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# INFORMATION FRATRICIDE AS A CONSEQUENCE OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION: HOW MESSAGE DESIGN ADVERSELY AFFECTS THE SENDER'S OWN GOALS

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# **INFORMATION FRATRICIDE AS A CONSEQUENCE OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION**

HOW MESSAGE DESIGN ADVERSELY AFFECTS THE SENDER'S OWN GOALS

by

**DEEN DE RONDE**

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs, Leiden University  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements For the Degree of

**MASTER OF SCIENCE IN CRISIS AND SECURITY MANAGEMENT**

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## **Abstract**

Although strategic communication is a tool that can help in countering adversarial influencing campaigns whilst simultaneously increasing resilience against them, it also has the potential to work against the sender's own goals. This research focuses on how the design of a message contributes to this phenomenon, referred to as 'information fratricide'. Because the term 'information fratricide' is derived from the military and this research focuses on non-military strategic communications in the modern contested information environment, information fratricide is theoretically and conceptually (re)developed to be better suitable for the use in this research. This is done by breaking down Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory (1973) and Shannon and Weaver's concept of 'noise' (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). In order to identify the role of message design in information fratricide, an analysis of information fratricide incidents was made. The analysis focused on the communication of U.S. officials about the Russian military build-up at Ukraine's borders in 2022 and the information fratricidal effects on three receivers of this communication, and found that message design contributes to information fratricide through the ideas that codes add to a message. Furthermore, it was found that the effects of past information fratricide incidents work over time to potentially affect future friendly operations.

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## INTRODUCTION

Strategic communication aims to influence audiences in a contested information environment and aims to coordinate messages with the aim of achieving desired effects (NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, n.d.; Reding et al., 2010). In that way, strategic communication has the potential to help governments, their armed forces and affiliated governmental organisations achieving goals in any type of conflict (see for example Freedman, 2006; Farwell, 2012; Michalski & Gow, 2007). The premise of this research, however, is that strategic communication also has the potential to work against one's own goals or that of allies. In this research, this phenomenon is referred to as 'information fratricide'. The study of the counterproductivity of strategic communication in conflict is not a novelty (see for example Helmus et al., 2007; Dimitriu, 2012; Cawkwell, 2019; Atkins et al., 2020). However, authors predominantly discuss information fratricide as being caused by a sender's inconsistent messaging. Cawkwell (2019, p. 384), for example, refers to information fratricide as "mixed messaging". Similarly, Helmus et al. (2007, p. 34) view that information fratricide is caused by inconsistencies in the messages of a sender. They regard a "lack of coordination or synchronization" of a sender's messages as the main cause of information fratricide incidents (Helmus et al., 2007, p. 34).

This research does not neglect the role of narrative inconsistency as a cause of information fratricide, rather it acknowledges that there are additional causes of this undesired phenomenon that should be researched in order to pinpoint key contributing factors to the occurrence of information fratricide, and to help strategic communication practitioners to avoid such incidents more easily in the future. Therefore, the focus of this research is on message design as a contributing cause of information fratricide – i.e. the words, symbols, images, actions or signs that a sender employs to communicate certain content to audiences – as opposed to message inconsistency. Therefore, this thesis seeks to answer the following research question:

How did message design in U.S. official's strategic communication preceding the Russian invasion of Ukraine contribute to information fratricide?

In order to be able to answer this research question, this research first focused on contextually, conceptually and theoretically developing information fratricide. This is described in the first four chapters. These chapters should be considered the foundation of

this research that has to be built, before being able to start the analysis. Chapter 1, focuses on the battlespace in which information fratricide plays a role and, therefore, provides context to the concept. As a definition of information fratricide that is suitable for the use in this research will be lacking, chapter 2 focuses on defining information fratricide. In chapter 3, the communication process in the modern information environment will be theoretically explained. Knowledge on the workings of information fratricide supports systematically analysing information fratricide incidents and helps to understand why message design influences behaviour and friendly operations. Hall's encoding/decoding theory (1973) together with Shannon and Weaver's (1949) concept of noise will be identified as being most appropriate for describing the communication process in the modern information environment, as compared to other communication theories. On the basis of the Hall/Shannon and Weaver communication process, chapter 4 will elaborate on the mechanism of information fratricide. This explanation will help with pinpointing how message design resulted in information fratricide in the incidents that are to be analysed and will, therefore, be of major importance for answering the research question.

After the foundation has been built in the first four chapters, the analysis can be started. Chapter 5 will explain and justify the methods through which the role of message design in information fratricide was determined. This will be done by focusing on U.S. official's strategic communication preceding the Russian invasion of Ukraine – in particular the messages that warned for this invasion – and the effect of this communication on three receivers: Russian Permanent Representative to the U.N. Vasily Nebenzia, Associated Press Reporter Matt Lee and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. As all the actors in the communication process in this incident are public figures, they will often discuss American communication in public. This created a significant amount of data in the form of 47 informational events that allowed to clearly identify the sender's intentions and the effects of the sender's message on the receiver. This data will be captured in a timeline. This timeline will be analysed following all separate elements of the Hall/Shannon and Weaver communication process. This means that the analysis first focuses on the ideas the U.S. officials intended to communicate and the codes that were used to transform their ideas into the message-form. Secondly, for each receiver it will be established what the meaning structures of this receiver is, how the receiver decoded messages, what idea was received as a result of this decoding, what were the adverse effects

on the receiver's cognitive domain, what observable behaviour was stimulated as a result of the received message and what the effects of this behaviour on the sender's operations were. Chapter 6 presents all the findings that will be yielded as a result of the analysis of the timeline. Chapter 7 concludes this research by providing an answer to the research question. Based on the findings it will be concluded that message design contributes to information fratricide through the communicative value that codes add to a message. Furthermore, it will be found that the effects of past information fratricide incidents work over time to potentially affect future friendly operations and that information fratricide is an inherent part of communication. Consequently, it cannot always be prevented.

## **CHAPTER 1: THE CONTEXT OF INFORMATION FRATRICIDE**

In order to be able to research information fratricide it is imperative to have an understanding of what information fratricide is, and to apprehend the battlespace where it all plays out. Before addressing what information fratricide is – which will be the aim of the next chapter – it should first be established in what context information fratricide occurs. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to illustrate the context of information fratricide. This is achieved by defining cognitive warfare and by exemplifying the role of strategic communication and the modern information environment.

### **1.1 COGNITIVE WARFARE: THE BATTLE FOR PEOPLE’S MIND**

The use of non-kinetic means in any form of warfare has been around for ages (see for example Dobrowolski et al, 2020, p. 22). Prussian General and military theorist Carl von Clausewitz already noted the possibility of increasing the likelihood of success in warfare, not with the use of physical power to defeat the armed forces of an adversary, but with “operations that have direct political repercussions, that are designed in the first place to disrupt the opposing alliance, or to paralyze it, that gain us new allies, favorably affect the political scene, etc” (Von Clausewitz, 1832/1976, p. 92). Operations in the cognitive domain are a type of activities that are able to achieve exactly what Clausewitz describes. The United States Department of Defense (2001, p. iv) describes the cognitive domain as “the domain of the mind of the warfighter and the warfighter’s supporting populace”. It further adds that

[m]any battles and wars are won or lost in the cognitive domain. The intangibles of leadership, morale, unit cohesion, level of training and experience, situational awareness, and public opinion are elements of this domain. (Department of Defense, 2001, p. iv)

Thus, the cognitive domain is the sphere in which social and psychological effects can be effectuated that influence the perception and behaviour of an individual (Defensiestaf, 2019). Cao et al. (2021) argue that Russia uses “cyber, information, psychological, and social engineering capabilities” to wage ‘cognitive warfare’ against audiences, such as those in NATO countries. In cognitive warfare an individual’s mind becomes the battlefield. It takes advantage of the accessibility and reach of the internet and social media to target desired audiences. The aim is to influence what someone thinks, how someone thinks and ultimately how someone acts (Cao et al., 2021) to accomplish (geo) political goals (Fridman, 2020). When actors are successful in waging this kind of war, “it shapes individual and group beliefs and

behaviours to favour an aggressor's tactical or strategic objectives (Cao et al., 2021). This may result, among other consequences, in the erosion of trust in (governmental) institutions or media, the subversion of democratic processes and it creates dissension between allies or social groups (Pronk, 2018; AIVD et al., 2021). Ultimately, "an opponent could conceivably subdue a society without resorting to outright force or coercion" (Cao et al., 2021).

Prior to the invasion of Ukraine, Russia attempted on multiple occasions to shape beliefs in such a way that a future invasion would be justified (EUvsDisinfo, 2022). One such an example was a false-flag operation that purportedly should have confirmed Ukrainian willingness to unleash hostilities against the territories occupied by separatists in the Donbass, something that would be against the existing Minsk cease-fire agreements. On February 18, 2022 – three days before Putin recognised the independence and sovereignty of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and the Lugansk People's Republic (LNR) (Putin, 2022a) and six days before the Russian invasion (Putin, 2022b) – a video was posted on a pro-Russian separatist Telegram channel. In the text accompanying the video, the separatists claimed to have stopped Polish speaking saboteurs from blowing up a chlorine tank of a sewage waste treatment facility on the territory of what the separatists claimed to be theirs. The video allegedly captured this sabotage operation. Although open-source investigators soon delivered evidence that debunked the authenticity of the footage (Higgins, 2022), such false-flag attacks were still used by Putin as one of the justifications to recognise the independence of DNR and LNR (Putin, 2022a) and to ordering the invasion of Ukraine (Putin, 2022b).

## **1.2 STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND NARRATIVES: BECOMING RESILIENT AND DECISIVE**

Cao et al. (2021) argue that Western countries are particularly vulnerable in cognitive warfare as the use of social media and smart devices is widespread. However, Western countries are not defenceless against Russian attacks on the cognitive domain. Strategic communication plays a key role in countering adversarial influencing campaigns whilst simultaneously increasing resilience against them (Defensiestaf, 2019, p. 13). The aim of strategic communication is to influence "big, important discourses in a very competitive environment [...] whilst remaining true to own values" (NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, n.d.). It is a process that is designed to coordinate messaging in words and in actions (i.e. between actors such as ministries, governments, governmental organisations) to reinforce their strategic effect (Reding et al., 2010, p. 9).

In order to use strategic communication correctly and effectively, all messages should ultimately support the narrative: a deliberately constructed storyline “which can explain events convincingly and from which inferences can be drawn” (Freedman, 2006, p. 22).

Freedman states that

the idea of the narrative opens up another possibility of military operations. Instead of being geared to eliminating the assets of the enemy, they might need to be focused on undermining those narratives on which that enemy bases its appeal and which animates and guides its activists. (Freedman, 2006, p. 26)

Although Freedman specifically mentions the possibilities of the narrative in *military* operations, his statement also implies that a strategically communicated narrative creates possibilities for non-military operations in conflict, such as those that are aimed to defend against cognitive warfare, and those that increase resilience against it. Resultingly, governments, politicians and spokespersons communicating on behalf of the government carry a great responsibility in the cognitive domain (Gackowski & Brylska, 2022). This responsibility includes strategically communicating compelling messages (Miskimmon et al., 2013; Roselle et al., 2014). Such messages should contribute to the goals of this strategic communication, for example warning Ukraine for a possible Russian invasion. However, such messages should also be able to counter Russian attacks on the cognitive domain and should increase resilience against them.

### **1.3 THE CHALLENGES FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IN THE MODERN INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT**

As of January 2021, there are an estimate of 4.66 billion active internet users in the world (Johnson, 2021). These users are able to produce, read and share information. Additionally, a still increasing number of people across the world – approximately 4.32 billion people (Johnson, 2021) – have the ability to record events on their smartphone and disseminate it across geographical borders via the internet. Moreover, these technological changes have fuelled social changes. Internet and smartphones have made it possible for people to be constantly online, producing widely accessible information and enabling users to consume information day in and day out. Moreover, incidents such as the protests in Ukraine, Iran and Egypt, have demonstrated that internet-assisted social networking has become a major factor of influence in different crises and conflicts (Porche et al., 2013). These technological and social changes shaped the modern information environment and the role of communication.

The modern information environment is “comprised of the information itself, the individuals, organizations and systems that receive, process and convey the information, and the cognitive, virtual and physical space in which this occurs” (NATO Standardisation Office, 2020). This means that the information environment consists of the cognitive domain, but also includes communicative (e.g. messages), technical (e.g. networks, software, algorithms) and physical (e.g. servers, user access devices, fiber optic cables) aspects.

The modern information environment allows a sender to disseminate information to a very large audience easier, cheaper, faster and more effectively than ever before (Jankowicz, 2020; Freedman, 2006). As a consequence, it has become easier for actors with malign intent, such as Russia, to wage a cognitive war against Western countries. Due to Russia’s use of (social) media and the internet to spread disinformation and influencing campaigns to wage its cognitive warfare (see for example Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2017; NATO, 2020; Gordon & Volz, 2021; Emmott, 2020), audiences are confronted with a contested information environment full of competing messages and alternative voices (Paxton, 2018). Similarly, the modern information environment also provides opportunities for the conduct of effective strategic communication. In that way, the modern information environment allows Western states to effectively engage in strategic communication to defend and increase resilience against Russian cognitive warfare. Freedman (2006, p. 77) states the following: “The ability to take advantage of this new information environment is now considered to be an essential attribute in contemporary conflicts”. However, as much as the modern information environment provides opportunities for Western strategic communication practitioners, it also provides challenges.

The first challenge relates to audiences, the receivers of the strategic communication. Due to information traveling (almost) freely across the world, there are no isolated audiences anymore (Briant, 2019). This makes message design a tough balancing act. In order to be compelling for a variety of audiences, messages require message designs that are tailored to those audiences (Tatham, 2015). This is due to every single audience having a different frame of reference with pre-existing beliefs (Holmstrom, 2015; Freedman, 2006; Dimitriu, 2012). What is accepted by one audience might provoke another audience. Additionally, one cannot simply communicate two completely different messages to different audiences to make them more compelling. In the modern information environment in which information travels freely,

audiences will receive the messages meant for the other audience. They would note the discrepancy between the messages, which might harm the sender's credibility.

The second challenge relates to the risk of a communication error or misstep. These are due to happen, especially in a contested information environment in which "organisations must constantly communicate to their desired audiences, or risk their communications being drowned out by noise or counter-narratives" (Paxton, 2018). In an interconnected world, it becomes difficult to make a communication error without it passing by unnoticed. Any action of a state will be understood in terms of the stories they tell as much as their direct (physical) impact (Freedman, 2006). This is especially true in a contested information environment in which scrutinising and opportunistic actors are exploiting these communication errors in order to strengthen their own narratives, while simultaneously discrediting the sender.

#### **1.4 CONCLUSION**

This chapter illustrated the context of information fratricide by defining what cognitive warfare is and by highlighting the role of strategic communication and the modern information environment in this type of warfare. The chapter demonstrated that strategic communication might be a useful tool in cognitive warfare and that the modern information environment provides opportunities for the effective conduct of strategic communication. However, the modern information environment also provides challenges that create fertile ground for counterproductive strategic communication. This does not solely inhibit effective strategic communication, but might also pose wider and more severe consequences for actors that are communicating in the contested information environment. As this chapter has established the broader context in which information fratricide plays out, it has become possible to zoom in on how the phenomenon should be defined in this context. This will be the aim of the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 2: DEFINING INFORMATION FRATRICIDE**

The previous chapter illustrated the context in which information fratricide plays out. Apprehending this context predominantly contributes to understanding in which battlespace information fratricide plays out, but does not so much provide insight in when something should be considered information fratricide. This is problematic when wanting to analyse information fratricide in U.S. official's strategic communication that warned for a Russian invasion of Ukraine. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to explore how information fratricide should be understood in the context of cognitive warfare and to provide a definition that best fits this research.

In order to formulate a usable definition for the purpose of this research, the first part of this chapter examines literature to determine how information fratricide has been defined by other authors. This section will show that, in comparison to the descriptions of information fratricide in other literature, the Department of the Army Field Manual definition provides a definition that is most fitting as a starting point for this effort. However, due to the military focus of this definition, it is not completely applicable for the use in research that analyses non-military strategic communication. As a result, the second part of this chapter redefines the Department of the Army definition to make it more suitable for this research. The definition of information fratricide that will be used in this research is presented at the end of this chapter.

### **2.1 INFORMATION FRATRICIDE IN LITERATURE**

The way in which most authors describe information fratricide in conflict indicates that the predominant view amongst authors is that this type of fratricide is a phenomenon that evolves around the inconsistency of messages. For example, Helmus et al. (2007) state that information fratricide is "the failure to synchronize and deconflict messages" (p. xv) which results in credibility loss (p. 34). Paul (2011, pp. 6-7) describes that "[w]hen one piece of information a government or its forces provide contradicts or is otherwise inconsistent with another piece of information provided by that government, that is information fratricide." Likewise, Cawkwell (2019, p. 384), refers to information fratricide as "mixed messaging." Richter (2009) slightly deviates from these authors. He does view inconsistency as an attribute of information fratricide, but also acknowledges that messages are information fratricidal when they compromise operations security (OPSEC). This happens when, for example, a

military unit discloses their position by posting a video on social media that shows them destroying an enemy vehicle. As a consequence of the way in which these authors describe information fratricide, they merely state it is a phenomenon caused by inconsistent messaging, rather than providing a clear definition. As a result, it does not become clear what information fratricide exactly entails. Additionally, these descriptions are hardly explicit about the effects of information fratricide, nor do they explain the domains in which these effects materialise. Consequently, these descriptions are not particularly suitable for this research as they barely provide insight in how the phenomenon should be understood in the context of cognitive warfare.

In this regard, the definition of the United States Department of the Army is much more suitable for the use in this research. In the United States Army Field Manual 3-13 of 2016 information fratricide is defined as

adverse effects on the information environment resulting from a failure to effectively synchronize the employment of multiple information-related capabilities which may impede the conduct of friendly operations or adversely affect friendly forces. (Department of the Army, 2016, p 1-7)

This definition is more suitable for the use in this research than the earlier discussed descriptions, because of two reasons. Firstly, it clearly specifies in what way unfavourable effects materialise. It states that the adverse effects in the information environment, which includes the cognitive domain, may affect friendly operations. Secondly, the definition emphasises that all information operations capabilities can cause information fratricide. Therefore, it disregards information fratricide as something that is solely caused by inconsistencies in the messages of a communicating actor. Therewith, the U.S. Department of the Army acknowledges there are other factors contributing to information fratricide, which better fits the premise and aim of this research. Despite the reasons that makes this definition more suitable compared to the earlier mentioned descriptions, it is still not completely usable for this research as a result of its military connotations. Due to the lack of a more suitable definition in literature, the definition of the Department of the Army is, therefore, used as a starting point to create a definition that is fully usable to understand information fratricide in the context of cognitive warfare.

## **2.2 REDEFINING INFORMATION FRATRICIDE**

The Department of the Army Field Manual is written for the United States *Army*. Obviously, this means that information fratricide is defined and explained from a military point of view. Most of the authors that discuss or mention information fratricide also demonstrate that the concept is generally understood in the same context (see for example, Cawkwell, 2019; Ollivant & Chewning, 2006; Dimitriu, 2012; Atkins et al., 2020). However, prior to the Russian invasion the U.S. military played just a minor role in U.S. strategic communication efforts. Furthermore, strategic communication in general is not something that is solely conducted by military actors in a solely military context. The most important role was played by non-military actors, such as politicians and press secretaries. Inherently, information fratricide became something that could be committed by these non-military communicating actors as well. This also means that the consequences of information fratricide may reach further than military operations alone. Hence, a definition such as the one from the Field Manual Information Operations (Department of the Army, 2016, p. 1-7) should be taken out the military context in order to be better suitable for this research. To achieve this, a few alterations must be made in the words that are used and in the way some of the concepts in the definitions are interpreted. These alterations are explained in more detail below.

