

**White Helmets (WH).** This organisation was established in Syria in early 2013 in Jihadist controlled territory. As with the SOHR, White Helmets try to project themselves as involved with the plight of ordinary Syrians within the frame of humanitarian help and human rights. The website of the organisation is found at the following link, <https://www.whitehelmets.org/>, where they work on self-promotion, political lobbying and fundraising. WH has a four-page long “briefing,” they position themselves, as with the previous three organisations, as a grass roots initiative by “concerned” and “dedicated” ordinary citizens. This is a very common branding frame across all of those described.

The Syria Civil Defence (also known as the White Helmets) is an organisation of volunteer rescue workers operating across Syria. They are made up of volunteers from all walks of life: tailors, carpenters, builders, doctors and university students. When attacks take place, the White Helmets are often the first responders at the scene. Their search and rescue teams dig people out from under the rubble and drive them to safety. The White Helmets provide services such as alerting people to unexploded bombs and finding homes for internally displaced people. However they are most known for their iconic search and rescue work<sup>37</sup>.

The section attempts to build a reputation of self-sacrifice and heroism of the approximately 3 000 “volunteers”. WH admits that “funding for their humanitarian relief work is received from the aid budgets of Japan, Denmark, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the

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<sup>34</sup> Massacres by Islamic Extremists Bolster Bashar al-Assad // Asia News [Site]. 07.06.2013. URL: <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Massacres-by-Islamic-extremists-bolster-Bashar-al-Assad-28219.html> (accessed: 11.11.2016).

<sup>35</sup> Cockburn P. Syrian Civil War: Jabhat al-Nusra’s Massacre of Druze Villagers Shows They’re Just as Nasty as Isis // Independent [Site]. 14.06.2015. URL: [www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/syrian-civil-war-jabhat-al-nuras-massacre-of-druze-villagers-shows-the-group-is-just-as-nasty-as-10318348.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/syrian-civil-war-jabhat-al-nuras-massacre-of-druze-villagers-shows-the-group-is-just-as-nasty-as-10318348.html) (accessed: 11.11.2016).

<sup>36</sup> The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights Is a Propaganda Machine Based in the UK Countryside // Islam Times [Site]. 15.04.2013. URL: [http://islamtimes.org/en/doc/fori\\_news/254308/](http://islamtimes.org/en/doc/fori_news/254308/) (accessed: 11.11.2016); Crompton P. Counting Death: The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights // Al Arabiya [Site]. 25.04.2014. URL: <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/perspective/features/2014/04/25/Counting-death-The-Syrian-Observatory-for-Human-Rights.html> (accessed: 11.11.2016).

<sup>37</sup> The White Helmets: Briefing // Aws.amazon.com [Site]. URL: <http://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/wh.media/WhiteHelmetsBriefing.pdf> (accessed: 21.06.2017).

United States”. No exact sums are given, but when researched some figures become apparent. Funding of at least £10 million from the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office<sup>38</sup>, and US \$ 23 million from USAID<sup>39</sup> was received by the WH, plus additional funding from other foreign governments and organisations. The funding that they receive is not entirely transparent and accountable as one should expect from a democratic system. A case in point being the Conflict, Stability and Security fund, which is described by the Joint Committee on National Security Strategy as being “opaque” and falling short of democratic standards in terms of transparency and accountability<sup>40</sup>.

WH projects itself as being independent and not politically aligned or motivated. Their brief explains that “they work to a strict code of conduct which insists that every White Helmet is impartial and prohibits them from joining any faction in the conflict”. However, the organisation itself was started by a former British Army officer and then private security consultant<sup>41</sup>. Russia and the Syrian government have accused WH of being affiliated with Jihadist elements, which has been denied. But interestingly, the leader of WH, Raed Saleh was denied entry to the United States in order to collect a humanitarian award<sup>42</sup>. This seems to cast some doubt on the leader of the WH, to be denied entry to the US, as one of the sponsoring nations of the organisation.

In spite of the overwhelmingly positive message and narrative in the mainstream Western media, there have been some less than encouraging information and evidence emerging in other spaces of the information sphere. Such as photos of WH posing with bodies<sup>43</sup>, there have been some investigations conducted and posted on social media that ask important questions not asked by Western MSM<sup>44</sup>, videos of members waving flags of terrorist organisations<sup>45</sup>, alleged

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<sup>38</sup> Written Statement to Parliament: Gifting of Search and Rescue Equipment to Syrian Civil Defence Teams // GOV.UK [Site]. URL: [www.gov.uk/government/speeches/gifting-of-search-and-rescue-equipment-to-syrian-civil-defence-teams](http://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/gifting-of-search-and-rescue-equipment-to-syrian-civil-defence-teams) (accessed: 11.11.2016).

<sup>39</sup> U.S. State Department [Site]. URL: [www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2016/04/256667.htm](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2016/04/256667.htm) (accessed: 11.11.2016).

<sup>40</sup> *McVeigh K.* Secrecy Around £1bn Aid and Security Fund Raises “Significant Concern”, Says MPs // The Guardian [Site]. 07.02.2017. URL: [www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/feb/07/secrecy-around-1bn-aid-and-security-fund-raises-significant-concern-say-mps](http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/feb/07/secrecy-around-1bn-aid-and-security-fund-raises-significant-concern-say-mps) (accessed: 07.05.2017).

