Legal Conditions of Information Conflicts Involving the People's Republic of China in the Xxi Century

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Abstract

Today, virtual space and social networks have become an integral part of the lives of the people of the world. Therefore, legal issues related to this field are of special importance. Many people in the society provide a significant part of the news and information they need through this virtual space. For this reason, the correctness of the published news is of great importance. Nevertheless, there are profit-seeking people who abuse these facilities and the space available to them and publish false and incorrect information. Therefore, by passing laws, the legislator has criminalized the act of publishing lies, especially the publication of lies in cyberspace, and has determined criminal penalties for the perpetrators. The presented work is devoted to the topic of information wars and conflicts involving the People's Republic of China as an important actor in the international stage of the XXI century. The study analyzes numerous forms of information conflicts, their goals, tools, methods, and patterns. The subject of the research is also aspects of modern information security of the People's Republic of China in the context of participation in information conflicts; the practice of protection from the information influence of dominant players in the global information field. The main goal of the work is to study in detail the current information conflicts with the direct participation of the People's Republic of China. The methodological basis of the study was general humanitarian research methods: comparative-historical and generalization methods, which allowed us to draw reliable conclusions. The presented work will be of interest to practitioners of international relations, historians and political scientists, as well as teachers of educational programs related to international relations and information security.

Keywords: Legal conditions, information security, information conflict, people's Republic of China, China, international relations.

Introduction

This work is devoted to the study of a phenomenon called "information conflict", or "information war", "information confrontation". The emergence and existence of this phenomenon have been studied in many disciplines, including history, sociology, conflict studies, psychology and sociopsychology, political science, and, above all, military affairs and international relations. Information conflict, from the point of view of modern science, is a type of conflict between subjects of international relations. The use of its tools and methods is most inherent to international conflicts of the late XX – early XXI centuries. The parties to the information conflict pursue a variety of goals, typical of traditional wars, and completely new, proper only for the modern information society. This article presents the results of research on organizational and legal support of information security in the People's Republic of China as an important subject of international relations at the present stage.

The choice of the People's Republic of China as the object of research is due to the fact that this state experiences a continuous state of information conflict with other subjects of international relations over the past years. Besides, unlike the USA, the UK, France and Germany (which are also considered major players in information conflicts of the time), China holds a largely defensive position in the global information confrontation, because China did not develop overseas propaganda in the second half of the twentieth century, preferring to use means of information influence just inside the country. In the twenty-first century, the PRC is becoming the target of information and psychological attacks aimed at discrediting the political campaigns of their governments. For the PRC, important information conflicts were the unrest in the Xinjiang Uyghur and Tibetan Autonomous regions [1], Hong Kong, and the emergence and fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Методы (Methods)

Main methods of this research are descriptive and comparative methods. They help to overview the problem posed as a whole. In addition, the methodology of research approaches allows us to see the main trends in the development of China's information policy, to evaluate the diverse mechanisms of China's foreign cyber policy initiatives, as well as to analyze the prospects for the development of information policy in terms of digital diplomacy. The

theoretical and methodological basis for the study was the conceptual position of scientific research in the field of studying modern international relations. Using the methodology of existing researches contributes to a better understanding and in-depth analysis of the impact of global digitalization and cybersecurity on the political decisions of the PRC.

Results and Discussion

The People's Republic of China is quite similar to the Russian Federation in terms of its position in the international arena. The state has a significant economic and military force, also has its own nuclear weapons, is a member of the UN Security Council and largely determines the global international situation. Direct military intervention in China's affairs would threaten the world with nuclear war, which no state in the world can allow, so the means of information warfare play into the hands of those subjects of international relations who are interested in influencing the policy of the People's Republic of China.

Since China has become a full-fledged great power with a strong army and one of the world's leading economies, many researchers and politicians predict an inevitable geopolitical clash between the US and China. This point of view is also confirmed by the fact that the main opponents of China in information conflicts are, first of all, the United States, as well as the countries of the European Union. The most prominent points of aggravation of the information conflict for China are the information unrest around China's policy in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous region, the protest movement in the city of Hong Kong, as well as the situation around the emergence and fight against the COVID-19 virus.