### **2.2.1 'INFORMATION-RELATED CAPABILITY' VERSUS 'MESSAGE'**

According to its definition, an IRC refers to the entire range of capabilities that can be employed in the information environment to create effects (Department of the Army, 2016, p. glossary – 3). However, some of these capabilities – such as jamming – are solely military capabilities and not related to strategic communication. Therefore, the use of the term 'information-related capability' would be overcomplicated and, more importantly, incorrect in the context of this research. Strategic communication is all about messaging. These messages determine the effectiveness of strategic communication. A message can be a message in words, (e.g. the content of a speech, a news article or tweet), or a message in deeds (e.g. images, video footage or activities, such as the deployment of more multi-national NATO battlegroups along NATO's Eastern flank in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine) (Michalski & Gow, 2007; Reding, Weed and Ghez, 2010, p. 9). Due to the focality of messages in strategic communication, the term 'information-related capability' is substituted by the word 'messages'.

### 2.2.2 'INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT' VERSUS 'COGNITIVE DOMAIN'

Military actors have a variety of capabilities to achieve a wide range of goals in the information environment. The deployment of these capabilities may inherently result in desired and undesired effects across the entire information environment. Hence, in defining information fratricide in the military context it is appropriate to speak of adverse effects in the information environment. Non-military actors engaged in strategic communication, however, only have messages as a capability to achieve the goals of influencing discourses and persuading audiences (NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, n.d.; Freedman, 2006; Farwell, 2012). A message alone does not *directly* impede a friendly operation. It is the behaviour of the receiver that does so. This behaviour is determined by how the receiver perceives a topic or actor. Messages do hold the power of directly influencing the receiver's perception. Therefore, it can be argued that messages only impede friendly operations, when it has first created adverse effects in the cognitive domain<sup>1</sup>. Information fratricide in the context of strategic communication, therefore always has a cognitive aspect to it. As a result, the definition of information fratricide that is used in this research substitutes information environment for cognitive domain.

### 2.2.3 FRIENDLY OPERATIONS

The concept of 'friendly operations' was retained in the new definition, but it was given a different interpretation. In the new definition, the concept may refer to military operations, but does not refer exclusively to them. Friendly operation, may also be, for example, (domestic) political endeavours. Therefore, the term covers all purposely conducted friendly efforts that aims to reach a favourable outcome in the cognitive domain as well as the physical environment.

To better clarify the meaning of friendly operations in the context of this research, it is important to determine what constitutes a *friendly* operation. 'Friendly' in this context refers to countless actors. In the context of fratricide the Oxford English Dictionary (2018), for example, signifies friendly as "accidental casualties or damage", which suggest that any actor

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<sup>1</sup> An example of this is a man that committed arson in two transmission towers in Veldhoven, The Netherlands. He acknowledged that he had gone too far in his information gathering on 5G networks (Rechtbank Oost-Brabant, 2021). In this case, messages regarding 5G networks made the man think in such a way that he became afraid of 5G waves (effect in the cognitive domain). This resulted in him destroying physical aspects of the information environment (transmission towers).

can be designated as a friendly as long as it was engaged accidentally. Kirke (2012) identifies “any target that is outside the rules of engagement and target priorities laid down by the commander” (Kirke, 2012, p. 37) as friendly. Thus, the notion of what constitutes a friendly actor is rather fluid, since it depends on the context and goals of any operation – in the physical domain but also the information environment – who is a friendly actor and what is a friendly goal or object.

Since this research examines information fratricide committed by Western actors, a friendly operation refers to any purposely conducted effort that aims to reach a favourable outcome in the physical or information environment that are conducted by the communicating actor (e.g. the government of a Western country, one of its representatives or the armed forces of that country), its partners (e.g. the European Union and NATO as organisations) and allies (e.g. other countries such as Ukraine).

#### 2.2.4 FURTHER ADJUSTMENTS

The definition has been altered in three other ways. First of all, the part that states that adverse effects on the information environment are the result of a failure to effectively *synchronize* the employment of *multiple* IRCs – or in this case messages – has been removed. A failure to effectively synchronise the employment of multiple messages may indeed be a cause of adverse effects, but it is not the only one. A failure of synchronisation insinuates that information fratricide is only effectuated by inconsistency between messages. However, as has been stated before, and as will be discussed in the following chapters, it can be concluded that one message on its own also possesses the potential to have such adverse effects on the information environment that the conduct of friendly operations is impeded or adversely affected. For that reason, it was decided to rephrase that part of the definition.

Secondly, the word ‘friendly’ has been added before ‘messages’ to emphasise the fratricidal part of information fratricide. Omitting the use of the word ‘friendly’ would incorrectly suggest that an incident should be regarded as information fratricide when the employment of *any* message causes adverse effects in the information environment. This implies that messages employed by a hostile actor are included as well. However, as stated before, fratricide is about own actions that cause adverse effects on own operations, or those of its partners or allies (Oxford English Dictionary, 2018; Kirke, 2012).

Lastly, the words 'friendly forces' are not included in the definition to remove the military connotation. After all, the focus of this research is on all kinds of operations, not only military ones. It would also be unnecessary to include these words in the definition, since 'friendly operations' already includes operations of friendly military forces.

The aforementioned alterations of the definition of information fratricide presented by the United States Army Field Manual 3-13 of 2016, results in a new definition that better fits the context of cognitive warfare. In this research information fratricide is therefore defined as:

adverse effects in the cognitive domain resulting from a failure to effectively employ one or multiple friendly messages which may impede the conduct of friendly operations or adversely affect them.

## **2.3 CONCLUSION**

This chapter addressed literature on information fratricide in order to establish what information fratricide exactly entails and to provide a definition of information fratricide in the context of cognitive warfare. Such a definition allows for a better understanding of the phenomenon, and helps identifying information fratricide in U.S. official's strategic communication that warned for a Russian invasion of Ukraine. This chapter discussed how the descriptions and definitions in the studied literature do not provide one that is entirely suitable for the use in this research, because the existing 'definitions' lacked concreteness and were formulated with a different context in mind. Due to the lack of a more suitable definition, the definition of the Department of the Army was slightly altered to make it more appropriate for the use in this research. Knowing what the term entails is just a first step to being able to investigate how message design contributes to information fratricide. The next step is to explain how information fratricide works. In the next two chapters literature is examined and applied to the definition that has been presented in this chapter, in order to explain the mechanism of information fratricide.

## **CHAPTER 3: THEORISING COMMUNICATION**

The focus of the two previous chapter was on contextualising and defining information fratricide. This enhanced understanding of the phenomenon on a contextual and conceptual level. However, for researching the adverse effects of message design in strategic communication, it does not suffice to solely understand the context of information fratricide and its definition. Information fratricide should also be understood from a theoretical point of view, in order to be able to explain how information fratricide works. Knowledge on the workings of information fratricide supports systematically analysing such incidents and helps to understand why message design influences behaviour and friendly operations. For that reason, this chapter discusses and theoretically elaborates on the communication process in the modern information environment. In particular how messages are designed, transferred and received, and the impact they have on behaviour.

This chapter consists out of two parts. In the first part, several communication models are examined in order to identify one that is most suitable for the context that this research investigates. This examination indicates that a communication model that integrates Hall's encoding/decoding theory (1973) and Shannon and Weaver's concept of noise (1949) is the most appropriate to signify the communication process in the modern information environment and to systematically explain the role of message design and its effects on behaviour. The second part aims zooms in on Hall's encoding/decoding theory and Shannon and Weaver's concept of noise. It chronologically addresses all separate elements of the Hall/Shannon and Weaver integrated communication process to explain these elements.

### **3.1 COMMUNICATION THEORY: A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Chapter 1 already demonstrated that new information and communication technologies have drastically changed the information environment, as information can be disseminated to a very large audience easier, cheaper, faster and more effectively than ever before (Jankowicz, 2020; Freedman, 2006). Furthermore, the widespread accessibility of communication technologies allows almost anyone to be a participant in the same information environment (Johnson, 2021). This means that due to information traveling (almost) freely across the world, many different audiences share the same information environment and communicate through it (Briant, 2019). As a result, this environment has become a contested one full of competing messages and alternative voices (Paxton, 2018). Therefore, the modern

information environment has become a divergent space in which there are many audiences that can cherry-pick the information that it desires based on their pre-existing beliefs (Holmstrom, 2015; Freedman, 2006; Dimitriu, 2012). As a result of the many alternative voices, there is a much more diverse landscape of audiences as compared to when it was mainly dominant narratives that reached people through the few available radio or television channels. As this research examines strategic communication in the modern information, a theory that is able to capture and explain how messages are designed, transferred and received in this modern information environment is of utmost importance.

Communication has been theorised and modelled by many scholars. A well-known communication model that is used to conceptualise communication, and one that is often regarded as the starting point of Communication Studies (Fiske, 1990), is the Shannon-Weaver Communication Model (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). The model states that a general communication system consists of an information source, a message, a transmitter, a signal, a received signal, a receiver, a destination and noise (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). According to Shannon and Weaver (1949), an information source (the sender) decides on what message to send from a set of possible messages. After deciding upon what message to send, a transmitter converts the message into a signal. This signal is sent through a channel, before it eventually is received by a receiver, which translates the signal back into an understandable message. Shannon and Weaver also pay attention to the “characteristic that certain things are added to the signal which were not intended by the information source” (p. 7). This is what they call noise. Noise makes it, according to Shannon and Weaver, more difficult for the receiver to translate the signal back into the message (Fiske, 1990).

Whereas the concept of noise is accurate in explaining the phenomenon in the modern information environment in which messages from various senders are competing with the messages send by the strategic communications practitioner, the model is not accurate in explaining the communication process in the modern information environment as a whole. This is due to three reasons. First of all, the primary goal of this model was to improve digital communications (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). This resulted in a linear model that works in one way: from sender to receiver. However, the study of information fratricide evolves around the messages that influence a receiver’s behaviour in such a way that it negatively affects friendly operations. Therefore, in information fratricide feedback is inherently a part of the

communication process. The second reason concerns the crafting of a message. Due to the rather technical approach of Shannon and Weaver, the model does not address the design of a message by the sender. The focus of their model is on a machine that crafts a message. Therefore, the words, symbols, images, actions or signs that a sender (un)deliberately includes in a message to communicate certain content to audiences (i.e. message design) are not addressed. Daylight (2017) rightly states that in the Shannon and Weaver Communication Model “the semantic content is irrelevant to the success of the transmission” (p. 175). As a result, this model is unable to show the relationships between message design and the effects on the receiver. The third reason pertains to the audience. In Shannon and Weaver’s model audiences simply accept the message. As a result, the model represents audiences as passive receivers. However, in the modern information environment audiences are full partners in the communicative exchange as they actively use information and interpret messages.

No single author seems to include a notion in their conception of the communication process that is similar to Shannon and Weaver’s concept of noise, whilst simultaneously overcoming the aforementioned inaccuracies to make it fully usable for researching information fraticide in the modern information environment. For example, Gerbner’s (1956) communication model goes further than Shannon and Weaver’s model, in that it looks beyond the process of the transmission of messages alone. Gerbner’s model also includes the role perception in converting an event into a message. It furthermore raises the question of meaning. However, Gerbner fails explain these processes in detail (Fiske, 1990), making the 1956 model in this form unsuitable for this research. Additionally, in his sender-message-channel-receiver model of communication (SMCR), Berlo (1960) does address the different steps in much more detail than Shannon and Weaver. Furthermore, he includes the notion of a code to describe the form of a message, which resembles somewhat of message design. Consequently, this model has potential for the use in this research. However, the model still lacks the level of detail that is required for this research, as it does not explain to a great extent how the different steps in communication work. Additionally, similar to Shannon and Weaver and Gerbner, the SMCR is model without feedback that portrays audiences as passively adopting a message.

Another theory, provides more detail on all the steps in the communication process and does not see audiences as passive. This theory is Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding theory (1973). In this theory he explains the communication process from the perspective of reception theory.

He contests the notion that a message has a fixed meaning that is passively adopted by the audience (Genosko, 2012). Instead, he argues that the message sent is rarely the one that is received. He calls, communication “systematically distorted” (Hall, 1973, p. 1). The causes for this distortion are to be found in the entire communication process: “from the structure of the production of the message at one end to audience perception and 'use' at the other” (Hall, 1973, p. 1). Furthermore, Hall’s theory is rather detailed on the role of coding (i.e. message design) and decoding. As a result, Hall’s theory is much more comprehensive and overcomes almost all of the shortcomings of the previously addressed theories. Therefore, this theory seems most suitable for explaining how messages are produced, transferred and received in a modern information environment. In the following paragraphs Hall’s theory will be explained in more detail by addressing Hall’s notion on the production of a message, the reception of a message, the sources of communication distortion and the reproduction of a message.

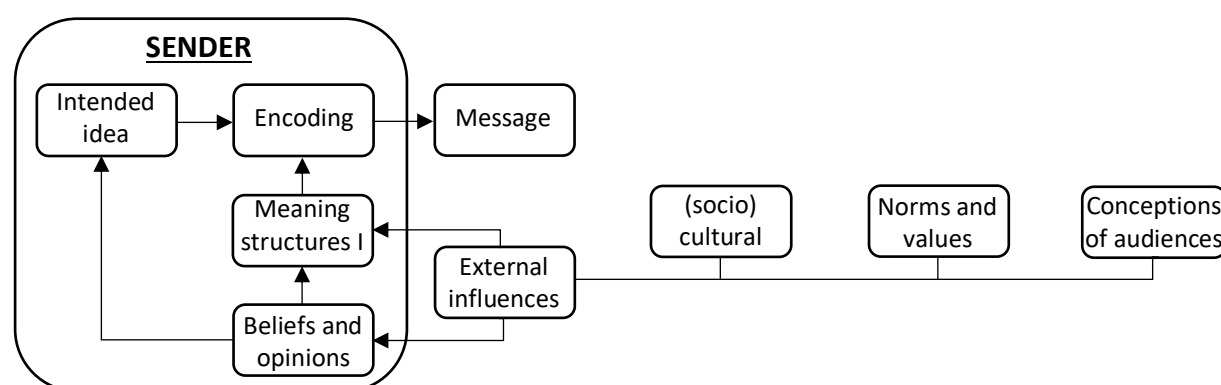
### **3.2 THE PRODUCTION OF A MESSAGE**

Before a message can be produced, a sender must have an idea it wants to communicate to the receiver (see figure 1). Such an idea is drawn from the “from the wider socio-cultural and political system” of which the sender is a part (Hall, 1973, p. 3). The production of a message can be best defined as the process of transposing the idea into the ‘message-form’. According to Hall, the ‘message-form’ is the form that is required to convey meaning from a sender, through a channel to a receiver (Hall, 1973, p. 2).

The production of a message requires that codes are used to translate the idea into a form that enable a receiver to deduct the sender’s idea (Hall, 1973). Codes are symbols and signs that are used to fix the intended idea in a message (Conway, 2017). They can take any form. The most commonly used codes are linguistic symbols in the form of letters, words and sentences. However, less obvious linguistic symbols are also used as codes, such as metaphors or other forms of linguistic symbolism. Additionally, the way in which a message is designed and distributed are codes in itself. For example, the language that is used, the lay-out of the message (e.g. what information is presented in what order), any imagery that is or is not included, the channels and media outlets that are used to distribute the message and even the time in which the message is distributed (Castleberry, 2016). It should be noted that a message does not only have to include written or verbal communication to convey an idea.

Non-linguistic messages, such as activities (e.g. large Russian troop movements along the border with Ukraine) and images, also carry meaning (Reding, Weed and Ghez, 2010). According to Hall, “the visual sign is probably a more universal one than the linguistic sign” (1973, pp. 11-12), which may explain why it is often said that actions speak louder than words. Therefore, it is these codes that constitute message design.

The oftentimes subconscious decision on which codes are used, is heavily impacted by what Hall calls ‘meaning structures’. Meaning structures can be summarised as “ideas, routines, skills, professional beliefs, institutional knowledges and assumptions, combined with common or expert knowledge drawn upon in myriad ways” (Genosko, 2012, p. 51). This means that it depends on the person producing the message, which codes are used. After all, the meaning structures of the sender are defined by all kinds of internal and external influences. Consequently, the codes that are used in producing a message, are very much determined by the sender’s (socio)cultural context, as well as personal beliefs and opinions, the conceptions of an audience or receiver, and norms and values.

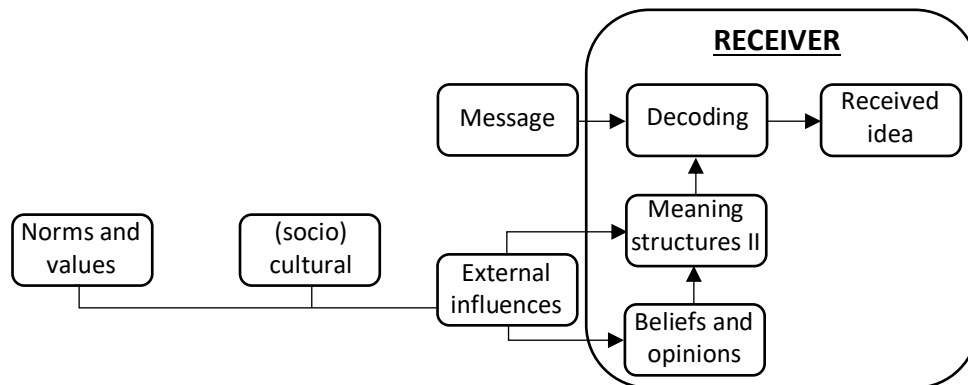


**FIGURE 1:** Schematic diagram of the production of a message, based on Hall’s essay on encoding and decoding (Hall, 1973; Genosko, 2012).

### 3.3 THE RECEPTION OF A MESSAGE

After the message has been received by the receiver, the reception process takes place. As is demonstrated by figure 2, the reception process is essentially the inversed production process. This process can be described as the translation from the message-form, into a form from which an idea can be deduced by the receiver. This translation happens, according to Hall (1973), in the decoding phase. The message, consisting out of a multitude of codes included by the sender, is received by the receiver. After the message is received, the codes that were used by the sender to include the idea in the message has to be decoded by the

receiver in order to be able to receive that idea. This is predominantly a cognitive process aimed at extracting that what the receiver thinks is the sender's idea. Similar to the encoding of a message, meaning structures play a major role in how a message is decoded and what idea is received as a result.



**FIGURE 2:** Schematic diagram of the production of a message, based on Hall's essay on encoding and decoding (Hall, 1973).

### 3.4 SOURCES OF COMMUNICATION DISTORTION

According to Hall, there is only one source in the communication process that results in the message received not being in accordance with the intended message. He refers to this as encoding/decoding asymmetry (Hall, 1973, p. 4). This would be appropriate for the homogeneous and linear information environment that existed at the time Hall wrote his article. However, in the modern information environment there is another source of communication distortion that Shannon and Weaver (1949, p. 8) would describe as 'noise'. Both sources of communication distortion are further clarified below.

#### 3.4.1 ENCODING/DECODING ASYMMETRY:

Meaning structures of the sender and receiver more often differ than they overlap (Hall, 1973). Hence, Hall differentiated them by respectively referring to them as *meaning structures I* and *meaning structures II* (Hall, 1973, p. 4; Genosko, 2012). The dissimilarities in meaning structures can be explained by the differences that may be in the factors that influence these structures. The sender and receiver, for example, might have a different (level of) understanding of a language, a different cultural background and/or different norms and values. Additionally, each side may have their own beliefs, their own view on issues and one might have different, more nuanced, or more contextual information on an issue. Through the many variations of meaning structures, a message is, therefore, prone to be decoded

differently as was intended by the sender, meaning that the received idea will differ from the intended idea as well. Mambrol explains it as follows:

Meaning is multiple rather than singular: the 'work' of the audience is not to discover a true, core meaning which has been embedded at the heart of the message, rather the audience generates meaning with a degree of 'relative autonomy'. (Mambrol, 2020)

Hall argues, that there can never be a "single, univocal and determined meaning" (Hall, 1973, p. 9) for elements in a message, or a message as a whole. The degree of symmetry, determines the degree of (mis-)understanding. Hall states the following:

The degrees of symmetry - that is, the degrees of 'understanding' and 'misunderstanding' in the communicative exchange depend both on the degrees of symmetry/ a-symmetry between the position of encoder-producer and that of the decoder-receiver. (Hall, 1973, p. 4)

Consequently, messages get a polysemic value: one message is able to signify more than the one idea that is intended by the sender. This does not mean, however, that there is no way to ensure that a receiving audience is steered towards the intended idea of a message. By using codes correctly, it can be ensured that a message carries dominant and subordinate meanings. Hall states that "'distortion' or 'misunderstandings' arise precisely from the lack of equivalence between the two sides in the communicative exchange" (Hall, 1973, p. 4). Thus, if the equivalence between the two sides is increased, dominant and subordinate meanings are created. Consequently, the number of possible ideas (interpretations) is decreased, which increases the likelihood of the receiver adopting the preferred (intended) idea (Hall, 1973). This can, for example, be achieved by a sender that adapts to the meaning structures of the receiver (or the other way around), which requires accurate knowledge of the communicative counterpart (Genosko, 2012; Tatham, 2015).