<sup>41</sup> Mayday Rescue. Syria Civil Defence [Site]. URL: [www.maydayrescue.org/content/james-le-mesurier-0](http://www.maydayrescue.org/content/james-le-mesurier-0) (accessed: 11.11.2016).

<sup>42</sup> *Westcott L.* Syrian Humanitarian Raed Saleh Is Denied Entry to U.S. // News Week [Site]. 22.04.2016. URL: <http://europe.newsweek.com/raed-saleh-syrian-civil-defense-denied-entry-us-451637?rm=eu> (accessed: 11.11.2016).

<sup>43</sup> Twitter User “Xemx” // Twitter.com [Site]. URL: <http://twitter.com/soshiro111/status/726423747981357058> (accessed: 11.11.2016).

<sup>44</sup> YouTube [Site]. URL: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=s8\\_cPE30z-I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s8_cPE30z-I) (accessed: 11.11.2016).

<sup>45</sup> Twitter User “Iad Tavil” // Twitter.com [Site]. URL: <http://twitter.com/iadtawil/status/782304588766535682> (accessed: 11.11.2016).

participation in kidnappings of pro-Assad civilians<sup>46</sup>, and the participation in executions<sup>47</sup>. Some sources and investigations claim that the WH is a form of shadow government until such a time as regime change in Syria is successful. Until this time, the WH performs a propaganda and agitation function for international public opinion and perception of the conflict. Their staged scenes of rescuing civilians (especially children) and bomb damage are intended to serve as ready-made emotionally-laden media products<sup>48</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

The manner of operation of the four organisations examined in this paper suggests that they serve, to a greater or lesser extent, as a front group. To define this term, “a *front group* is an organization that purports to represent one agenda while in reality it serves some other party or interest whose sponsorship is hidden or rarely mentioned. The front group is perhaps the most easily recognized use of the third party technique”<sup>49</sup>. The third party technique involves proclaiming one agenda (normally an ethical or morally based cause), but in reality serve a subversive and partisan political cause (namely regime change). This is done through these organisations by posing as “independent” and “grass-roots” to serve public interest by working for the “truth” and human rights.

In order to become accepted these organisation need to have the pretence of a brand and reputation of independence as a means of reinforcing and amplifying their credibility as a communicator in the eyes of the media consuming public. This comes at a time when public trust in media and government is decreasing, and these organisations are intended to serve as a “neutral” and “objective” observer and source of information that serves as an echo chamber for foreign policy objectives and goals. The message consists of emotionally-based and subjective information that is produced and packaged in a media friendly and “entertaining” format. The more uncritical and praising media exposure they get the more trust and credibility they are likely to develop. This is psychological warfare, which relies on perception and public opinion, even if that perception and public opinion are not grounded in real life processes and events.

Their role is to serve as sources of information in an environment that is intended to create an atmosphere of information dominance for one party. This information, if transmitted

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<sup>46</sup> Twitter User “H e b a” // Twitter.com [Site]. URL: <http://twitter.com/hkx07/status/781614195594756096> (accessed: 11.11.2016).

<sup>47</sup> Nusra Executes Civilian, White Helmets Watch and Pick Up Body When It’s Over // Live Leak [Site]. URL: [www.liveleak.com/view?i=0a3\\_1430870428#0GyWt3ZSeYe7iD0m.99](http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=0a3_1430870428#0GyWt3ZSeYe7iD0m.99) (accessed 11.11.2016).

<sup>48</sup> Beeley V. Exclusive: The Real Syria Civil Defence Exposes Fake “White Helmets” as Terrorist-Linked Imposters // 21st Century Wire [Site]. 23.09.2016. URL: <http://21stcenturywire.com/2016/09/23/exclusive-the-real-syria-civil-defence-expose-natos-white-helmets-as-terrorist-linked-imposters/> (accessed: 11.11.2016).

<sup>49</sup> Front Groups // Source Watch [Site]. URL: [www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Front\\_groups](http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Front_groups) (accessed: 11.11.2016).

and ultimately accepted, becomes knowledge, which is the basis for decision-making on issues and events. Given the nature of the geopolitical competition and conflict that currently exists between the West and Russia, these organisations serve as an auxiliary to desired foreign policy outcomes in specific and selected hotspots (Syria and Ukraine in this case). The intended outcome seems to be to legitimise the current US-led foreign policy, allow for a greater level of leeway in the operational aspects, and at the same time, to restrict Russia's operational choices and therefore its ability to effectively pursue foreign policy interests and goals.

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## **The Role of “NGOs” in Knowledge Management of Conflicts**

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### **Annotation**

By its very nature, the outcomes of modern armed conflicts are increasingly being determined by political rather than purely military considerations. To support the politics of initiating and continuing to wage war in the current political environment requires a perception and sense of legitimacy and righteousness, whether the basis of this is or is not based upon actual and not projected reality. In an age of an increasingly cynical attitude towards both mainstream politics and mainstream media, a new and “independent” source of information is found in the NGOs in shaping the information space of modern battlefields in order to affect public perception and opinion of these events, which is illustrated with examples from Ukraine and Syria.

### **Keywords**

Armed conflict, communication management, NGOs, public opinion, public perception, political legitimacy, information operations.