The internal political situation in China around the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous region is still an acute issue for the Chinese authorities, as well as a topic of active discussion for the international media. The state development strategy proposed by Chinese Communist party Chairman XI Jinping in 2012 and called "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation", among other things, plans to prevent acute social crises within the state. In accordance with this strategy, the PRC began a long and thorough work on potential problems of ethnic minorities; in other words, it was given the beginning of the formation of a single, multi-ethnic Chinese nation, loyal to the ideas of the state.

The work on assimilation and integration of the Uighur population into the Han majority in China has been the subject of numerous information attacks on Chinese politics. The information fight escalated in late 2018, when the UN Committee on racial discrimination received a letter signed by representatives of 22 States – the majority of the European Union, as well as Japan and New Zealand – calling for a halt to China's policy towards Uighurs [3]. At the same time, popular Western media outlets [4] and Human Rights Watch [5] joined the broad coverage of the situation. Points of anti-Chinese propaganda were: illegal detention in the Xinjiang Uyghur district of about a million people (Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities); constant surveillance of the population through a wide video surveillance system; forced "re-education" of Uyghurs in special camps; a ban on communication with relatives; ignoring the opinion of the World Uyghur Congress (an organization considered a terrorist organization in China; prohibited), and so on. At the 41st session of the UN on human rights, 37 countries, including Russia, protested against the letter [6]. However, the discussion of the position of Uighurs in the global information space was not over.

In 2019, in parallel with the ongoing trade war with China, the us government formed a bill obliging China to impose economic sanctions in connection with violations of the rights of the Uighur ethnic minority [7]. on July 17, 2020, the us President D. Trump signed an anti-China law.

How does the people's Republic of China cope with information pressure? There are several significant differences in China's behavior model from the Russian model, although there are some similarities. The main difference between the two models is that Chinese information influence has a much more powerful force within its own state than that of Russia. If in Russia, as was described in the previous section, the enemy was "accepted" in its own information space ("Vkontakte") on equal terms, in China, however, the work carried out over many years with the population makes attempts at foreign propaganda almost useless. The statements of Chinese politicians regarding us interference in China's affairs [8] are absolutely supported by the Chinese population. Also, Chinese politicians and media try to offer the world an alternative view of the situation in the Uighur region – they focus on the achievements in the fight against extremism and terrorism in the region, accusing the US of supporting the terrorist movement [9]. And the fact that the list of countries that have accused China of the Uighur issue includes only its permanent geopolitical opponents confirms the view that China's information policy in this conflict is effective, because it resonates with States looking for an alternative to Western information hegemony.

So, the main characteristics of China's behavioral model in the information conflict over the situation in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous region are: immediate refutation of any hostile statements from politicians of other countries; giving the information space the character of steadfastness and complete independence of Chinese policy; focusing the attention of the international community on what positive results have been achieved as a result of Chinese policy.

The information conflict surrounding the protests in Hong Kong in late 2019 has acquired a similar character. In connection with the draft extradition law promoted by China, mass demonstrations began in the city demanding the cancellation of the project, and later the resignation of representatives of the Hong Kong government. The demonstrations turned into direct clashes with the police and riots in the streets.

The US and European Union countries have expressed support for the protesters in their quest to "protect their independence" and human rights, and, just as in the case of the Uighurs, the US has passed several bills to impose sanctions against China for human rights violations in Hong Kong. The protesters in Hong Kong also received broad media support from the United States and European countries.

This recently started and still ongoing information conflict, as already mentioned, has many similarities with that around the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous region. However, in contrast to the latter, the Hong Kong incident was much more impulsive and was accompanied by more intensive information support. How did China behave in this case?

For this information conflict, China's behavior model is characterized by the following distinctive features: the use of tougher rhetoric in international polemics ("double standards", "connivance", "condoning violence", "excessive politicization") [10]; the focus of the international community on the positive aspects of the authorities' actions during protests (providing medical care to injured protesters, refusing to arrest young citizens); the use of state power to restrict Internet resources that helped protesters demonstrate and organize riots (for example, at the request of the Chinese authorities, Apple removed an application that allowed monitoring the movements of police officers); the exploitation of the so-called "three-click" rule - the theory that protest movements break out due to the availability of certain guides to action on the Internet for protesters; however, if it becomes a little more difficult for the population to access such resources, citizens stop participating in the search and dissemination of such information [11].