#### 3.4.2 NOISE:

Hall's encoding/decoding theory (1973) seems to be lacking one aspect through which it is not completely accurately representing communication in the modern information environment. His notion of the communication process is particular true for a homogeneous and linear information environment in which the sender is fully able to control the message that is send (i.e. the information environment of earlier days, or the ('modern') information environment of authoritarian regimes). However, in the modern information environment of (liberal) Western democracies this is not the case (Bolt, 2011). Such an environment is characterised

by freedom of speech, being widely accessible, its plethora of potential (groups of) receivers and – above all – a vast number of actors that (are able to) send large quantities of information. Shannon and Weaver state that the greater is the amount of information, the greater is the uncertainty that the message that is actually selected is the one that was intended by the communicating actor (1949, p. 18). Some of these messages that have the ability to change the way in which the receiver decodes the main message sent by, for example, a strategic communication practitioner. Eventually, this results in the received message being different from the intended one. This is what Shannon and Weaver (1949) refer to as noise.

Noise is defined as certain things that are added to that what is transmitted (i.e. a signal or, in the case of this research, a message), which was not intended by the sender (Shannon and Weaver, 1949, p. 7). These additions make it more difficult to decode the message in the way as was intended by the sender (Fiske, 1990, p. 8). Therefore, it can be regarded as a second source of communication distortion.

### **3.5 THE REPRODUCTION OF A MESSAGE**

Focusing on the exact cognitive processes that explain the relationship between a message on the one hand and the receiver's thinking, opinion and behaviour on the other hand is far beyond the scope of this research. However, Hall's conception on this relationship helps to better understand the effects of a message. According to Hall the message is "reproduced" after it has been received, meaning that the message has some sort of effect on the receiver. He states the following:

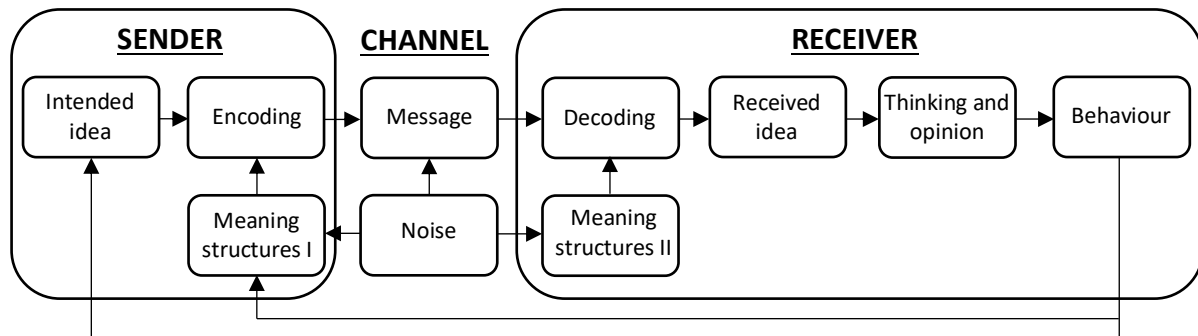
Before this message can have an 'effect' (however defined), or satisfy a 'need' or be put to a 'use', it must first be perceived as a meaningful discourse and meaningfully de-coded. It is this set of de-coded meanings which 'have an effect', influence, entertain, instruct or persuade, with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioural consequences. (Hall, 1973, p. 3)

The behaviour that is shown by a receiver can be considered a visible effect of the sent message. This behaviour is determined by what this receiver thinks and by the opinions they have, which are (partly) influenced by the received message.

On the basis of the receiver's behaviour, a sender is able to assess the necessity to continue, adjust or halt its communication. As a result, a feedback loop exists between the visible effects

(behaviour) and the intended idea. Additionally, the conceptions of audiences play a role in the sender's meaning structures. Therefore, a feedback loop between behaviour and meaning structures I exists as well (see figure 3).

Figure 3 presents a schematic overview of the entire communication process in the modern information environment that is based on Hall's (1973) encoding/decoding theory and Shannon and Weaver's (1949).



**FIGURE 3:** Schematic diagram of the communication process in the modern information environment (Hall, 1973; Shannon and Weaver, 1949).

### 3.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter started with a literature review to identify a theory that is able to systematically explain the communication process in the modern information environment and that is able to highlight the role of message design and its effects on behaviour. Hall's (1973) encoding/decoding theory was identified as the communication theory that most accurately describes this. The theory explains how messages are designed, transferred and received in the modern information environment, because it underlines the role of message design, as well as the role of the receiver in decoding the message. Additionally, this theory distinguished itself from other theories as it explicitly recognised and described the relationship between messages and behaviour. This is particularly applicable for researching information fratricide. It did, however, not account for the many actors in the information environment that might influence how a receiver receives the strategic communication message. Therefore, Shannon and Weaver's (1949) concept of noise was included in the communication process as described by Hall.

As Hall's theory in combination with Shannon and Weaver's concept of noise provides a systematic overview of the communication process in the modern information environment,

it also allows to explain the mechanism of information fratricide. Knowing how information fratricide works on the basis of such a detailed overview, facilitates to pinpoint how message design in U.S. official's strategic communication preceding the Russian invasion of Ukraine contributed to information fratricide. Therefore, the focus of the next chapter is on elaborating upon the workings of information fratricide on the basis overview of the communication process in the modern information environment as was presented in this chapter.

## **CHAPTER 4: THE MECHANISM OF INFORMATION FRATRICIDE**

The previous chapter identified that Hall's encoding/decoding theory (1973) and Shannon and Weaver's concept of noise should be combined in order to better capture the communication process in the modern information environment and to understand how messages are designed, transferred and received in this environment. The Hall/Shannon and Weaver integrated communication process also facilitates in explaining how information fratricide works. Understanding the mechanism of information fratricide is particular relevant for this research, as it allows to pinpoint how message design in U.S. official's strategic communication that warned for a Russian invasion of Ukraine resulted in information fratricide.

The definition of information fratricide that is used in this research indicates that, when the received idea is information fratricidal (due to the ineffective employment of a friendly message), this may unfavourably impact the receiver's thinking and opinion (adverse effects in the cognitive domain). Consequently, this thinking may stimulate actions that are unwanted or are against own goals, or those of partners and allies (affect friendly operations). The aim of this chapter is to accompany this definition with an explanation of how information fratricide works, which enhances the understanding of information fratricide on a theoretical level. In order to provide such an explanation, the definition of information fratricide will be split into three parts. Each of these parts will be explained along the lines of the Hall/Shannon and Weaver integrated communication process as presented in the previous chapter to elucidate the mechanism of information fratricide.

### **4.1 ADVERSE EFFECTS IN THE COGNITIVE DOMAIN**

Hall explains that the received idea determines the receiver's thinking and opinion (1973, p. 3), which occurs in the cognitive domain. Hall also demonstrates that the receiver's sentiment on a specific topic, an actor or the sender itself may stimulate certain behaviour. Ultimately, this behaviour may negatively affect the friendly operations. Therefore, an adverse effect in the cognitive domain in the context of information fratricide is understood as any effect in the cognitive domain created by the sender's message that stimulates the receiver to demonstrate behaviour that is undesired for that sender.

There are multiple ways in which the sender can adversely affect the cognitive domain. Apart from, for example, outright lying, communicating something controversial (even when it is not a lie or inconsistent with the narrative) or appealing to emotions (Bolt, 2011), one's thinking

and opinion can also unfavourably be influenced by sending multiple pieces of contradicting information. Contradicting information is not only confusing for receivers, making it difficult to know who to trust and what to believe, inconsistency is also seen as an unwanted personality trait (Allgeier et al., 1979; Asch, 1946). It eventually might even be associated with people that are muddle-headed, treacherous or even mentally insane (Cialdini, 2017). In a contested information environment, contradicting information may result in own communication supporting goals of malign information operations and influencing campaigns (information fratricide), when for example, the contradicting information results in the erosion of trust in own or allied (governmental) institutions, the media, or democratic processes (Pronk, 2018; AIVD et al., 2021). It may even cause own, or allied citizenry or nations to favour the intentions and actions of an adversary more (Cao et al., 2021). This is especially true when that adversary appears as more consistent. After all, a high degree of consistency is often associated with positive traits, such as intelligence and a powerful personality (Cialdini, 2017).

## **4.2 THE FAILURE OF EFFECTIVELY EMPLOYING ONE OR MULTIPLE FRIENDLY MESSAGES**

When the cognitive domain is adversely affected, one has failed to effectively deploy one or multiple messages. From the communication process that has been drawn out in the previous chapter, it can be concluded what constitutes an ineffective message. There are four processes in communication that potentially result in the ineffective employment of a message: the intended idea, the encoding process, the decoding process and noise. These processes should be regarded as the four sources of information fratricide.

### **4.2.1 INFORMATION FRATRICIDE SOURCE 1: THE INTENDED IDEA**

The intended idea plays a primary role in determining whether the message will be effective or not. When the intended idea communicated by the sender for example is erroneous, provoking or contradicting and the receiver interprets this idea as was intended by the sender, it means that one has potentially failed to effectively employ a message. This is due to the fact that this idea has the potential to result in adverse effects in the cognitive domain (see 4.1).

### **4.2.2 INFORMATION FRATRICIDE SOURCE 2: THE ENCODING PROCESS**

In order to transpose an idea into the message-form, codes must be used to encapsulate the intended idea (Hall, 1973). The encoding process determines what in this research is referred

to as message design. The encoding process plays an important role in ineffectively employing a message. However, the effectiveness is dependent on *how* codes are used and on *which* codes are used. It is not a given that codes are able to perfectly signify the idea of the sender. As a result, codes do not always accurately translate the intended idea into the message-form. This may result in another idea being communicated than originally was intended. This new, unintended idea may be ineffective in that it is causing adverse effects in the cognitive domain. Thus, although the intended idea may not cause adverse effects itself, a message can still be employed ineffectively when the intended idea is not encoded correctly.

Additionally, the codes itself can contribute to the failure of effectively employing a message, since the codes may also convey a certain idea by themselves. In order to clarify this, the following hypothetical situation will be used as an example: A popular group protests (code) against a certain policy that is going to be implemented by the government. With this protest, the group demonstrates they are against that government policy (idea) and that many people agree with the group (idea), which is dependent on the amount of people attending the protest (code). However, for the first time in a row of protests members of the group use a lot of violence (code and idea) during the protest. In this particular case the code 'protesting with violence', encoded the idea that the group rejects the government policy to such an extent that they are willing to undertake any action in order to prevent the policy from being implemented. However, in this case, the code itself also communicated the idea that the group is violent and relentless. People might sympathise with the main idea (rejecting the government policy) and even with the protest as a way to communicate their idea. However, due to the way they communicated their idea, with violence, it is likely that people will start to develop negative opinions (adverse effects in the cognitive domain) regarding that group, potentially resulting in the group losing support (impede friendly operation).

#### 4.2.3 INFORMATION FRATRICIDE SOURCE 3: THE DECODING PROCESS

In order to distil the idea out of a message, a receiver has to decode it. However, due to encoding/decoding asymmetry (Hall, 1973; Genosko, 2012), it might occur that the received idea is different from the intended idea that was send, or that the code itself is perceived in a manner than was intended by the sender. These new, unintended ideas may affect the effective employment of a message when they create adverse effects in the cognitive domain.

#### 4.2.4 INFORMATION FRATRICIDE SOURCE 4: NOISE

Every action, image or word choice may prospectively and potentially have game changing consequences for friendly operations, either in a supporting or in an undermining manner (Boudreau et al., 2016). That is to say, *any* message, as long it has traction and receives a large audience, may have such consequences, not only the messages the main sender wants the receiver to receive. Thus, information fratricide can also arise as a result of other actors communicating about actions of the main sender. An example is a journalist writing an investigative piece on actions of the main sender that contradicts the overall narrative of that sender. Such noise may also come from the own ranks of an army. In 1999, United States Marine Corps General Charles Krulak introduced the term ‘strategic corporal’. Krulak (1999) observed that low-level soldiers such as corporals – the lowest non-commissioned officer in the United States Marine Corps – carry a great responsibility. The decisions some lower-level soldiers make can, in some instances, have consequences for the entire theatre of operations (Krulak, 1999; Boudreau et al., 2016). The increase of information technological means, such as the internet, social media platforms and smartphones, together with an increase of public scrutiny made Krulak’s observations even more true. It makes lower-level information fratricidal actions increasingly visible for a larger audience, increasing its potential impact on different levels (Freedman, 2006). Boudreau et al. (2016), introduced the term ‘strategic tweet’ as a variant of the strategic corporal. This term depicts how low-level actions by an individual (citizen or soldier) – such as tweeting the photo of the corpse of a Syrian boy that drowned in an attempt to seek refuge in Europe – can generate a worldwide response (Boudreau et al., 2016).

When explaining how the intended idea, the encoding and the decoding process as sources of information fratricide, one could notice the use of the words ‘affect’, ‘potential’ and ‘can’ throughout the paragraph. These words are deliberately used to emphasise that it is not a given that errors in these parts of the communication process automatically result in adverse effects in the cognitive domain. This is due to three reasons.

First of all, although mistakes in the encoding and decoding process may result in the emergence of ideas that cause adverse effects, the contrary can also occur: ideas may emerge that differ from the sender’s intended idea, but do not cause adverse effects in the cognitive domain.

Secondly, an error in one element of the communication process does not rule out an error occurring in another element. In other words, various consecutive errors can be made throughout the communication process. Therefore, one mistake can neutralise another mistake. For example, an erroneous idea might end up not causing adverse effects when in the encoding or decoding process such mistakes are made that the new, unintended idea, differs to such an extent from the original that the received idea is not causing adverse effects anymore.

Thirdly, Mambrol (2020) has stated that an audience generates meaning with a degree of 'relative autonomy'. This means that the receiver has a certain amount of discretion in appraising the received idea. However, similar to the asymmetry in meaning structures between a sender and a receiver, such an asymmetry can also exist between receivers. This means that the impact of the received idea may differ from receiver to receiver. Receivers may give a different meaning to the received idea, or decode the message differently which results in a different idea being received. In one case this might lead to adverse effects in the cognitive domain, while in another case it might not.

#### **4.3 IMPEDING THE CONDUCT OF FRIENDLY OPERATIONS**

A person's thinking or opinion stimulates certain behaviour (Hall, 1973) (see figure 3). The effect of this behaviour may impede the conduct of friendly operations or adversely affect them. Depending on how a message is employed ineffectively and the adverse effects it creates in the cognitive domain, friendly operations can be impeded in numerous ways. Paragraph 4.1 already stated that inconsistency may result in loss of credibility and trust in organisations (effect on thinking and opinion) which, for example, may result in a decrease of support for friendly narratives, making the target audience becoming more susceptible for other, potentially malign, narratives.

The decrease in support for friendly narratives, is a rather intangible effect of an intangible friendly operation. However, behaviour that is influenced by messages nor friendly operations remain in intangible or virtual places. Consequently, occurrences in the information environment (the send message) may stimulate certain thinking (effect in the cognitive domain) that stimulates behaviour that impacts the physical environment.

#### **4.4 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, the three parts of the definition of information fratricide were explained along the lines of the Hall/Shannon and Weaver integrated communication process. In doing so, it was established that in information fratricide adverse effects can be any effect in the cognitive domain created by the sender's message that stimulates the receiver to demonstrate behaviour that is undesired for that sender. Furthermore, the chapter demonstrated there are four processes in communication that potentially result in these adverse effects: the intended idea, the encoding process, the decoding process and noise. Moreover, the chapter recognised that it is dependent on how a message is employed ineffectively and the adverse effects it creates in the cognitive domain, how friendly operations are impeded, what environment is affected and on what level operations are affected. This means that information fratricide may manifest itself in numerous way. However, it can be concluded that regardless of whether operations in the information or the physical environment are affected, whether it happens on higher or lower levels, information fratricide always results in an unfavourable situation in which the effectiveness of own operations is subverted, while it may support adversarial information and influencing campaigns. In conflicts this results in a disadvantageous position: a competitor achieving its goals, whilst the achievement of own or allied (strategic) goals is simultaneously impeded.

The aim of this chapter was to enhance the understanding of the mechanism of information fratricide on a theoretical level. Such an understanding helps with pinpointing how message design results in information fratricide in the incidents that will be studied.

The first four chapters of this research laid the foundation for conducting an analysis of the U.S. official's strategic communication that warned for a Russian invasion of Ukraine. It has become clear in what context information fratricide is manifested, how information fratricide should be defined and how it works. However, before being able to conduct the analysis, it should first be determined what in U.S. official strategic communication is analysed and how it is analysed. This will be elaborated upon in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY**

As the purpose of this research is to pinpoint key contributing factors to the occurrence of information fratricide, and to contribute to such incidents being more easily avoided, the aim of this research has been on message design as a cause for information fratricide as opposed to contradicting messaging. Researching the latter would be yet another research on this subject, while researching the former can really add new and useful knowledge for strategic communication practitioners. As a result, this research seeks to answer the following central research question:

How did message design in U.S. official's strategic communication preceding the Russian invasion of Ukraine contribute to information fratricide?

This chapter presents and justifies the methods that were used for determining the role of message design in information fratricide.

### **5.1 INFORMATION FRATRICIDE INCIDENT SELECTION**

The investigation of incidents is a common practice in research that aims to find the mechanisms that contribute to the occurrence of incidents. Real-world incidents provide a unique opportunity to identify and explain the circumstances resulting in unfavourable incidents, which enables to learn and improve future practices (Gadsden & Outteridge, 2006; Rafferty et al., 2012). Therefore, in order to illustrate the role of message design, an analysis was conducted of three information fratricide incidents that were the result of U.S. officials communicating the threat of a Russian invasion of Ukraine. The first one evolves around the Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations (U.N.) Vasily Nebenzia. The second incident evolves around Associated Press journalist Matt Lee. The third one evolves around the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy. These three information fratricide incidents were chosen, because all the actors in the communication process in the chosen incident are public figures. Therefore, a lot of what they communicate to, but also about each other, reveal cognitive processes that otherwise would not be observable. The amount of data and the detail of the data that this public communication generates, makes it possible to research information fratricide and the role of message design more thoroughly.

However, as the focus of the analysis is solely on that what is visible on the surface, it is still possible that it remains out of view what is happening below the surface. In cognitive warfare

it might, for example, be the intention of a receiver to decode a message in such a way that is undesirable for the sender. Due to the used methodology, such hidden intentions cannot be determined with perfect certainty. However, if there were reasons to believe that a receiver deliberately decoded a message to further its own goals, this was addressed for the sake of completeness.

## **5.2 DATA COLLECTION**

The data collection method that was used to identify the role of message design in information fratricide incidents is based on the method used by Gadsden and Outteridge (2006). Their research was focused on the entire chain of events leading to fratricide in combat in order to identify all contributing factors. Due to the similarities in research goal and subject, it was decided to also study the chain of events leading to the studied information fratricide incidents. After all, the role of message design can only be determined when the full context of the event is studied. Therefore, following up on the research of Gadsden and Outteridge (2006), this research created a timeline to capture the informational events leading up to the studied information fratricide incidents. For this timeline, the timeframe November 2021 – 24 February 2022 was chosen, as this timeframe includes one of the first messages in which the U.S. publicly warned for the threat of a potential Russian invasion of Ukraine and the speech in which Putin announced the invasion of Ukraine (Putin, 2022b). Therefore, it was expected that the data from this timeframe would provide the most comprehensive overview of U.S. communication on this issue, and the receiver's responses.

The timeline was not intended to show the entire chain of events leading up to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, nor was it intended to be exhaustive in that it captured every informational event in the information environment. Its purpose was rather to represent the most important informational occurrences in the information environment pertaining U.S. communications and the studied information fratricide incidents. This means that not only informational events of the U.S. were included, but also those of its receivers. This resulted in 47 informational events being included in the timeline. For each informational event the following data was included:

- A reference number, that can be referred to when analysing the data from the sometimes detailed and complex data set.

- The date on which the informational event occurred and, if it could be determined, the time. As Gadsden and Outteridge (2006) state, this chronology allowed for the identification of “a high-level appreciation of the directional relationships” (p. 6).
- The context in which the information event occurred, as this context may also contain codes that may be relevant for the analysis.
- All relevant messages in the informational event. Informational events oftentimes included multiple messages, and sometimes even multiple senders/receivers. In order to create the most comprehensive overview, all these relevant messages were included.
- The source of the informational event. As it is imaginable that not all sources present reliable or objective information in a contested information environment, the aim was to predominantly use primary sources to increase the reliability of the research. It was deemed undesirable that in researching a contested information environment, conclusions are based on information that was first interpreted by others. However, sometimes it was not possible to use primary sources. In such cases, the decision was made to use media outlets that are known for their credibility, such as Reuters, the Washington Post and Bloomberg.

### **5.3 CONDUCTING THE ANALYSIS**

In order to be able to understand the complex relationship between the sender’s messages and their effects on the receiver, the analysis followed the lines of the Hall/Shannon and Weaver communication process that was explicated in chapter 3. This means, that it was first determined what idea the U.S. officials wanted to send to its receivers, and what codes were used to transform this idea into the message-form. Subsequently, the analysis focused on the receiver’s perspective of the communication process. Consequently, for each of the three receivers it was highlighted what were the receiver’s meaning structures, decoding process and received idea entailed, what were the adverse effects on the receiver’s cognitive domain were and what behaviour was observed that was the result of these adverse effects. If indications of the influence of noise were observed, this was included in the research as well. The analysis of each receiver was finished by making an appreciation how the receiver’s observed behaviour (could potentially have) impacted friendly operations and the role noise played in the studied incident.

In order to be able to lay bare the cognitive processes of the participants in the communication process and to prevent that the meaning structures of the researcher influenced the way that the messages in the informational events were interpreted, conclusions were drawn as much as possible on what was explicitly stated by the studied communicative participant. When this was not possible, the observed actions of the studied communicative participant or the context of certain statements was used to draw such conclusions. After all, what the receiver explicitly states about American communication, tells much about the cognitive processes of that receiver.

To further improve the reliability of the research, a second reader that was unfamiliar with the studied information fratricide incidents, but familiar with the mechanism of information fratricide, provided an additional review of the conclusions that were drawn by the researcher.

Although great care has been taken in choosing the research methods, there will remain two challenges when conducting research into information fratricide. The first one is the size of the information environment. It is impossible to investigate the entire information environment and all the receivers of U.S. official's communication. Secondly, information fratricide predominantly is a phenomenon in which cognitive processes play an important role. As a result of these two challenges, choices had to be made pertaining the scope of this research in order to make it attainable, yet relevant for the aim of the research. Consequently, the number of studied receivers is relatively small. Furthermore, there was no other academic material to compare the results with. Therefore, care has to be taken in extrapolating the findings and drawing conclusions in the overall significance of the found ways in which message design contributed to the emergence of an information fratricide incident.

#### **5.4 CONCLUSION**

In order to answer the research question, it was chosen to investigate real-life information fratricide incidents to explain and illustrate message design can contribute to information fratricide. Therefore, a chain of events leading to the analysed information fratricide incidents was created by creating a timeline in the timeframe between November 2021 and February 2022. In this timeline, the most important informational events were represented. These events were analysed along the lines of the Hall/Shannon and Weaver communication process.

## **CHAPTER 6: INFORMATION FRATRICIDE INCIDENT ANALYSIS**

The goal of this research is to identify how message design in U.S. official's strategic communication preceding the Russian invasion of Ukraine contributed to information fratricide. All previous chapters laid the foundation that allows to conduct the analysis and to produce the findings presented in this chapter.

This chapter presents the findings that were obtained by analysing 47 informational events of the studied senders and receivers (see the timeline in appendix 1). The analysis chronologically followed all separate elements of the Hall/Shannon and Weaver communication process (see chapter 3). The presentation of the findings in this chapter follows the same line. Therefore, the chapter first focuses on identifying the ideas U.S. officials intended to communicate and the codes that were used to transform their ideas into the message-form. Secondly, this chapter separately presents the analysis of the three receivers that were studied. For each receiver it was established what the meaning structures of this receiver is, how the receiver decoded messages, what idea was received as a result of this decoding, what were the adverse effects on the receiver's cognitive domain, what observable behaviour was stimulated as a result of the received message and what the effects of this behaviour on the sender's operations were. By conducting the analysis in this way and by presenting the findings in this order, the obtained findings allow for identifying the effects of the American messages and the role of message design in creating these effects. Finally, this results in findings that permits answering the question this research seeks to answer.

### **6.1 SENDER: U.S. OFFICIALS**

Since Russia started a military build-up around Ukraine in March and April 2021 concerns arose over Russia's intentions with the congregation of military force (Kramer, 2021; Malyasov, 2021). Instead of showing signs of de-escalation, Russia amassed even more troops around Ukraine's border, including in Belarus, at the end of 2021 (Troianovski & Sanger, 2022). As a result, Western worries of an invasion of Ukraine grew even higher (Hansler, 2022; Sonne et al., 2021; Federal Foreign Office, 2021; NATO, 2021). After months of Western warnings of a potential Russian invasion of Ukraine, and Russia continuing its military build-up in 2022, it became clear what President Putin's intentions were. In a speech televised on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced he had made the decision to launch a what he called "special military operation" (Putin, 2022b). Shortly after Putin's announcement,

explosions were reported in Ukraine (Sheftalovich, 2022). Russia's invasion of Ukraine had started.

Prior to the invasion, the United States officials prominently communicated the threat of a Russian invasion to a wide arrange of audiences. This paragraph addresses the parts of the communication process that are related to the sender to analyse what were the intended ideas that U.S. officials wanted to send and which codes were used to transpose their intended ideas into the message-form.

#### 6.1.1 INTENDED IDEA

In the studied timeframe, two ideas were communicated by U.S. officials. The first idea being that Russia has amassed the capabilities around its border with Ukraine, that enables it to launch an invasion at any time it wants (informational events 1, 5, 13, 21, 23, 26 and 34) and that current Russian actions follow the pre-Crimea invasion playbook by, for example, creating a false pretext to justify an invasion (information event 11, 12, 19, 25, 28, 29, 39 and 42). The second idea being that Russia has amassed the capabilities around the Ukrainian border to (possibly) invade Ukraine (informational events 4, 7, 16 and 31) and that Russia will create a false pretext to justify an invasion (informational events 41, 43 and 44).

Both ideas look similar. They both communicate a warning for a Russian invasion. There is, however, a slight difference between the two communicated ideas. That is, the first idea is more reserved on the Russian intentions when compared to the second idea, which communicates that Russia (eventually) will invade Ukraine.

The studied timeline shows that the U.S. communicated the intended ideas to effectuate four effects. The first effect that the U.S. attempted to achieve was to prevent Russia from starting a war altogether. Secretary of State Blinken, for example, stated that "by sharing what we know with the world, we can influence Russia to abandon the path of war and choose a different path while there's still time" (see informational event 43). This stance had previously already been communicated through the Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations (see informational event 25). During a public United Nations Security Council (UNSC) meeting, Thomas-Greenfield stated that meetings on the matter, including those with Russian officials, had earlier been taking place in private, but that "[w]e think it is now time to have a meeting in public and have this discussed in a public forum". She later

voiced that the goal of the UNSC is not only to “address conflicts after they occur, but to prevent them from happening in the first place.”

The second intended effect pertains to dissuading Russia from fabricating false-flag operations and using it as a pretext for invasion. The timeline shows on multiple occasions that the U.S. was particularly concerned about this (see informational events 1, 5, 11, 12, 19, 20, 28, 29, 39, 41, 42, and 44). From a press briefing by the spokesperson of the Department of State Ned Price (informational event 29), it became clear that the goal of U.S. communication was not only to prevent an invasion, but also to remove Russian opportunity to justify an attack by fabricating and using false pretexts. He stated that information was made public as an “attempt to deter the Russians from going ahead with this activity”. Moreover, he declared that when U.S. communication did not succeed in preventing Russia from conducting a false-flag operation “[w]e are making it available to you in order [...] to lay bare the fact that this has always been an attempt on the part of the Russian Federation to fabricate a pretext” (informational event 29). White House principal deputy press secretary Jean-Pierre, voiced a similar narrative on this issue. She stated that the U.S. thinks “it’s important that the world be watching for that pretext and that people treat any such claims with the appropriate scepticism” (informational event 42). In light of this, U.S. communications seem to have aimed at sabotaging future Russian information operations. The intended ideas that the U.S. communicated created awareness on Russian intentions with the objective to create resilience among receivers, to make them less susceptible for possible future Russian narratives that should justify an invasion of Ukraine (see informational event 20).

A third effect that the communication of the intended ideas aimed to realise, was to justify decisions made and actions undertaken by the U.S. government. For example, Russian aggression on Ukraine’s borders was consistently referenced to when announcing U.S. to Europe and NATO’s Eastern flank as well as when speaking about U.S. military and security assistance to Ukraine (see informational events 1, 14, 20, 21, 27, 35 and 46).

Lastly, the timeline indicates that the intended ideas were also communicated to encourage others to take appropriate action. American citizens, for example, were urged to leave Ukraine as soon as possible. The U.S. officials that sent these advises always referred to the threat of a Russian invasion when urging U.S. citizens to undertake action (see for example informational events 34 and 36).

### 6.1.2 ENCODING PROCESS

Message design is not about *what* is communicated (i.e. the intended idea), but about *how* an intended idea is communicated (i.e. encoding). In communicating the intended ideas, U.S. officials used codes to convert the intended ideas into the message-form. Additionally, these codes were used to contribute to the intended effects of their communication. The inserts in the timeline indicate that three categories of codes were predominantly present in all studied U.S. messages that communicated either of the two intended ideas. For convenience, the three categories are referred to as the indicator-codes, the intelligence-codes and the imminence-codes.

#### *INDICATOR-CODES*

This category codes was present in informational events 1, 4, 5, 7, 11, 12, 13, 19, 23, 25, 28, 29, 31, 34, 39, 41, 42, 43, 44 and 46. In these inserts, two variants of indicator-codes were present. What these variants have in common, is that they all referred to indicators of an invasion to communicate the threat of potential Russian military action.

The first variant referred to general indicators that could be the preamble of any military invasion, since they were not put in a historic context. Examples of these indicators are the build-up (informational events 4, 31 and 34) and amount of forces at the border (informational events 13, 19 and 23), the type of equipment that is brought to the border (informational events 7 and 46) and the creation of a false pretext to justify an invasion (see informational events 12, 39, 41 and 43).

The second variant of the indicator-code did not only refer to general indicators, they also put these observed indicators in a historical context. Blinken, for example, stated the following:

“Now, we’ve seen this playbook before, in 2014 when Russia last invaded Ukraine. Then, as now, they significantly increased combat forces near the border. Then, as now, they intensified disinformation to paint Ukraine as the aggressor to justify pre-planned military action. We’ve seen that tactic again in just the past 24 hours.” (informational event 5)

Other U.S. officials also referred to the Russian actions as fitting their “playbook” (see informational events 1, 11, 28, 29 and 44). Furthermore, Thomas-Greenfield stated Russian actions are “an escalation and a pattern of aggression that we’ve seen [...] again and again,” while further referring to Russia’s past incursions in Crimea, other parts of Ukraine, Georgia

and the Republic of Moldova (informational event 25). A similar reference was made by Jean-Pierre (see informational event 42).

The remarks made by Price during a press briefing provides evidence for concluding that the indicator-code was used to add credibility to the message. When a reporter criticised the by Price presented information and asks for additional evidence, Price tried to create credibility by stating the following:

“So with what we know from eight years ago, with what we have seen – you and I both have seen, everyone has seen – with what we have heard eight years ago, in the ensuing eight years, and in recent weeks, it seems to me that it should not be outlandish that the Russians may be engaging in this activity again.” (informational event 29)

Furthermore, the indicator-code is not only used to add credibility, but also to add urgency. This is, for example, corroborated by Blinken’s speech for the UNSC on 17 February. During this speech he stated:

The information I’ve presented here is validated by what we’ve seen unfolding in plain sight before our eyes for months. And remember that while Russia has repeatedly derided our warnings and alarms as melodrama and nonsense, they have been steadily amassing more than 150,000 troops on Ukraine’s borders, as well as the capabilities to conduct a massive military assault. (informational event 43)

### *INTELLIGENCE-CODES*

On several occasions U.S. officials referred to having intelligence (see informational events 11, 29 and 34), information (28, 29 and 43) or evidence (5, 25, and 42) about certain Russian activities. Remarks made by Price provides insight into the reason why this code has been included. After repeatedly being asked by a reporter for evidence that proves the allegations that Price made during the press briefing (see informational event 29), Price answered that the allegations are “derived from information known to the U.S. Government, intelligence information that we have declassified.” Later Price again stated that the evidence of the allegations “is intelligence information that we have declassified.” Furthermore, Price stated that the U.S. government only declassifies information “when we’re confident in that information.” Later in the dialogue, Price repeats his statements: “This is derived from intelligence, intelligence in which we have confidence [...] otherwise we would not be making it public in the way we are.” In other words, Price argues that when U.S. officials are publicly

sharing intelligence or information this indicates that the presented information is credible. Therefore, it is concluded that this code is included to add credibility to the message.

### *IMMINENCE-CODES*

Throughout the analysed U.S. communication, variants of the imminence-code were identified. The varieties range from messages that state that Russia is laying or has laid the groundwork that puts Russia in the position to invade any time he wants (see informational events 5, 11, 12, 13, 23, 25, 26, 28, 29, 31, 34, 39 and 43), that an invasion is “imminent” (see informational events 19, 21 and 42) , that an invasion will happen (including mentioning timeframes) (see informational events 4, 7, 16, 41, 44 and 46), to actions such as urging citizens to leave Ukraine (see informational events 32, 33, 34 and 35) and evacuating diplomatic personnel (see informational events 17 and 36).

The context in which these codes were used, indicate that they were included to add a sense of urgency to the message. However, in contrary to the previous coding categories, U.S. officials were not explicit about this code. Therefore, it cannot definitely be determined with what purpose, if there was any deliberate one at all, this code was included in the studied messages.

## **6.2 RECEIVER: RUSSIAN PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO THE U.N. VASILY NEBENZIA**

The address to the UNSC by the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia is used to illustrate how message design contributed to information fratricide in this specific case. He addressed the UNSC after the US Permanent Representative to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield had made her contribution in which she expressed her concerns about the evidence that showed Russia’s activities at Ukraine’s border.

### **6.2.1 MEANING STRUCTURES**

The studied timeline sheds light on the meaning structures through which Nebenzia (and his colleagues) decode U.S. messages. The data shows that Russian officials widely communicated a narrative that portrayed Western nations – predominantly the U.S. – NATO and the EU as aggressors that threatened Russia with their aggressive acts. All Russian informational events in the timeline communicated (parts) of this narrative (see informational events 3, 6, 8, 9, 10, 25, 30, 38, 45, and 47). Nebenzia put forth the same narrative. He accused the U.S. of wanting

to weaken Russia by “creating an arc of instability around it.” Furthermore, Nebenzia elaborated on the “Americans who hold the record for having troop presences outside their territory” and that the country “has used force against other states without the authorisation of the UN Security Council.” According to him, these and other examples show that the U.S. poses a threat to international peace and stability. This indicates that Nebenzia’s meaning structures includes the point of view that the U.S. is an aggressor that threatens Russia.

#### 6.2.2 DECODING AND RECEIVED IDEA

The statements that are made by Nebenzia, make it appear as though he simply did not believe the information that the U.S. is providing. He claimed that there is no evidence for the allegations, which he referred to as “bogus narratives” and “a hotchpotch of accusations,” and further stated that no Russian official had said something about invading Ukraine or the number of Russian troops stationed at the Ukrainian border (informational event 25). However, Nebenzia not only disbelieved American information, he also seemed to distrust this information. He, for example, stated that everybody who makes claims about the threat of the Russian military concentration at Ukrainian borders “is misleading you.” Moreover, Nebenzia stated the following:

Incidentally I’d like to put a question [...]: where did you get the figure of a 100.000 troops that are deployed, as you state, on the Russia-Ukraine border, although that is not the case. We have never cited that figure, we have never confirmed that figure. We do recall [...] the Secretary of State Colin Powell in this very room waived around a vial with an unidentified substance as so-called evidence of the presence of WMDs in Iraq. They didn’t find any weapons, but what happened with that country is well known to one and all. (informational event 25)

By making this remark, Nebenzia showed that he thought there is a resemblance between U.S. communication prior to its 2003 invasion of Iraq and the U.S. communication regarding the Russian troops at the Ukrainian border. He observed, for example, that the Americans in both instances communicated towards the public through the UNSC. However, there is another resemblance that explains as to why Nebenzia distrusts U.S. communication on the Russian military threat.

In warning the UNSC for Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) program – this alleged WMD program was later used to justify the invasion (Bush, 2003a) – U.S. officials used

intelligence-codes in their messages. For example, during a briefing of the UNSC, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell stated that “[w]hat we're giving you are facts and conclusions based on solid intelligence” (United Nations, 2003). Furthermore, two days before the invasion Bush stated that “[i]ntelligence gathered by this and other governments leaves no doubt that the Iraq regime continues to possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised” (Bush, 2003b).

Ultimately, the intelligence that the U.S. was referring to prior to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, proved to be wrong. The Iraq Survey Group – “an interagency, international organization dedicated to the discovery and elimination of Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction” (Shuster, 2008, p. 230) – concluded that there were no chemical weapons, no biological weapons and no capacity to make nuclear weapons in Iraq (Iraq Survey Group, 2004). Furthermore, the Report of the Select Committee on Intelligence on the U.S. Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq concluded that the intelligence that supported the U.S. officials’ claims on Iraq’s WMD program was inaccurate and misleading for both government policy makers and the American public (United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 2004). These assessments were a major blow for the credibility of the U.S. intelligence community “making this one of the most public—and most damaging—intelligence failures in recent American history” (Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction, 2005).

This historical context, Nebenzia’s address to the UNSC and his meaning structures explain how Nebenzia decoded the American messages. By actively recalling that it is “well known to one and all” what happened to Iraq when the U.S. presented “so-called evidence” in the UNSC in 2003, Nebenzia presented the U.S. as an aggressor that used fabricated information to justify invading other countries. This indicates that he perceived the intelligence-code as a symbol that should be distrusted rather than one that increases credibility. Therefore, by drawing similarities between the past and the present, he seemed to belief that the U.S. again has a hidden agenda in communicating the threat of the Russian military congregation at Ukraine’s borders. As a result of this decoding process, it can be concluded that he received the idea that the U.S. is using fabricated evidence to justify aggression towards Russia.