Thus, to the already listed characteristic features of China's behavior in international information conflicts, simple technologies are added to counteract the well-developed algorithms for inciting protests, developed during the "color revolutions" and the "Arab spring". In this case, even strict censorship, which is also used as a target of information attacks on China, was not necessary; the Chinese authorities found a very soft way to counter the problem of spontaneous demonstrations by easily hindering the population's access to sources of harmful information.

I would also like to mention, in the context of our narrative, the events of recent months related to the emergence and mass spread of the COVID-19 virus. Detected in late 2019 in the Chinese province of Wuhan, the virus caused the development of a pandemic, foci of infection in Europe and the North American continent. The United States and some European countries have lost a large number of people who died from pneumonia caused by the virus. In connection with these events, a new information conflict has developed in the international arena, which, however, many call just another round of a large-scale anti-Chinese information war.

As the staff of the Russian newspaper "Vzglyad" put it, China and the collective West have developed an extensive debate on who is to blame for the emergence of the pandemic, and who is better at fighting it [12]. President of the United States D. Trump in his speeches several times blamed China for the origin of the virus and hinted at "investigations" conducted by US intelligence agencies regarding the appearance of the coronavirus [13]. French President E. Macron said in April 2020 that China does not disclose all data related to the virus [14]. Former head of British intelligence, MI6, D. Sawers said that the Chinese authorities hid data about the virus at the initial stage of its spread [15].

In this information conflict, it is very interesting to consider China's response, since China is clearly on the defensive in this particular situation – because it is impossible to refute the fact that the pandemic originated in China. What does China do to preserve its image in the international stage?

In this case, China comes to the aid of a soft, consistent denial of high-profile accusations made by the enemy. China here does not deny its role in the spread of the virus, but also does not allow the view that only China is to blame for the pandemic to be fixed [16]. Just as delicate the representatives of China rejected the US claims that Chinese spies are going to steal from American researchers, a vaccine against coronavirus. "Why do we need this? We are working on our own vaccines", - Chinese foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian gently responds to the accusations [17]. The second important and undoubtedly defensive way of China's behavior in this information conflict is the Declaration of China's commitment to the principles of the world health organization, cooperation with it and other States in the fight against the virus. Given the recent US refusal to participate in the activities of the WHO, China's willingness to help and cooperation generates a positive rating, for example, in the Russian Federation, with which, by the way, China has developed strong cooperation in exchange of humanitarian aid, medical equipment, medicine [18].

Thus, the model of China's behavior in this information conflict is reduced to the following characteristics: preference for practices in the fight against the pandemic over loud statements, China's confirmation of its image as a hard-working, ready to help in difficult times; China's opposition to effective international cooperation in the fight against the virus in the face of who to the failed practices of the United States and European countries, which were unprepared for the pandemic.

Summary

The people's Republic of China has become an active participant in information conflicts in the past five years, when its growing political and economic power began to threaten the interests of the United States and the European Union. According to the results of a study of information conflicts around the situation in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous region, in Hong Kong in 2019, around the situation with the emergence and spread of the COVID-19 virus, the following characteristic features of the PRC's behavior in the information conflict were identified: creating

the image of a strong state, which, unlike the United States, is ready to adhere to the ideals of the UN and help less developed States, and at the same time forming a sense of the international community of the steadfastness and indispensability of Chinese domestic and foreign policy; soft and consistent denial of all the accusations coming to China with the provision of satisfactory evidence in their favor; orientation to external objects in connection with the already successful information work with their own population; countering the emergence of spontaneous protests using the method of "color revolutions" by making it difficult for the population to access the necessary resources for organizing a protest.

Conclusions

Information conflict in modern international relations is a complex and permanent phenomenon that is an integral part of international conflict. Information warfare, like any war, consists in achieving geopolitical goals and national interests by fighting, but not armed, but informational and informational-psychological, i.e. by influencing the information systems and processes of the enemy, as well as the consciousness of the mass population and individuals. [19] The subjects of information warfare in modern international relations are primarily States and their unions, transnational corporations, international organizations, illegal radical formations and virtual social communities. [20]

For the people's Republic of China, information security is a priority in foreign and domestic policy in the coming years. China is on the way to understanding the new "rules of the game", when information superiority is a key advantage, including in international relations. Comprehensive priority development of information technologies, information security systems, organizational and legal framework, as well as global media channels indicates that China is preparing for the fact that information warfare will occupy an even larger niche in international relations.

Acknowledgements

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