### 6.2.3 ADVERSE EFFECTS IN THE COGNITIVE DOMAIN AND OBSERVED BEHAVIOUR

The goal of adding credibility to the messages by the use of intelligence-codes, was not achieved in the case of Nebenzia. Instead, the codes made Nebenzia distrust the messages. This adverse effect in the cognitive domain prompted behaviour that was observed in Nebenzia's communications.

First of all, Nebenzia's distrust stimulated him to criticise the information that is provided by the U.S. in the UNSC. This was, for example, demonstrated by him stating: "let them show us any evidence [...] that Russia is intending to attack Ukraine." Secondly, he subverted the credibility of U.S. intelligence by recalling their intelligence failure concerning Iraq's WMDs and by suggesting that the U.S. potentially has malign intentions in communicating the threat of a potential Russian invasion of Ukraine. By doing so, he tried to downplay the American accusations and strengthen the narrative widely communicated by Russian officials. For example, about the 100.000 troops the Americans accused Russia of having staged along the Ukrainian border, Nebenzia said that "[w]e have never cited that figure, we have never confirmed that figure," while later in his address he stated that "data available on the internet" states that the U.S. has 750 military bases in more than 80 countries, with an overall number of 175.000 U.S. troops deployed abroad. One of his closing remarks was that the U.S. should not "try to shift the blame on someone else."

As a result of the behaviour that is demonstrated by Nebenzia, it can be argued that the way in which U.S. messages were decoded by Nebenzia may well be a deliberate attempt to undermine U.S. credibility whilst simultaneously supporting the Russian narrative and justifying Russian actions. This conclusion is supported by the observation that Nebenzia is not the only Russian official that decodes U.S. messages in exactly this way. In the widely televised speech in which he announced the start of a "special military operation" in Ukraine, Putin recalled American "lies made at the highest state level and voiced from the high UN rostrum" as a pretext to invade Iraq. He further stated that "[t]he United States is pursuing its own objectives, while neglecting our interests" and that this presents the question "what are we to expect?" He continued by drawing a similarity between American actions and the Second World War. "[T]he Soviet Union went to great lengths to prevent war or at least delay its outbreak," but, according to Putin, this policy has made the Soviet Union left unprepared when "Nazi Germany, which attacked our Motherland on June 22, 1941, without declaring

war.” He stated that this came at a great cost for the Soviet Union. He concluded that Russia will, therefore, “not make this mistake the second time. We have no right to do so” (informational event 47).

#### 6.2.4 (POTENTIAL) EFFECT ON FRIENDLY OPERATIONS

Earlier it has been identified that one of the aims of communicating the intended ideas was to justify U.S. decisions and actions. The observed adverse effect on the cognitive domain, demonstrates that this goal was not achieved. The contrary is true, however. Since Nebenzia distrusted U.S. communication, he would not be convinced by American justifications on troop movements to Eastern Europe. In fact, because of how Nebenzia decoded the message, he would perceive the troop movements as a confirmation of the Russian narrative that poses the U.S. as an aggressor threatening Russia.

Furthermore, Nebenzia’s behaviour may also indirectly affect friendly operations. Nebenzia publicly questioning the credibility of U.S. intelligence, and his motivations for doing so, may feed the communication process between the U.S. government and its target audiences in the form of noise. That way, Nebenzia’s considerations may influence the decoding process of larger audiences. This noise may prove to be undesirable for the U.S. when it influences the decoding of target audiences in such a way that it creates adverse effects on the cognitive domain (e.g. distrusting U.S. intelligence). The result of this noise is, potentially, that target audiences start to question the credibility of U.S. intelligence, as a result of Nebenzia’s statement in the UNSC. This undermines U.S. credibility, impacts the four effects that the U.S. intends to achieve with their communication (see 6.1.1.), whilst it simultaneously may increase support for Russian actions. It should be noted, however, that there was no data present in the timeline that corroborates this hypothesis.

#### **6.3 RECEIVER: ASSOCIATED PRESS REPORTER MATT LEE**

The following information fratricide incident addresses the dialogue that occurred between Associated Press reporter Matt Lee and U.S. Department of State spokesperson Ned Price. This dialogue took place during a press conference held on 3 February, 2022 (informational event 29).

### 6.3.1 MEANING STRUCTURES

At the press conference in informational event 29, Price stated “the United States has information that Russia is planning to stage fabricated attacks [...] as a pretext for a further invasion of Ukraine” and that the Russians are considering making a

video with graphic scenes of false explosions – depicting corpses, crisis actors pretending to be mourners, and images of destroyed locations or military equipment – entirely fabricated by Russian intelligence.

After these statements, Lee voiced his criticism, asking whether something like that already happened and whether there is proof to accompany the allegations (see informational event 29). As Price refers to him declassifying the intelligence as proof for his statements, Lee recalls earlier statements that were made on the basis of intelligence. He said:

That’s right. And I remember WMDs in Iraq [...] And I remember that Kabul was not going to fall. I remember a lot of things. So where is the declassified information other than you coming out here and saying it?

Lee’s statement indicates that he does not believe Price’s statements without some sort of evidence to corroborate the claim. His reference to previous intelligence failures signify that he is not going to immediately believe statements in which U.S. officials only refer to non-specific intelligence as proof. His meaning structures, therefore, seems to include the notion that a reference to U.S. intelligence alone is not sufficient to proof a statement.

### 6.3.2 DECODING AND RECEIVED IDEA

The data in the timeline shows evidence that Lee predominantly responded to two codes. The first code he responded to was the intelligence-code. The use of the intelligence-code is what generated Lee’s scepticism. He states: “if you can’t provide any evidence other than, “Well, I said so and so it’s a fact,” that’s a problem.” As Price continues by saying that his statements are based on intelligence in which they have confidence, Lee interrupts him by asking: “The same confidence you had in WMD in Iraq?” (informational event 29). Lee also seems to respond to another code. In the analysis of the sender, this code was not identified as being included on purpose. Lee’s statements demonstrate that U.S. allegations of Russia wanting to use ‘crisis actors’ created additional scepticism. Lee:

What is the evidence that they – I mean, this is – like, crisis actors? Really? This is like Alex Jones territory you're getting into now. What evidence do you have to support the idea that there is some propaganda film in the making?

He later also states that a “fake mass casualty event with, quote/unquote, “crisis actors,” [...] is something that in the U.S. we rarely hear outside of the kind of nutty conspiracy theory crowd.” As a result of his reaction to the two observed codes, it can be concluded that Lee received the idea that the information of an alleged Russian false-flag operation to fabricate a pretext for invasion might be false.

The timeline shows that Lee made the exact same comparison as Nebenzia did during his address in the UNSC. Paragraph 6.2.4 already addressed the possibility of Nebenzia's comparison indirectly affecting friendly operations by influencing the decoding processes of receivers from other audiences through noise. Lee's comparison only came three days after Nebenzia's similar comparison. Moreover, the timeline did not indicate that other reporters or officials had made similar comparisons before Nebenzia did. Strikingly, eight days after Lee expressed his criticism, another reporter made the exact same comparison (see informational event 34). Therefore, there are weak indications that Nebenzia indeed might have made other audiences sceptical in regards to the American statements on Russian false-flag operations. However, the data in the timeline does not provide more evidence to definitely proof the causal relationship between the observed informational events.

### 6.3.3 ADVERSE EFFECTS IN THE COGNITIVE DOMAIN AND OBSERVED BEHAVIOUR

In this information fratricide incident, the two observed codes added additional ideas to the message. These ideas prompted the receiver to regard the message with scepticism. This adverse effect in the cognitive domain resulted in Lee publicly showing behaviour that was similar to what was observed in the Nebenzia-incident. As could be observed, his scepticism prompted Lee to publicly criticise the information that Price declassified. He did so, not by just asking a question, but by over and over demanding evidence from Price. As a result, the dialogue almost appeared to be transforming in a heated argument in which Lee and Price interrupted each other (see informational event 29). Additionally, by publicly recalling previous American intelligence failures he subverted the credibility of the presented information.

#### 6.3.4 (POTENTIAL) EFFECT ON FRIENDLY OPERATIONS

The way in which Lee decoded the American message on a potential Russian false-flag operation to justify an invasion of Ukraine, and the behaviour he showed as a consequence potentially had an impact on American operations. As the U.S. aims to inform the world about Russia's intention to pressure it to "abandon the path of war and choose a different path while there's still time," they would be very much aided by journalists that report (and support) U.S. narratives (see informational event 43). From the data it can be derived that U.S. officials indeed think that journalists play an important role in preventing Russia to use false pretexts to justify an invasion. According to Chargé d'Affaires of the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv Kristina Kvien, the press must be on their guard for these false pretexts. She voiced that reporters have to make sure that they know the facts before they start reporting certain events in Ukraine. "Let's not let Russia use a false flag operation to start an attack on Ukraine," she stated (see informational event 20). The questions that Lee, but also one other reporter, raise at the press conference demonstrates that the U.S. was not successful in convincing all reporters (see informational events 29 and 34). Ultimately, this may impede the earlier mentioned goals of dissuading Russia or preventing it from fabricating a false pretext to justify an invasion of Ukraine. However, it may be a calculated risk that not all receivers believe the intelligence presented by Price. After all, in the intelligence community it is a normal practice to not release certain secret information. This is done in order to remain in the advantageous information position or to protect sources. These reasons are also provided by Price as a reason for not being able to provide more details. When explaining why he cannot provide more details, Price explains that the U.S. only makes intelligence public "in a way that protects sensitive sources and methods" (informational event 29). Therefore, losing the information position or compromising the source might have been regarded a bigger loss than some people not believing the information that was presented by Price.

Additionally, the behaviour that Lee showed has the potential to indirectly impede friendly operations through noise. This is similar as what was observed in the Nebenzia-incident. As reporters potentially have large groups of readers, they have a platform through which they can transfer their scepticism to their audiences. In this way, this scepticism is amplified, potentially adversely affecting the cognitive domain of large groups of receivers. While sceptical journalists are necessary for properly reporting on government practices, this would

still be problematic for American goals. However, data that confirmed the existence of these relationships could not be found in the timeline.

#### **6.4 RECEIVER: UKRAINIAN PRESIDENT VOLODYMYR ZELENSKYY**

The following information fratricide incident evolves around the concerns of President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy regarding the warnings of U.S. officials for a Russian invasion. The analysis shows that he is not so much concerned about what is said, but more so about how it is said.

##### 6.4.1 MEANING STRUCTURES

Statements made by Zelenskyy indicate that he perceives the Russian soldiers around their borders differently than U.S. officials. He said: “Didn’t the invasion start in 2014? These risks have long existed. They didn’t increase. What increased is the craze. Our land is not being under attack now — but your nerves are” (informational event 15). In another informational event, Zelenskyy expresses similar statements: “I am not saying that escalation is excluded. We have been talking about this for eight years now. It has happened already. [...] Part of our territory is unfortunately temporarily occupied.” He further states that

We need to stabilise the economy of our country, because of those signals which say that tomorrow there will be war, because these signals were send by even respected leaders of respected countries. [...] This means panic on the market, panic in the financial sector. (informational event 22)

He continues by saying that the economy was doing increasingly well the past years, but that Ukraine faced economic setbacks after the beginning of the media coverage on the warnings for the Russian threat (informational event 22). This demonstrates that Zelenskyy’s meaning structures include the perception that the Russian threat was not something new, instead it is something that Ukraine has already been dealing with since 2014 (the year in which Ukrainian territories, such as Crimea became occupied by Russian(-backed) forces). Furthermore, his statements on the economy imply that despite this Russian occupation of territory, Ukraine was, at least in economic respect, functioning properly.

##### 6.4.2 DECODING AND RECEIVED IDEA

Zelenskyy’s meaning structures help to understand his decoding process, which aids in identifying the received idea. The data shows that Zelenskyy predominantly responds to two

the indicator-codes and the imminence-codes (see informational events 15, 22 and 37). His meaning structures suggest that Zelenskyy would decode in such a way that he acknowledges the risk that is communicated through the indicator-codes and imminence-codes, but that he rejects the urgency of those risks. Furthermore, it suggests that he regards the Russian troops – and the threat that goes with them – not as new situation, but rather as an already existing situation. For that reason, he seems to reject the imminence-codes. He therefore sees the communication of “respected leaders of respected countries” that do not even use “diplomatic language” by “saying tomorrow is the war – with which he also refers to President of the United States Joe Biden (informational event 22) – as the reason why things are not going well in the country. His view is that this information “raises economic panic” (informational event 22).

#### 6.4.3. ADVERSE EFFECTS IN THE COGNITIVE DOMAIN AND OBSERVED BEHAVIOUR

The indicator- and imminence-codes that were included in the messages communicated by U.S. officials seem not to have achieved the intended goals. Instead of receiving an idea that communicates urgency, Zelenskyy received an idea that made him think in such a way that he regards the messages as a cause for some of the problems he observes in his country. This adverse effect in the cognitive domain prompted him to publicly downplay U.S. communications. This behaviour was, for example, shown in informational event 15. When Zelenskyy publicly addressed the Russian military build-up for the first time since it has started, U.S. officials had already publicly warned at least four times for the threat this build-up poses for Ukraine (see informational events 1, 5, 11 and 13). Amid these warnings, he used his first address on the topic to tell Ukrainian citizens “take a breath, and calm down” (informational event 15). In contrast, White House Press Secretary Psaki stated one day earlier that the situation around Ukraine’s borders is an “extremely dangerous” one, and that “[w]e’re now at a stage where Russia could at any point launch an attack in Ukraine” (informational event 13). Zelenskyy, showed similar behaviour during a press-conference for foreign reporters. In this press conference he stated that Ukrainians “should have no panic” (informational event 22). As informational event 37 presents, Zelenskyy also stated that “there is too much information in the media about a deep, full-scale war” and that people should remain calm, because “right now, the people’s biggest enemy is panic.”

#### 6.4.4 (POTENTIAL) EFFECT ON FRIENDLY OPERATIONS

The studied informational events demonstrate that Zelenskyy kept downplaying the threat of a Russian invasion, despite the – sometimes very urgent – warnings of the U.S. During a press conference he stated: “I am the President of Ukraine. I am based here and I think I know the details deeper than any other president” (Informational event 22). In another statement he again stated that he does not have the information the U.S. is warning for (informational event 37). In communicating something completely different, he implies that U.S. communication is inaccurate. Therefore, Zelenskyy’s behaviour might have created confusion among the people following the events unfolding and might have impacted the credibility of the U.S. (communication).

The data in the timeline further demonstrated that the Russians had taken note on the different perspectives of the U.S. and Ukraine regarding the Russian build-up at Ukraine’s border. In his address to the UNSC, Nebenzia stated the following:

Ukraine as well, is a country, it seems, that our colleagues are prepared to sacrifice for their own pernicious interests. Otherwise it is hard to explain why, in convening us today, the initiators of this meeting did not even heed the opinion of the President of Ukraine, who asked the West not to whip up the panic, which already had a harmful impact on the economic situation in that country. (Informational event 25)

By doing so, Nebenzia saw an opportunity to express the recurrent Russian narrative as the U.S. as an aggressor. Thus, the arisen commotion provided Nebenzia with evidence to support his narrative on the U.S, potentially impacting credibility and making it more difficult to justify actions in the future.

By analysing this particular information fratricide incident, it was also observed that Zelenskyy made claims about the influence of communications that warn for a Russian invasion on Ukrainian civilians and its consequences for Ukraine. In the light of this research, these claims are rather interesting, as this would mean that if a causal relationship exists between U.S. communication, the behaviour of Ukrainian citizens and the problems observed by Zelenskyy, U.S. communication might have had a much larger impact on friendly operations (in this case that of an ally) than the ones highlighted before. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba stated the following on the effects of the warnings for a potential Russian invasion of Ukraine:

While president Putin hasn't moved any additional Russian soldier or Russian tank into Ukraine, we already suffer economically and become weaker, because of the panic spread in the society. [...] We shouldn't allow president Putin getting what he wants, without even crossing the red line. (informational event 24)

However, due to the scope of this research and data that was available, such a relationship could not be established in this research.

## **6.5 CONCLUSION**

This chapter presented the analysis of the strategic communication of U.S. officials that warned for a Russian invasion of Ukraine. The analysis used the Hall/Shannon and Weaver communication process to identify how information fratricide was caused, and the role message design played in causing this phenomenon. Therefore, the communication of three receivers of the U.S. communication was also analysed in order to detect what the meaning structures of these receiver were, how the receivers decoded messages, what ideas were received as a result of this decoding, what were the adverse effects on the receivers' cognitive domains, what observable behaviour was stimulated as a result of the received message and what the effects of this behaviour on the sender's operations were.

The analysis indicates that U.S. strategic communication indeed had undesirable effects leading to information fratricide. The most important finding was that the undesired effects were generally caused by the codes that were used to transform the intended idea into the message-form. The incidents show that the receivers did not only interpret the received idea, but also the codes. As a result codes themselves were given communicative value by the receivers. To avoid unnecessary repetitions of conclusion, the following chapter will provide a more detailed review of the findings with a more elaborate conclusion.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to illustrate the role of message design in information fratricide. Such knowledge helps to pinpoint key contributing factors to the occurrence of this phenomenon and contributes to information fratricide incidents being more easily avoided in future strategic communication. Ultimately, this enables Western governments to communicate better and more effectively in the contested information environment of current and future conflicts.

The first four chapters of this research laid the foundation for conducting an analysis of the U.S. official's strategic communication that warned for a Russian invasion of Ukraine. The research started with the context in which information fratricide plays out. The second chapter aimed at defining the phenomenon, as a definition that was suitable for the use in this research was lacking. Furthermore, the third chapter identified Hall's encoding/decoding theory (1973) together with Shannon and Weaver's (1949) concept of noise as being most accurate in describing the communication process in the modern information environment. This theoretical elaboration on the communication process was made in order to be able to explain how information fratricide works. This explanation helped with pinpointing how message design resulted in information fratricide in the incidents that were analysed and was therefore of major help in answering the research question. Additionally, it provided a framework with which the analysis could systematically be conducted.

The analysis itself focused on U.S. official's strategic communication preceding the Russian invasion of Ukraine – in particular the messages that warned for this invasion – and the effect of this communication on three receivers: Russian Permanent Representative to the U.N. Vasily Nebenzia, Associated Press Reporter Matt Lee and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. As all the actors in the communication process in the chosen incident are public figures, they often discussed American communication in public. This created a significant amount of data in the form of 47 informational events that allowed to clearly identify the sender's intentions and the effects of the sender's message on the receiver. This data was captured in a timeline. This timeline was analysed following all separate elements of the Hall/Shannon and Weaver communication process. This means that the analysis first focused on the ideas the U.S. officials intended to communicate and the codes that were used to transform their ideas into the message-form. Secondly, for each receiver it was established

what the meaning structures of this receiver is, how the receiver decoded messages, what idea was received as a result of this decoding, what were the adverse effects on the receiver's cognitive domain, what observable behaviour was stimulated as a result of the received message and what the effects of this behaviour on the sender's operations were.

In this concluding statement, the main research question *"how did message design in U.S. official's strategic communication preceding the Russian invasion of Ukraine contribute to information fratricide?"* will be answered on the basis of the analysis and results that were presented in the previous chapter.

In the studied incidents it was observed that it were not the intended ideas that caused information fratricide, but the codes that were used to transform the intended idea into the message-form. Apart from the intended idea, the codes (i.e. message design) communicated a message themselves. In the studied incidents it were these code-messages that caused information fratricide. For example, the adverse effects in Nebenzia's cognitive domain were not so much fuelled by the textual content of Thomas-Greenfield's and other U.S. official's statements on the 100.000 Russian troops at Ukraine's border. Rather, it was the use of the intelligence-code by U.S. officials that created these effects. The studied receivers interpreted these as unreliable discourse, as similar codes have earlier been falsely used by the U.S. to inform the world about the threat that Iraq pose and to ultimately justify an invasion of the country. Another example in which code-messages caused information fratricide, can be found in the Zelenskyy-incident. He seems to concur with U.S. reports on the Russian military build-up, but rejects the urgency that was added to the message through the imminence-codes. It was the urgency that was added through these codes that caused the adverse effects leading to information fratricide. The analysis further indicates that – similar to extracting the intended idea from messages – it depends on the meaning structures whether the additional ideas that codes communicate are extracted by the receiver. For example, Nebenzia and Lee decoded the indicator- and intelligence-codes in a similar manner, while Zelenskyy, as a result of different meaning structures, did not extract these ideas from the codes. Resultingly, these codes did not prompt similar adverse effects in Zelenskyy's cognitive domain.

The analysis, therefore, indicates that, based on their meaning structures, the studied receivers extracted ideas from the codes themselves. As a result, adverse effects in the cognitive domain were not so much incited by the intended idea, but were created by the

ideas that were implied through the codes that were added to the message. Therefore, it can be concluded that it was the codes themselves that largely influenced what would be the received idea, and not so much the main intended idea. This means that codes are not like an envelope that enables a sender to send a letter to the receiver, and that only has to be opened by the receiver in order to receive the idea that the sender wanted to communicate through a letter. The research found that the envelope itself also communicates a message and that it depends on meaning structures whether this message is extracted and how it is interpreted. Thus, codes are not wrappers that can be thrown away after it has revealed its content. Rather, codes themselves have communicative value.

Furthermore, it was observed that message design affects the meaning structures of a receiver over a longer period of time. This was observed in the Nebenzia and Lee-incident. These incidents demonstrate that the used intelligence-codes, in contrary to their purpose, actually decreased the credibility of a message. This is attributed to the context in which similar intelligence-codes have been used in the past. In a past event, these codes were used to falsely justify an invasion of Iraq. The analysis demonstrates that intelligence-codes, therefore, became a symbol of deceit instead of credibility. The similarities in the context in which the intelligence-codes were used to falsely justify an invasion of Iraq and the context in which the intelligence-codes were used in U.S. communication on the Russian military threat for Ukraine, prompted Nebenzia and Lee to distrust the message and decode it in a way that was undesirable for the sender. Therefore, current friendly operations can potentially be impeded by adverse effects in the cognitive domain that, for example, were caused twenty years ago. Evidently, this means that adverse effects in the cognitive domain that are caused by current communications, may potentially affect future (e.g. twenty years from now) friendly operations as well.

Finally, it should be noted that the findings of this research indicate that information fratricide sometimes simply cannot be avoided. Occasionally, undesirable codes are included in a message no matter how hard the sender tries to avoid using them. For example, in order to prevent an impending Russian invasion of Ukraine the UNSC must be addressed, as it is the prime forum through which to attempt such an endeavour. Secondly, such an address should make some reference to evidence, because otherwise, there will not be something to discuss. In other words, when addressing the UNSC to prevent a Russian invasion of Ukraine, it was

the most obvious option for Thomas-Greenfield to include codes that were similar to those that were used prior to its 2003 invasion of Iraq (i.e. intelligence-codes and the UNSC as a code). In this instance, the benefits of possibly preventing a war, clearly outweighs the potential adverse effects that the codes potentially create. Therefore, this research does not want to imply that information fratricide is something that *can* always be avoided, nor that it is something that *should* always be avoided. Sometimes, the benefits of communicating a message with a certain message design, simply outweigh the disadvantages of a specific message design. Therefore, the research rather wants to make the case that strategic communication practitioners are not only deliberate in what idea they want to communicate, but also in how they want to communicate that idea. Therefore, a cost-benefit analysis that estimates the impact of the idea and the accompanying codes on the target audience, should always be part of the process of producing a strategic message.

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## APPENDIX 1: INFORMATION FRATRICIDE INCIDENT TIMELINE

Informational event no.	Date	Sender	Context	Message content / action undertaken	Source(s)
1	10 November, 2021	Antony J. Blinken <i>Secretary of State</i>	After a meeting with Ukraine Foreign Minister Kuleba a press conference was held. Blinken made his statements during this conference.	<p>“We’re concerned by reports of unusual Russian military activity near Ukraine. We’re monitoring the region very closely, as we always do, we’ll continue to consult closely as well with allies and partners on this issue. And as we’ve made clear, any escalatory or aggressive actions would be of great concern to the United States. We continue to support de-escalation – de-escalation – excuse me – in the region and diplomatic resolution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine. The updated U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership that the foreign minister and I signed today affirms the United States unwavering commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. It reflects our countries’ continued commitment to advance the mutual priorities set forth in the September 1 Joint Statement signed by President Biden and President Zelenskyy, and outlines key areas of cooperation – including security, the rule of law, and economic transformation.”</p> <p>After a reporter asked whether the U.S. thinks that Russia is amassing its troops with the intention to invade Ukraine, Blinken answered as follows:</p> <p>“With regard to Russia and its intentions, look, as I said, we are concerned with the reports of the unusual Russian activity near Ukraine. We’re looking at this very, very closely. We’re also consulting very closely with allies and partners. And, as you’ve heard me say and heard us say, we don’t have clarity into Moscow’s intentions, but we do know its playbook. And our concern is that Russia may make the serious mistake of attempting to rehash what it undertook back in 2014 when it amassed forces along the border, crossed into sovereign Ukrainian territory, and did so claiming falsely that it was provoked. So the playbook that we’ve seen in the past is to claim some provocation as a rationale for doing what it’s intended and planned to do all along, which is why we’re looking at this very carefully.”</p>	U.S. Department of State, 2021a.
2	11 November, 2021	Anonymous sources via the Daily Telegraph and Bloomberg.	The information was published in articles of the Daily Telegraph and Bloomberg.	Citing anonymous officials, the Daily Telegraph and Bloomberg state that the U.S. has warned European allies that Russia could be planning an invasion of Ukraine.	Barnes et al., 2021; Nardelli et al., 2021.
3	18 November, 2021	Vladimir Putin <i>President of the Russian Federation</i>	The statements were made during a meeting of Russia’s Foreign Ministry Board.	<p>“Of course, Ukraine’s internal crisis is among the most pressing and sensitive issues for us, which has so far remained unresolved. [...] Importantly, our Western partners are exacerbating the situation by supplying Kiev with modern lethal weapons, conducting provocative military exercises in the Black Sea and other regions close to our borders. With regard to the Black Sea, this even goes beyond certain limits since strategic bombers, which carry very serious weapons, fly at a distance of only 20 kilometres from our state border.”</p> <p>“Indeed, we constantly express our concerns about these matters and talk about red lines, but of course, we understand that our partners are peculiar in the sense that they have a very – how to put it mildly – superficial approach to our warnings about red lines. We remember well NATO’s eastward expansion – the audience here is quite representative and professional. Despite the fact that relations between Russia and our Western partners, including the United States, were nothing short of unique, and the level of relations was almost allied, our concerns and warnings regarding NATO’s eastward expansion have been totally ignored.”</p> <p>“There have been several waves of expansion, and let’s look at where the military infrastructure of the NATO bloc is now – anti-missile defence systems have been deployed right next to our borders in Romania and Poland. These can</p>	Putin, 2021.

				<p>easily be put to offensive use with the Mk-41 launchers there; replacing the software takes only minutes. Nevertheless, our recent warnings have had a certain effect: tensions have arisen there anyway.”</p> <p>“In this regard, I have two points to make. First, it is important for them to remain in this state for as long as possible, so that it does not occur to them to stage some kind of conflict on our western borders which we do not need, we do not need a new conflict. Second, Mr Lavrov, it is imperative to push for serious long-term guarantees that ensure Russia’s security in this area, because Russia cannot constantly be thinking about what could happen there tomorrow.”</p> <p>“Clearly, and I can see this despite the fact that many people are wearing face masks, but I can tell by their eyes that there are sceptical smiles with regard to whether we can count on and hope for serious agreements in this area, keeping in mind that, after all, we are dealing with, to put it mildly, not very reliable partners who can easily backtrack on any previous agreement. Nevertheless, as difficult as it may be, we need to work on this, and I want you to keep that in mind.”</p>	
4	20 November, 2021	U.S. officials “briefed on the matter” via CBS News (Gazis & Martin, 2021).	The information was published in an article of CBS News.	The officials stated that an incursion of Ukraine by Russia might happen in weeks. They are warning that this military build-up is in preparation of an actual incursion, in contrary to earlier Russian military build-ups along the Ukraine border.	Gazis & Martin, 2021.
5	1 December, 2021	Antony J. Blinken <i>Secretary of State</i>	Blinken made the statements during a speech at a press availability after the meeting of the NATO Foreign Ministers.	<p>“We’re deeply concerned by evidence that Russia has made plans for significant aggressive moves against Ukraine. The plans include efforts to destabilize Ukraine from within, as well as large scale military operations.”</p> <p>“Now, we’ve seen this playbook before, in 2014 when Russia last invaded Ukraine. Then, as now, they significantly increased combat forces near the border. Then, as now, they intensified disinformation to paint Ukraine as the aggressor to justify pre-planned military action. We’ve seen that tactic again in just the past 24 hours.”</p> <p>“And in recent weeks, we’ve also observed a massive spike – more than tenfold – in social media activity pushing anti-Ukrainian propaganda, approaching levels last seen in the leadup to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2014.”</p> <p>“Now, we don’t know whether President Putin has made the decision to invade. We do know that he is putting in place the capacity to do so on short order should he so decide. So despite uncertainty about intentions and timing, we must prepare for all contingencies while working to see to it that Russia reverses course.”</p>	U.S. Department of State, 2021b.
6	2 December, 2021	Sergei Lavrov <i>Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation</i>	The remark was made after Lavrov met with his U.S. counterpart at the Munich security conference.	“No one can guarantee their own security at the expense of the security of others. NATO’s extension . . . will infringe on our security.”	Ryan & Khurshudyan, 2021.
7	3 December, 2021	Anonymous U.S. official via The Washington Post.	The statements were published in The Washington Post.	<p>“The Russian plans call for a military offensive against Ukraine as soon as early 2022 with a scale of forces twice what we saw this past spring during Russia’s snap exercise near Ukraine’s borders.”</p> <p>“The plans involve extensive movement of 100 battalion tactical groups with an estimated 175,000 personnel, along with armor, artillery and equipment.”</p>	Harris & Sonne, 2021.
8	17 December, 2021	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation	Russia sends a list of security guarantees to NATO and the United states that have to be met	From the what Russia called “agreement on measures to ensure the security of The Russian Federation and member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization”:	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the

			in order to de-escalate the tensions around Ukraine.	<p>Article 4: “The Russian Federation and all the Parties that were member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as of 27 May 1997, respectively, shall not deploy military forces and weaponry on the territory of any of the other States in Europe in addition to the forces stationed on that territory as of 27 May 1997. With the consent of all the Parties such deployments can take place in exceptional cases to eliminate a threat to security of one or more Parties.”</p> <p>Article 6: “All member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization commit themselves to refrain from any further enlargement of NATO, including the accession of Ukraine as well as other States.”</p> <p>Article 7: “The Parties that are member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization shall not conduct any military activity on the territory of Ukraine as well as other States in the Eastern Europe, in the South Caucasus and in Central Asia.”</p> <p>From the what Russia called “Treaty between The United States of America and the Russian Federation on security guarantees”:</p> <p>Article 1: “The Parties shall cooperate on the basis of principles of indivisible, equal and undiminished security and to these ends:</p> <p>shall not undertake actions nor participate in or support activities that affect the security of the other Party;</p> <p>shall not implement security measures adopted by each Party individually or in the framework of an international organization, military alliance or coalition that could undermine core security interests of the other Party.”</p> <p>Article 4: “The United States of America shall undertake to prevent further eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and deny accession to the Alliance to the States of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.</p> <p>The United States of America shall not establish military bases in the territory of the States of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics that are not members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, use their infrastructure for any military activities or develop bilateral military cooperation with them.”</p> <p>Article 6: “The Parties shall undertake not to deploy ground-launched intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles outside their national territories, as well as in the areas of their national territories, from which such weapons can attack targets in the national territory of the other Party.”</p>	Russian Federation (2021a; 2021b).
9	21 December, 2021	<p>Vladimir Putin <i>President of the Russian Federation</i></p> <p>Sergei Shoigu <i>Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation</i></p>	The statements were made during a meeting of Russian top military commanders, which was partly televised.	<p>Responding to U.S. military aid to Ukraine, Putin stated: “What the United States is doing in Ukraine is at our doorstep.” He further stated: “And they should understand that we have nowhere further to retreat to. Under [U.S.] protection, they are arming and urging on extremists from a neighbouring country at Russia. Against Crimea, for instance. Do they think we’ll just watch idly?”</p> <p>Putin: “If our western counterparts continue a clearly aggressive line, we will undertake proportionate military-technical countermeasures and will respond firmly to unfriendly steps.” “I’d like to stress that we are fully entitled to do that.”</p> <p>Putin: “We need long-term legally binding guarantees.” “You and I know well that even they, legal guarantees, cannot be trusted because the United States easily withdraws from all international agreements it loses interest in for one reason or another ... giving no explanations whatsoever.”</p> <p>Putin: “What’s happening now, this tension in Europe, is their fault.” “At every step Russia has been forced to respond, the situation has got worse and worse and worse ... And now we’re in a situation where we must make a decision. We can’t allow the situation I’ve described to develop any further.”</p>	The Moscow Times, 2021; Roth, 2021; CNBC, 2021.

				<p>Shoigu: “We have identified the presence of over 120 members of U.S. mercenary groups in the cities of Avdiivka and Krasny Liman to commit provocations...Tanks filled with unidentified chemical components were delivered to the cities of Avdeevka and Krasny Liman to commit provocations.”</p> <p>Shoigu: “The United States is building up its military presence at Russian borders. In the countries of Eastern Europe, American units with a total number of about 8,000 servicemen are deployed on a rotational basis.”</p>	
10	23 December, 2021	Vladimir Putin <i>President of the Russian Federation</i>	Putin made the statements during an annual, widely televised press conference.	<p>Throughout the entire conference, Putin accused the West and Ukraine of being responsible for the surge in tensions with Russia. He further stated that the West has to give Russia security guarantees.</p> <p>A SkyNews reporter asks Putin if he will guarantee that he is not going to invade Ukraine. He answers as follows:</p> <p>“In this connection, we have made it clear that any further movement of NATO to the East is unacceptable. Is there anything unclear about this? Are we deploying missiles near the US border? No, we are not. It is the United States that has come to our home with its missiles and is already standing at our doorstep. Is it going too far to demand that no strike systems be placed near our home? What is so unusual about this?” [...] “We remember, as I have mentioned many times before and as you know very well, how you promised us in the 1990s that [NATO] would not move an inch to the East. You cheated us shamelessly: there have been five waves of NATO expansion, and now the weapons systems I mentioned have been deployed in Romania and deployment has recently begun in Poland. This is what we are talking about, can you not see?”</p> <p>“We are not threatening anyone. Have we approached US borders? Or the borders of Britain or any other country? It is you who have come to our border, and now you say that Ukraine will become a member of NATO as well. Or, even if it does not join NATO, that military bases and strike systems will be placed on its territory under bilateral agreements. This is the point.” [...]</p> <p>After another reporter asked what Russia should prepare for, Putin made, among others, the following remarks:</p> <p>“Stability and security, ensuring security on this territory and in this area is one of the key matters on today’s agenda. We must understand how to ensure our security. With this in mind, we spoke out clearly and directly against any further eastward expansion by NATO. The ball is in their court. They need to respond in one way or another.”</p>	President of Russia, 2021.
11	13 January, 2022	Jake Sullivan <i>U.S. National Security Advisor</i>	The statements were made during a press briefing.	<p>“[O]ur intelligence community has developed information — which has now been downgraded — that Russia is laying the groundwork to have the option of fabricating a pretext for an invasion, including through sabotage activities and information operations, by accusing Ukraine of preparing an imminent attack against Russian forces in Eastern Ukraine.”</p> <p>“We saw this playbook in 2014. They are preparing this playbook again. And we will have — the administration will have further details on what we see as this potential laying of a pretext to share with the press over the course of the next 24 hours.”</p>	The White House, 2022a.
12	14 January, 2022	Anonymous U.S. official	The statements were made in an e-mail send to CNN on the condition of animosity.	A U.S. official states that Russia is planning sabotage attacks in Ukraine as a pretext for invasion: “The operatives are trained in urban warfare and in using explosives to carry out acts of sabotage against Russia’s own proxy-forces.”	Bertrand & Herb, 2022; Sonne et al., 2022.
13	18 January, 2022	Jen Psaki <i>White House Press Secretary</i>	These statements were made as an answer to a	“President Putin has created this crisis by amassing 100,000 Russian troops along Ukraine’s borders. This includes moving Russian forces into Belarus recently for joint exercises and conducting additional exercises on Ukraine’s eastern border.”	The White House, 2022b.

			reporter's question during a press briefing.	<p>"So, let's be clear: Our view is this is an extremely dangerous situation. We're now at a stage where Russia could at any point launch an attack in Ukraine."</p> <p>"And what Secretary Blinken is going to go do is highlight very clearly there is a diplomatic path forward. It is the choice of President Putin and the Russians to make whether they are going to suffer severe economic consequences or not."</p>	
14	19 January, 2022	Antony J. Blinken <i>Secretary of State</i>	Blinken made the statements during a joint press availability together with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Kuleba.	"With regard to security assistance, a few things. I think as you know, we have been providing defensive assistance to Ukraine consistently, including deliveries that – taken place in just the last few weeks alone. I'm not going to get into every detail of that assistance, but the point is this: We have given more security assistance to Ukraine in the last year than at any point since 2014. And as I say, we're doing that on a sustained basis. The deliveries are ongoing, again, as recently as the last few weeks, and more are scheduled in the coming weeks. Should Russia carry through with any aggressive intent and renew its aggression and invade Ukraine, we'll provide additional material beyond that that is already in the pipeline and that will further aid in defending Ukraine."	U.S. Department of State, 2022a.
15	19 January, 2022	Volodymyr Zelenskyy <i>President of Ukraine</i>	Zelenskyy made these remarks in a video address to the nation. This was the first such video address about the threat of a Russian invasion since Russia's military build-up started	Zelenskyy states that people should "take a breath, and calm down" amid the warnings of a potential Russian invasion of Ukraine. He further states: "Didn't the invasion start in 2014? These risks have long existed. They didn't increase. What increased is the craze. Our land is not being under attack now — but your nerves are. They're trying to make you feel anxiety all the time."	Sorokin, 2022; Stern & Dixon, 2022.
16	19 January, 2022	Joe Biden <i>President of the United States</i>	The remark was made during a regular press conference.	"I'm not so sure that he [...] is certain what he's going to do. My guess is he will move in. He has to do something."	The White House, 2022c.
17	23 January, 2022	The State Department	The statement is made during a briefing with reporters.	The State Department announces that it has ordered all family members of U.S. Embassy personnel in Kyiv to leave Ukraine. It is left to the discretion of non-essential embassy personnel whether they want to leave as well.	Benner et al., 2022.
18	24 January, 2022	John F. Kirby Pentagon Press Secretary	Kirby announces the news during a press briefing.	<p>"As you're all aware, the United States is deeply concerned about the current situation in Europe. We remain keenly focused on Russia's unusual military activities near the Ukrainian border, including in Belarus."</p> <p>"[T]he United States has taken steps to heighten the readiness of its forces at home and abroad so they are prepared to respond to a range of contingencies."</p> <p>"Secretary Austin has placed a range of units in the United States on a heightened preparedness to deploy, which increases our readiness to provide forces if NATO should activate the NRF or if other situations develop. All told, the number of forces that the secretary has placed on heightened alert comes up to about 8,500 personnel."</p>	U.S. Department of Defense, 2022a.
19	25 January, 2022	Jen Psaki <i>White House Press Secretary</i>	The statements were made during a press briefing.	<p>A reporter asks whether the U.S. government agrees with Ukraine's assessment "that an invasion is not imminent."</p> <p>Psaki: "Well, no one can get into the mind of President Putin or Russian leadership. We all know that is the case."</p> <p>Psaki: "What we have seen is a range of preparations, including 100,000 troops at the border, bellicose rhetoric, and actions, as we've talked about in here, including false-flag operations to try to spread misinformation throughout the region and even the world, setting up the predicate for an invasion."</p>	The White House, 2022d.

				<p>Psaki: "So, while, of course, our preferred path is diplomacy — and we can't predict where the mind of President Putin is — we've certainly seen aggressive actions and preparations increasing at the border."</p> <p>Later, a reporter states that "last week was when the administration began to, sort of, ratchet up warnings that an invasion could be imminent, it could happen at any time." The reporter subsequently asks if Biden's view on this has changed in the meantime. "Is it the same? Is it getting worse?"</p> <p>Psaki: "I think when we said it was imminent, it remains imminent. But, again, we can't make a prediction of what decision President Putin will make. We're still engaged in diplomatic discussions and negotiations."</p> <p>Reporter: "So, there's no new element in the last week that's changed the President's view one way or the other on (inaudible)?"</p> <p>Psaki: "Well, "imminent" has a pretty intense meaning. Doesn't it?"</p> <p>Reporter: "I agree. I agree."</p> <p>Psaki: "Okay."</p> <p>Reporter: "And it's still the belief that it's imminent?"</p> <p>Psaki: "Correct."</p>	
20	25 January, 2022	Kristina A. Kvien <i>Chargé d'Affaires U.S. Embassy Kyiv</i>	The statements were made on the airfield on which a plane with U.S. military assistance just landed.	<p>"Our message is clear. The United States stand with Ukraine, our Allies and partners. And we are working together to expedite security assistance in support of Ukraine's sovereign right to self-defense. As I said many times, we're committed to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity."</p> <p>"Deliveries like today's will continue and are ongoing. In fact, the United States have delivered more security assistance this year to Ukraine than in any year since 2014. So, this year we provided over 650 million dollars of security assistance to Ukraine. And since 2014 we delivered 2.7 billion dollars of security assistance. And what you see behind me now is part of the extra 200 million dollars of assistance that we announced just recently."</p> <p>And perhaps I'll just also raise, since we have quite a few press here, that I think we all know Russia's playbook. There are cyberattacks, there are attempts to sow discord, their use of false flag operations — all of those are things that Russia uses. And we all need to be on our guard to watch for those and to make sure that we know the facts before we report incidents in Ukraine. Let's not let Russia use a false flag operation to start an attack on Ukraine."</p>	Kvien, 2022.
21	27 January, 2022	John F. Kirby <i>Pentagon Press Secretary</i>	The statements were made during a regular press briefing.	<p>"We've always said, and said for quite some time that another incursion by Russia could be imminent. And imminent means imminent. So, we're watching this every single day."</p> <p>"The only thing I'd add is, we still don't believe that there's been a final decision by Mr. Putin to launch another invasion."</p> <p>"But by imminent, I don't mean, I'm telling you, it's going to happen tomorrow. We've long said that an incursion could be imminent."</p>	U.S. Department of Defense, 2022b.
22	28 January, 2022	Volodymyr Zelenskyy <i>President of Ukraine</i>	Zelenskyy made the statements during a press conference for foreign media.	<p>A reporter notes that amid warnings of a Russian invasion, Zelenskyy keeps saying everyone should remain calm, while simultaneously asking for foreign help. The reporter asks what Zelenskyy's strategy is:</p> <p>[...]</p>	In time Ukraine, 2022.

				<p>Zelenskyy (translated): “I am the President of Ukraine. I am based here and I think I know the details deeper than any other president. [...] we do understand what the risks are and which of those risks are priority.”</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>“I am not saying that escalation is excluded. We have been talking about this for eight years now. It has happened already. This escalation already happened. Part of our territory is unfortunately temporarily occupied. [...] We need to stabilise the economy of our country, because of those signals which say that tomorrow there will be war, because these signals were sent by even respected leaders of respected countries. Sometimes they are not even diplomatic language. They are saying tomorrow is the war. This means panic on the market, panic in the financial sector. [...] So, how much does it cost our country. [...] We need unity of our people. People have to be certain and sure in their army, in their President. The people should trust their government and the special services. [...] But this varied information, from varied sources cannot mislead our country, because this raises economic panic.”</p> <p>Zelenskyy mentions that after economic highs in 2021, Ukraine started to face economic setbacks, that according to him, started after the beginning of the media-coverage he is addressing.</p> <p>“They [Russia] are trying to build up the psychological pressure.”</p> <p>Later another reporter questions whether downplaying the threat is really only to preserve the economy. Among other statements, Zelenskyy states the following:</p> <p>“We may lose the economy of our country. People come first.” He also points out that there is still a possibility of peaceful resolution. Therefore, he states, “we have to be very careful of how we speak out.”</p> <p>“We understand what is happening to people. These are courageous people, but the courageous people have to protect their country and keep on working at the same time and keep on bringing up and nurturing their children.”</p> <p>Another reporter asks how Ukraine is preparing for “what everyone is describing, except the Ukrainian government, as an imminent attack?” Zelenskyy:</p> <p>“We should have no panic. [...] We have to arm our armed forces. They have everything, but it is never as much as we can provide considering the capacity of our economy. [...] With a powerful economy you can increase the equipped state of your armed forces.”</p> <p>“The morale of our people will also be a defence asset and people have to work for our state, for its economy.”</p>	
23	28 January, 2022	<p>Lloyd J. Austin <i>U.S. Defence Secretary</i></p> <p>General Mark A. Milley <i>Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff</i></p>	The statements are made during a Pentagon press conference.	<p>During the press conference it is stated that Russia has amassed 100.000 troops near the border of Ukraine, including in Crimea and Belarus, an amount that “far and away exceeds what we would typically see them do for exercises”. It is also stated that Russia has deployed all the necessary military hardware to start a large-scale invasion and possibly occupy large parts of Ukraine.</p>	U.S. Department of State, 2022b.
24	29 January, 2022	Dmytro Kuleba	The statements were provided by Kuleba in an interview that is put in a	“We do not underestimate the level of threat, but we have been fighting this war since 2014 and we understand that anything can happen at any moment.”	VICE News, 2022.

		<i>Foreign Minister of Ukraine</i>	VICE News video about the unfolding crisis regarding Ukraine.	<p>Asked by a reporter whether he understands that the different messages from the U.S. and Ukraine on the threat level are confusing for anyone following the events in and around Ukraine, he states the following:</p> <p>“We are on the same page with the United States when it comes to the assessment of the threat, but while president Putin hasn’t moved any additional Russian soldier or Russian tank into Ukraine, we already suffer economically and become weaker, because of the panic spread in the society.”</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>“We shouldn’t allow president Putin getting what he wants, without even crossing the red line.”</p>	
25	31 January, 2022	<p>Linda Thomas-Greenfield</p> <p><i>Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations</i></p> <p>Rosemary DiCarlo</p> <p><i>United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs</i></p> <p>Vassily A. Nebenzia</p> <p><i>Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations</i></p>	The statements were made during the first public UNSC meeting, since tensions start to rise after the Russian troop congestion at Ukraine’s borders. The UNSC convened on the United States’ initiative.	<p>Thomas-Greenfield: “We call for this meeting, because of what we have all have witnessed in the course of the past few months in terms of the actions of the Russian Federation [...] on their territory on the border with Ukraine. They indicate that is within their own territory, but it is also very close to their neighbour’s border. It is a neighbour that has been invaded already before. It is a neighbour that has Russian troops occupying their territory.”</p> <p>“We have had numerous meetings, over a hundred meetings, over the course over the past few weeks, both with Russian officials and in consultations with our European and Ukrainian colleagues. All have these meetings have been in private. We think it is now time to have a meeting in public and have this discussed in a public forum.”</p> <p>“We have worked with the Ukrainians at their request to provide assistance to them so that they can prepare for what they see as inevitable, including having provided 200 million dollars in assistance in recent weeks and over five billion dollars in assistance since 2014 and that is so that they can be prepared.”</p> <p><u>DiCarlo:</u></p> <p>“It is reported that over 100.000 troops and heavy weaponry from the Russian Federation are positioned along the border with Ukraine. Unspecified numbers of Russian troops and weaponry are also reportedly deployed to Belarus. Ahead of large scale joint military exercises in February on the borders with Ukraine Poland and the Baltic States.”</p> <p>“Accusations and recriminations among the various actors involved in the ongoing discussions, have created uncertainty and apprehension for many that a military confrontation is impending.”</p> <p><u>Thomas-Greenfield:</u></p> <p>“The situation we are facing in Europe is urgent and dangerous.” Thomas-Greenfield further recalls that the UNSC was founded after the Second World War to “address precisely the kind of threat that Ukraine now faces”. She states: “Our charge is not only to address conflicts after they occur, but to prevent them from happening in the first place.”</p> <p>“First, let’s be clear about the facts. Russia has assembled a massive military force of more than 100.000 troops along Ukraine’s border. These are combat forces and special forces prepare to conduct offensive actions in Ukraine. [...] And as we speak Russia is sending even more forces and arms to join them. [...] Russia has also moved nearly 5.000 troops into Belarus. With short-range ballistic missiles, special forces and anti-aircraft batteries. We have seen evidence that Russia intends to expand that presence to more than 30.000 troops near the Belarus-Ukraine border [...] by early February.” She further states that Russia uses disinformation to make it appear as if Ukraine and Western states are the aggressors, therewith fabricating a pretext for invasion.”</p> <p>“This is an escalation and a pattern of aggression that we’ve seen from [the Russian Federation] again and again,” while further mentioning Russia’s past incursions in Crimea, other parts of Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova.</p> <p><u>Nebenzia (translated):</u></p> <p>[...]</p>	United Nations, 2022a; United Nations, 2022b.

			<p>“The military action of Russia against Ukraine, that they are all assuring us is going to take place in just a few weeks time, if not, a few days time. There, however, is no proof confirming such a serious accusations, whatsoever being put forward. However, it is not preventing people from whipping up hysteria, to such an extent that an actual economic impact is already being felt by our Ukrainian neighbours.” [...] He later continues by stating that no Russian official has said something about invading Ukraine and that they are categorically deny such allegations. “Everybody who claims the opposite is misleading you.”</p> <p>“If our Western colleagues, who provoked and supported the 2014 bloody anti-constitutional coup, bringing to power in Kyiv nationalists, radicals, Russophobes, and pure fascists, or Nazis rather. If they had not done this than we to date would be living in a spirit of good neighbourly relations and mutual cooperation, however some in the West just don’t clearly like this positive scenario.”</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>“The aim of our Western colleagues is to prevent the natural brotherly coexistence of [...] our peoples and countries, which would destroy their plans of weaken Russia and create an arc of instability around it.”</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>“Since our American colleagues convened us today, let them show us any evidence apart from bogus narratives that Russia is intending to attack Ukraine. In the statement of my American colleague there was a significant hotchpotch of accusations of aggressive actions by Russia, but no specific fact given.”</p> <p>“Incidentally I’d like to put a question, not only to our U.S. colleagues [...]: where did you get the figure of a 100.000 troops that are deployed, as you state, on the Russia-Ukraine border, although that is not the case. We have never cited that figure, we have never confirmed that figure. We do recall [...] the Secretary of State Colin Powell in this very room waived around a vial with an unidentified substance as so-called evidence of the presence of WMDs in Iraq. They didn’t find any weapons, but what happened with that country is well known to one and all.”</p> <p>“Ukraine as well, is a country, it seems, that our colleagues are prepared to sacrifice for their own pernicious interests. Otherwise it is hard to explain why, in convening us today, the initiators of this meeting did not even heed the opinion of the President of Ukraine, who asked the West not to whip up the panic, which already had a harmful impact on the economic situation in that country. Otherwise, it is difficult to explain why our colleagues from the U.S. and a number of other countries are actively pumping Ukraine full of weapons and ammunition and talk about this with great pride, moreover.”</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>“The manoeuvres of the U.S. regarding the convening of this meeting is particularly hypocritical, because it was the Americans who hold the record for having troop presences outside their territory. American troops, advisors and weapons, including nuclear weapons, are frequently deployed thousands of kilometres from Washington.” He further adds that American troops has killed thousands of civilians. Additionally, he states that the U.S. consistently “has used force against other states without the authorisation of the UN Security Council.”</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>“There is data available on the internet stating that there are 750 U.S. bases in more than 80 countries in the world. The overall number deployed U.S. troops abroad is 175.000, and more than 60.000 U.S. troops are deployed in Europe.” He further makes the comparison between the U.S. military budget, and Russia’s military budget, which is, as he claims,</p>	
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				<p>twelve times lower. “So, these examples pose a specific threat to international peace and security, they are a clear example of this.”</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>“If our Western partners push Kyiv to sabotage the Minsk agreements, something that they are willingly doing, then that might end in the absolute worst way for Ukraine. And not because, someone has destroyed it, but because it would have destroyed itself. [...] Don’t try to shift the blame on someone else.”</p> <p>[...]</p>	
26	2 February, 2022	Jen Psaki <i>White House Press Secretary</i>	The statements were made during a press briefing.	<p>A reporter asks Psaki for some clarification on the assessment of a Russian invasion of Ukraine, after Linda Thomas-Greenfield stated a day earlier she would not say that the Biden administration argues that an invasion is “imminent”.</p> <p>Psaki: “I used that once. I think others have used that once. And then we stopped using it because I think it sent an — a message that we weren’t intending to send, which was that we knew that President Putin had made a decision.”</p> <p>Psaki: “I would say the vast majority of times I’ve talked about it, we said, “He could invade at any time.” That’s true; we still don’t know that he’s made a decision.”</p> <p>Reporter: “Okay, so you’re not using that word (inaudible)?”</p> <p>Psaki: “I think I used it once last week.”</p> <p>Reporter: “But the decision now is that you’re not describing it as “imminent” anymore?”</p> <p>Psaki: “I haven’t in over a week.”</p>	The White House, 2022e.
27	2 February, 2022	John F. Kirby <i>Pentagon Press Secretary</i>	Kirby holds a press briefing in which he made announcements.	<p>“[W]e remain focused on the evolving situation in Europe, and Russia's actions on the Ukrainian border and in Belarus.” [...] “President Biden has been clear that the United States will respond to the growing threat to Europe's security and stability.” [...] “As part of this commitment and to be prepared for a range of contingencies, the United States will soon move additional forces to Romania, Poland and Germany.” [...] “First, 1,000 soldiers that are currently based in Germany will reposition to Romania in the coming days.” [...] “Second, we are moving an additional force of about approximately 2,000 troops from the United States to Europe in the next few days.” [...] “Third, and finally, all of these forces are separate and in addition to the 8,500 personnel in the United States on heightened alert posture that I announced last week.”</p>	U.S. Department of Defense, 2022c.
28	3 February, 2022	John F. Kirby <i>Pentagon Press Secretary</i>	During a press briefing, Kirby was asked a question by an attending reporter.	<p>“you know, we’ve discussed this idea of false flags by the Russians before. We’ve made no secret of that, and we do have information that it is – that – that – that the Russians are likely to want to fabricate a pretext for an invasion, which again, is right out of their playbook.</p> <p>One option is the Russian government; we – we think is planning to stage a fake attack by Ukrainian military or intelligence forces against Russian sovereign territory or against Russian-speaking people the – to therefore justify their action.</p> <p>As part of this fake attack, we believe that Russia would produce a very graphic propaganda video, which would include corpses and actors that would be depicting mourners and images of destroyed locations, as – as well as military equipment, at the hands of Ukraine or the West, even to the point where some – some of this equipment would be – to make – made to look like it was Western-supplied, Ukrainian – you know, to Ukraine equipment.”</p>	U.S. Department of Defense, 2022d.

29	3 February, 2022	<p>Ned Price <i>Spokesperson Department of State</i></p> <p>Matt Lee <i>Associated Press Reporter</i></p>	<p>The statements were made and the dialogue took place during a daily press briefing.</p>	<p>Price: "We have previously noted our strong concerns regarding Russian disinformation and the likelihood that Moscow might create – seek to create a false flag operation to initiate military activity. Now, we can say that the United States has information that Russia is planning to stage fabricated attacks by Ukrainian military or intelligence forces as a pretext for a further invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>One possible option the Russians are considering, and which we made public today, involves the production of a propaganda video – a video with graphic scenes of false explosions – depicting corpses, crisis actors pretending to be mourners, and images of destroyed locations or military equipment – entirely fabricated by Russian intelligence.</p> <p>To be clear, the production of this propaganda video is one of a number of options that the Russian Government is developing as a fake pretext to initiate and potentially justify military aggression against Ukraine. We don't know if Russia will necessarily use this or another option in the coming days. We are publicizing it now, however, in order to lay bare the extent of Russia's destabilizing actions towards Ukraine and to dissuade Russia from continuing this dangerous campaign and ultimately launching a military attack.</p> <p>Russia has signaled it's willing to continue diplomatic talks as a means to de-escalate, but actions such as these suggest otherwise."</p> <p>Associated Press reporter Matt Lee voiced his criticism regarding the statements made by Price, asking whether something like that already happened and whether there is proof that accompany the allegations.</p> <p>Price: "We told you a few weeks ago that we have information indicating Russia also has already pre-positioned a group of operatives to conduct a false flag operation in eastern Ukraine. So that, Matt, to your question, is an action that Russia has already taken."</p> <p>Lee: "No, it's an action that you say that they have taken, but you have shown no evidence to confirm that. And I'm going to get to the next question here, which is: What is the evidence that they – I mean, this is – like, crisis actors? Really? This is like Alex Jones territory you're getting into now. What evidence do you have to support the idea that there is some propaganda film in the making?"</p> <p>Price: "Matt, this is derived from information known to the U.S. Government, intelligence information that we have declassified. I think you know —"</p> <p>Lee: "Okay, well, where is it? Where is this information?"</p> <p>Price: "It is intelligence information that we have declassified."</p> <p>Lee: "Well, where is it? Where is the declassified information?"</p> <p>Price: "I just delivered it."</p> <p>Lee: "No, you made a series of allegations and statements —"</p> <p>Price: "Would you like us to print out the topper? Because you will see a transcript of this briefing that you can print out for yourself."</p> <p>Lee: "But that's not evidence, Ned. That's you saying it. That's not evidence. I'm sorry."</p> <p>After this, the following dialogue takes place:</p> <p>Price: "I know. That was my point. You have been doing this for quite a while."</p>	U.S. Department of State, 2022c; U.S. Department of State, 2022d.
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30	3 February, 2022	Dmitri S. Peskov <i>Kremlin spokesman</i>	In response to Russia’s military build-up, the U.S decided upon sending 3000 additional troops to Poland and Romania. Peskov’s statements were a reaction on this.	<p>Peskov accuses the U.S. of "igniting tensions on the European continent" and describes the U.S. troop movement as a threatening act “in the vicinity of our borders.”</p> <p>“Clearly, Russian concerns are justified and understandable.”</p> <p>“All measures to ensure Russia's security and interests are also understandable.”</p>	The New York Times, 2022.
31	6 February, 2022	Jake Sullivan <i>U.S. National Security Advisor</i>	The statement was made in ABC News’ program This Week.	<p>“We believe that there is a very distinct possibility that Vladimir Putin will order an attack on Ukraine. It could take a number of different forms. It could happen as soon as tomorrow or it could take some weeks yet. He has put himself in a position with military deployments to be able to act aggressively against Ukraine at any time now.”</p>	ABC News, 2022.
32	9 February, 2022	Jen Psaki <i>White House Press Secretary</i>	The statements were made during a press briefing.	<p>“The White House has made it pretty clear there is no plan for a mass evacuation of American citizens in Ukraine. And, in fact, you and the President and others have suggested that Americans who are in Ukraine should leave now if they can.”</p> <p>“At the same time, it’s been projected that Russia could overtake Kyiv in two days if it invades.”</p>	The White House, 2022f.
33	10 February, 2022	Joe Biden <i>President of the United States</i>	Biden made the statements during an interview with NBC News.	<p>Biden urges U.S. citizens to depart Ukraine: "American citizens should leave now.”</p> <p>“It’s not like we’re dealing with a terrorist organization. We’re dealing with one of the largest armies in the world. It’s a very different situation, and things could go crazy quickly.”</p>	Finn, 2022.

34	11 February, 2022	Jake Sullivan <i>U.S. National Security Advisor</i>	The statements were made during a press briefing.	<p>“We continue to see signs of Russian escalation, including new forces arriving at the Ukrainian border.”</p> <p>“As we’ve said before, we are in the window when an invasion could begin at any time should Vladimir Putin decide to order it. I will not comment on the details of our intelligence information. But I do want to be clear: It could begin during the Olympics, despite a lot of speculation that it would only happen after the Olympics.”</p> <p>“We encourage all American citizens who remain in Ukraine to depart immediately.”</p> <p>“We want to be crystal-clear on this point: Any American in Ukraine should leave as soon as possible, and in any event, in the next 24 to 48 hours.”</p> <p>“The risk is now high enough and the threat is now immediate enough that this is what prudence demands.”</p> <p>“I’m not going to get into intelligence information. But if you look at the disposition of forces in both Belarus and in Russia — on the other side of the Ukrainian border, from the north, from the east — the Russians are in a position to be able to mount a major military action in Ukraine any day now. And for that reason, we believe that it is important for us to communicate to our allies and partners, to the Ukrainians, and to the American citizens who are still there.”</p> <p>“I want to be crystal-clear though: We are not saying that a decision has been taken — a final decision has been taken by President Putin. What we are saying is that we have a sufficient level of concern, based on what we are seeing on the ground and what our intelligence analysts have picked up, that we are sending this clear message. And it remains a message that we have now been sending for some time. And it is — yes, it is an urgent message because we are in an urgent situation.”</p> <p>Later, a reporter asks the following question: “And just — because this is getting so close now and the concern that you’re weighing towards the American people, is there a need to provide some underlying evidence of just what you’re seeing that shows Americans — this is a country that went through Iraq — and concerns about what the intelligence is showing? Does the administration see a need to just provide underlying intelligence?”</p> <p>Sullivan: “Well, let me just start with a fundamental distinction between the situation in Iraq and the situation today.”</p> <p>“In the situation in Iraq, intelligence was used and deployed from this very podium to start a war. We are trying to stop a war, to prevent a war, to avert a war. And all we can do is come here before you in good faith and share everything that we know to the best of our ability, while protecting sources and methods so we continue to get the access to intelligence we need.”</p>	The White House, 2022g.
35	12 February, 2022	Anonymous senior Defense official	N/a	The Defense official confirmed that an additional 3,000 soldiers will deploy to Europe. “They are being deployed to reassure our NATO allies, deter any potential aggression against NATO’s eastern flank, train with host-nation forces and contribute to a wide range of contingencies,” according to the official.	Garamone, 2022.
36	12 February, 2022	Anonymous Senior State Department official	Via AP News.	The official stated that due to the potential of attacks on Kyiv in the event of a major Russian invasion, the decision was made to evacuate almost all its staff from the U.S. embassy. The official also repeated the warning that U.S. citizens should immediately leave Ukraine.	Lee, 2022.
37	12 February, 2022	Volodymyr Zelenskyy <i>President of Ukraine</i>	N/a	<p>Amid more warnings of an invasion by Western countries, and the evacuation of their diplomatic personnel, Zelenskyy stated that everyone should remain calm: “right now, the people’s biggest enemy is panic.”</p> <p>“I think there is too much information in the media about a deep, full-scale war.”</p>	BBC News, 2022a; BBC News, 2022b.

				"We understand all the risks, we understand that they exist. If you or someone else has additional 100% reliable information about the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine... please share it with us."	
38	12 February, 2022	Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation	The Foreign Ministry provided this response after the EU and NATO on behalf of their member states delivered a joint response to Russia's security demands.	Moscow accused Western nations of using media to spread lies about Russian intentions with the aim of trying to distract from their own aggressive acts.	Mason & Balmforth, 2022.
39	13 February, 2022	Jake Sullivan <i>U.S. National Security Advisor</i>	The statements were made during an interview for "Face the Nation", a CBS program aired on the radio and television.	<p>"We have seen over the course of the past 10 days a dramatic acceleration in the buildup of Russian forces and the disposition of those forces in such a way that they could launch a military action, essentially at any time. They could do so this coming week. But of course, it still awaits the go order."</p> <p>"We also are watching very carefully for the possibility that there is a pretext or a false flag operation to kick off the Russian action in which Russian intelligence services conduct some kind of attack on Russian proxy forces in eastern Ukraine or on Russian citizens, and then blame it on the Ukrainians."</p> <p>"the Russian media has been laying the groundwork for this publicly by trying to condition their public that some kind of attack by the Ukrainians is imminent. And there is a kind of bizarre quality to all of this where the Russians are claiming they are the ones who are under threat, despite the fact that they have amassed more than 100.000 forces on the troops of- excuse me, on the border of their neighbor. And they have done so not just on their own territory, but on the territory of Belarus, which is the country, of course, that borders Ukraine to the North."</p>	CBS News, 2022.
40	14 February, 2022	Volodymyr Zelenskyy <i>President of Ukraine</i>	Zelenskyy made the statements during a video address to the country.	<p>"We are being intimidated by the great war and the date of the military invasion is being set again. This is not the first time."</p> <p>"The war against us is being systematically waged on all fronts. On the military one, they increase the contingent around the border. On the diplomatic one, they are trying to deprive us of the right to determine our own foreign policy course. On the energy one, they limit the supply of gas, electricity and coal. On the information one, they seek to spread panic among citizens and investors through the media."</p> <p>"The foothold of our army is the confidence of their own people and a strong economy."</p>	Zelenskyy, 2022.
41	17 February, 2022	Joe Biden <i>President of the United States</i>	Biden made the statements on the White House South Lawn before departing for Ohio.	<p>Joe Biden is asked how high the threat of a Russian invasion of Ukraine is. He answers: "It's very high because they have not moved any of their troops out."</p> <p>"They have moved more troops in, number one. Number two, we have reason to believe they are engaged in a false flag operation to have an excuse to go in. Every indication we have is they are prepared to go into Ukraine, attack Ukraine."</p> <p>Later another reporter asks Biden is he senses an attack will happen, and when it will happen. Biden states the following: "Yes. My sense is it will happen in the next several days."</p>	Klein & Liptak, 2022.
42	17 February, 2022	Karine Jean-Pierre <i>White House Principal Deputy Press Secretary</i>	A press gaggle was held aboard Air Force One, en route Ohio.	"But as we have said, we are in the window where we believe an attack could come at any time and that it would be preceded by a fabricated pretext that the Russians use as an excuse to launch an invasion, which could take many forms."	The White House, 2022h.

			<p>“So, we believe it’s important that the world be watching for that pretext and that people treat any such claims with the appropriate skepticism, especially when they come from Russian state media sources and aren’t backed up by the independent media reporter — reporting. Russia relies on confusion and obfuscation to cover its attacks. We would all expect — expect it and be ready for it. So that’s just from the (inaudible).”</p> <p>A reporter asked what a false pretext may look like. Jean-Pierre answered as follows:</p> <p>“So, just — let me just give you some examples. So that false pretext could take a number of different forms: a provocation in Donbas; a claim about NATO activity by land, at sea, or in the air; an incursion into Russian territory.”</p> <p>“And so we are — already have seen an increase in false claims by the Russians in the past few days, including reports of an unmarked grave of civilians — of civilians allegedly killed by the Ukrainian armed forces; statements Ukraine is committing genocide in eastern Ukraine; that the U.S. and the Ukraine are developing biological or chemical weapons; and what the West — that the West is funneling in guerrillas to kill locals. Each of these allegation is categorically false.”</p> <p>“We’ve been very clear about this, and we should expect more false, again, reports from Russian state media over the coming days. And we’ve seen this playbook before from Russia: their previous military incursions into Ukraine and in Georgia. So, again, this is — this is something that we are anticipating and that the President has talked about to expect a potential pretext.”</p> <p>After a question by one of the reporters, Jean-Pierre gave the following answer:</p> <p>“the evidence on the ground is that Russia is moving toward an imminent invasion. This week, the Russian government said that it would withdraw troops from the broder [sic] — from the Ukraine border. And they received a lot of attention for that claim but — here and around the world. And — but we know that is absolutely false, which you’ve heard us say from — coming from our administration.”</p> <p>“In fact, we have now confirmed that, in the last several days, Russia has increased its troops presence along that Ukraine border by as many as 7,000 troops, with some arriving in the past 24 hours. This is cause of serious concerns.”</p> <p>“So we continue to receive indications that they could launch a false pretext, as I just mentioned, and so we just want to make sure that the world is aware and knows that this is a possibility, because it is indeed part of the Russian playbook.”</p> <p>Another questions pertained what the White House was doing to prepare Americans for the possibility of a war in Ukraine. Jean-Pierre stated the following:</p> <p>“Well, one of the reasons that the President spoke the other day is to speak directly to the American public and to the world about what to expect and what process and — what process we were taking in this crisis that Russia, remember, has created.”</p> <p>“And so, he wanted to be direct. He wanted to lay down what we’ve been doing for the last several months, the last several weeks for the American public, and talked about the impact of this potential — if Russia decides to invade, how this would impact the American public. And so that’s one way that the President is communicating with the American public.”</p> <p>“But we have been very, very clear, the President has been very clear for the last several months, the last several weeks, and being — and being transparent about how we’re moving forward with our European allies and partners in this moment, and what we’re trying to do to deter and how we’re trying to go to the direction of diplomacy.”</p>	
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43	17 February, 2022	Antony J. Blinken <i>Secretary of State</i>	Blinken made the statements during a UNSC meeting.	<p>“Over the past months, without provocation or justification, Russia has amassed more than 150,000 troops around Ukraine’s borders, in Russia, Belarus, occupied Crimea. Russia says it’s drawing down those forces. We do not see that happening on the ground. Our information indicates clearly that these forces – including ground troops, aircraft, ships – are preparing to launch an attack against Ukraine in the coming days.”</p> <p>“Russia plans to manufacture a pretext for its attack. This could be a violent event that Russia will blame on Ukraine, or an outrageous accusation that Russia will level against the Ukrainian Government. We don’t know exactly the form it will take. It could be a fabricated so-called “terrorist” bombing inside Russia, the invented discovery of a mass grave, a staged drone strike against civilians, or a fake – even a real – attack using chemical weapons. Russia may describe this event as ethnic cleansing or a genocide, making a mockery of a concept that we in this chamber do not take lightly, nor do I do take lightly based on my family history.”</p> <p>“And here today, we are laying it out in great detail, with the hope that by sharing what we know with the world, we can influence Russia to abandon the path of war and choose a different path while there’s still time.”</p> <p>“Now, I am mindful that some have called into question our information, recalling previous instances where intelligence ultimately did not bear out. But let me be clear: I am here today, not to start a war, but to prevent one. The information I’ve presented here is validated by what we’ve seen unfolding in plain sight before our eyes for months. And remember that while Russia has repeatedly derided our warnings and alarms as melodrama and nonsense, they have been steadily amassing more than 150,000 troops on Ukraine’s borders, as well as the capabilities to conduct a massive military assault.”</p>	Blinken, 2022.
44	18 February, 2022	Joe Biden <i>President of the United States</i>	The remarks were made during a press briefing that was meant as an update by the President on Russia and Ukraine.	<p>Biden starts his remarks by stating that Russian-backed fighters are increasingly violating the ceasefire, and that the amount of disinformation has increased as well:</p> <p>“All these are consistent with the playbook the Russians have used before: to set up a false justification to act against Ukraine. This is also in line with the pretext scenarios that the United States and our Allies and partners have been warning about for weeks.”</p> <p>“But the fact remains: Russian troops currently have Ukraine surrounded — from Belarus, along the Russian border with Ukraine, to the Black Sea in the south — and all of its border.”</p> <p>“You know, look, we have reason to believe the Russian forces are planning to and intend to attack Ukraine in the coming week — in the coming days. We believe that they will target Ukraine’s capital, Kyiv, a city of 2.8 million innocent people.”</p> <p>A reporter later asks: “And do you have any indication about whether President Putin has made a decision on whether to invade? Do you feel confident that he — that he hasn’t made that decision already?”</p> <p>Biden: “As of this moment, I’m convinced he’s made the decision. We have reason to believe that.”</p>	The White House, 2022i.
45	21 February, 2022	Vladimir Putin <i>President of the Russian Federation</i>	The statements were made in a televised speech in which Putin also announced that Russia recognises the independence and sovereignty of the Donetsk People’s	<p>Putin claims that Ukraine attempts to create their own nuclear weapons, using technologies created during Soviet times. “Ukraine’s Western patrons may help it acquire these weapons to create yet another threat to our country. We are seeing how persistently the Kiev regime is being pumped with arms. Since 2014, the United States alone has spent billions of dollars for this purpose, including supplies of arms and equipment and training of specialists. In the last few months, there has been a constant flow of Western weapons to Ukraine, ostentatiously, with the entire world watching.”</p>	Putin, 2022a.

			<p>Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic.</p>	<p>“The United States and NATO have started an impudent development of Ukrainian territory as a theatre of potential military operations. Their regular joint exercises are obviously anti-Russian. Last year alone, over 23,000 troops and more than a thousand units of hardware were involved.”</p> <p>He further claims that the U.S. is building military facilities across Ukraine for “for a rapid buildup of the NATO military group on Ukrainian territory.”</p> <p>Furthermore, the speech makes it apparent that Putin sees that the Americans are carrying out an anti-Russia policy, and that it uses its influence on its allies to make sure it can achieve their agenda.</p> <p>Later in his speech, Putin states: “In 1990, when German unification was discussed, the United States promised the Soviet leadership that NATO jurisdiction or military presence will not expand one inch to the east and that the unification of Germany will not lead to the spread of NATO's military organisation to the east.”</p> <p>“In addition, the United States is developing its all-purpose Standard Missile-6, which can provide air and missile defence, as well as strike ground and surface targets. In other words, the allegedly defensive US missile defence system is developing and expanding its new offensive capabilities.”</p> <p>“I will explain that American strategic planning documents confirm the possibility of a so-called preemptive strike at enemy missile systems. We also know the main adversary of the United States and NATO. It is Russia. NATO documents officially declare our country to be the main threat to Euro-Atlantic security. Ukraine will serve as an advanced bridgehead for such a strike.”</p> <p>“Finally, after the US destroyed the INF Treaty, the Pentagon has been openly developing many land-based attack weapons, including ballistic missiles that are capable of hitting targets at a distance of up to 5,500 km. If deployed in Ukraine, such systems will be able to hit targets in Russia’s entire European part. The flying time of Tomahawk cruise missiles to Moscow will be less than 35 minutes; ballistic missiles from Kharkov will take seven to eight minutes; and hypersonic assault weapons, four to five minutes. It is like a knife to the throat. I have no doubt that they hope to carry out these plans, as they did many times in the past, expanding NATO eastward, moving their military infrastructure to Russian borders and fully ignoring our concerns, protests and warnings. Excuse me, but they simply did not care at all about such things and did whatever they deemed necessary.”</p>	
46	22 February, 2022	Joe Biden <i>President of the United States</i>	<p>Biden made these remarks in response of Putin’s speech a day earlier. In which he announced the recognition of the Donetsk People’s Republic and the Lugansk People’s Republic.</p>	<p>Biden starts with explaining what Putin announced in his speech.</p> <p>“Last night, Putin authorized Russian forces to deploy into the region — these regions. Today, he asserted that these regions are — actually extend deeper than the two areas he recognized, claiming large areas currently under the jurisdiction of the Ukraine government. He’s setting up a rationale to take more territory by force, in my view. And if we listen to his speech last night — and many of you did, I know — he’s — he’s setting up a rationale to go much further. This is the beginning of a Russian invasion of Ukraine, as he indicated and asked permission to be able to do from his Duma.”</p> <p>President Biden states that, as a result of Putin’s actions, he starts imposing sanctions on Russia, continues to deliver defensive weapons to Ukraine, and authorised the “additional movements of U.S. forces and equipment already stationed in Europe to strengthen our Baltic Allies — Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.”</p> <p>He further voices that “there are still well over 150,000 Russian troops surrounding Ukraine” and that the positioning of these troops, the movement of certain medical supplies and the authorisation of the Russian Parliament to use military force outside of Russian territory indicates that a “[fu]rther Russian assault into Ukraine remains a severe threat in the days ahead.”</p>	Biden, 2022.

47	24 February, 2022	Vladimir Putin <i>President of the Russian Federation</i>	<p>The statements were made in a speech in which Putin announced his order to launch a “special military operation” against Ukraine and was televised right before Russian bombs and rockets hit cities all over Ukraine.</p>	<p>Putin addresses “a state of euphoria created by the feeling of absolute superiority, a kind of modern absolutism, coupled with the low cultural standards and arrogance of those who formulated and pushed through decisions that suited only themselves,” therewith referring to Western states after the end of the Cold War. He mentions a few examples of this. “First a bloody military operation was waged against Belgrade, without the UN Security Council’s sanction but with combat aircraft and missiles used in the heart of Europe.” “Then came the turn of Iraq, Libya and Syria. The illegal use of military power against Libya and the distortion of all the UN Security Council decisions on Libya ruined the state, created a huge seat of international terrorism, and pushed the country towards a humanitarian catastrophe, into the vortex of a civil war, which has continued there for years. The tragedy, which was created for hundreds of thousands and even millions of people not only in Libya but in the whole region, has led to a large-scale exodus from the Middle East and North Africa to Europe. A similar fate was also prepared for Syria. The combat operations conducted by the Western coalition in that country without the Syrian government’s approval or UN Security Council’s sanction can only be defined as aggression and intervention.”</p> <p>“But the example that stands apart from the above events is, of course, the invasion of Iraq without any legal grounds. They used the pretext of allegedly reliable information available in the United States about the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. To prove that allegation, the US Secretary of State held up a vial with white powder, publicly, for the whole world to see, assuring the international community that it was a chemical warfare agent created in Iraq. It later turned out that all of that was a fake and a sham, and that Iraq did not have any chemical weapons. Incredible and shocking but true. We witnessed lies made at the highest state level and voiced from the high UN rostrum. As a result we see a tremendous loss in human life, damage, destruction, and a colossal upsurge of terrorism.”</p> <p>“Overall, it appears that nearly everywhere, in many regions of the world where the United States brought its law and order, this created bloody, non-healing wounds and the curse of international terrorism and extremism. I have only mentioned the most glaring but far from only examples of disregard for international law.”</p> <p>Putin further states that all allies of the U.S. “not only humbly and obediently say yes to and parrot it at the slightest pretext but also imitate its behaviour and enthusiastically accept the rules it is offering them.” He sees that the Western bloc is formed by the United States.</p> <p>Furthermore, Putin states: “The United States is pursuing its own objectives, while neglecting our interests. Of course, this situation begs a question: what next, what are we to expect?” He draws a similarity between WWII in which “the Soviet Union went to great lengths to prevent war or at least delay its outbreak.” [...] “As a result, the country was not prepared to counter the invasion by Nazi Germany, which attacked our Motherland on June 22, 1941, without declaring war. The country stopped the enemy and went on to defeat it, but this came at a tremendous cost. The attempt to appease the aggressor ahead of the Great Patriotic War proved to be a mistake which came at a high cost for our people. In the first months after the hostilities broke out, we lost vast territories of strategic importance, as well as millions of lives. We will not make this mistake the second time. We have no right to do so.”</p> <p>He continues mentioning NATO’s Eastward expansion, the policy of the United States and its allies of containing Russia, the subsequent genocide that takes place and the support by NATO’s “leading countries” for far-right nationalists and neo-Nazis in Ukraine that “will undoubtedly try to bring war to Crimea just as they have done in Donbass, to kill innocent people just as members of the punitive units of Ukrainian nationalists and Hitler’s accomplices did during the Great Patriotic War” and “openly laid claim to several other Russian regions.” After this he states that there is no other option for Russia than to carry out “a special military operation.”</p>	Putin, 2022b.
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