From Public Diplomacy to Diplomacy which becomes Public: Investigating Intelligence Disclosure as an Information Warfare Tactic

LAURA SIEWERT

Lund University

Department of strategic communication

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Abstract

**From Public Diplomacy to Diplomacy which becomes Public:
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This master's thesis explores the phenomenon of intelligence disclosure within the context of digital public diplomacy. The focus is on the "Taurus Scandal," where a confidential conversation among high-ranking German military officials about potential Taurus missile deliveries to support Ukraine was intercepted and published by Russia, leading to political and diplomatic turmoil within Germany and among its allies. The thesis examines the strategic dimension of transparency by analyzing the reactions and communication strategies of the involved actors.

The findings underscore the dual nature of transparency. While it is commonly perceived as a normative ideal in democratic discourse, this study critically examines how transparency can also be strategically employed to achieve individual goals. Moreover, the thesis delves deeper into the case of deceptive deployment, stressing the potential misuse of transparency as a tool in information warfare. Hostile actors, such as Russia in this study, utilized the deceptive deployment of intelligence and transparency to coerce, disguise, and distract, polarize, compromise national sovereignty, and even decrease transparency.

Grounded in Jürgen Habermas' principles of deliberative democracy, the Rhetorical Arena Theory, and the concept of strategic transparency, this study sheds light on the complexities of modern diplomatic communication and the delicate balance between secrecy and disclosure in international relations.

Keyword: Public Diplomacy, Information Warfare, Intelligence Disclosure,
Digital Disruptions*,* Deliberative Democracy, Rethorical Arena Theory,
Strategic Transparency

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

"I am now faced with the challenge of talking about a conversation that was never intended for you or me to hear. Experts were engaging in a technical discussion when they were eavesdropped on by a foreign, hostile intelligence service. This intelligence service then made the conversation public." – Arne Collatz (Document #05, p. 28)

This quote from Arne Collatz, Chief of the Press Section at the German Federal Ministry of Defence, highlights a growing challenge in modern diplomacy: in a world that seems increasingly, almost pervasively, transparent, it is becoming more and more difficult to keep secrets. His words refer to one of the first press conferences held in connection with the "Taurus scandal" – an incident in which a confidential conversation between high-ranking German military officials was intercepted and afterwards published by a Russian intelligence service. The eavesdropped discussion centred around the potential delivery of Taurus cruise missiles to Ukraine, a highly sensitive and politically charged issue given the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

The field of diplomacy aims to mediate and resolve such conflicts through communication. But the traditional practice of diplomacy, which once relied on closed-door negotiations and discreet communication channels (Roselle et al., 2014; Verčič, 2021), has never been more challenged by the emergence of new media ecologies and hyperconnectivity than today (Bjola et al., 2019). With the proliferation of digital technologies and social media platforms, information flows freely and rapidly across borders (Cotton & Sebastião, 2021), empowering the public to both inform and be informed about issues. Therefore, the relevance of public diplomacy has increased in recent years (Verčič, 2021). With the public having digitally more access and means to participate and exert influence in political affairs, state

actors must legitimize their actions and policies to maintain and strengthen their role. In addition to the constant pressure to remain accountable, there is a widely held belief that transparency, credibility, and authenticity in strategic communication are essential tools for gaining and maintaining the public's trust (Christensen & Langer, 2009; Fjällhed & Pamment, 2023). This positions transparency as a necessary prerequisite for the legitimacy of political processes. But while this might be true on the one hand, incidents such as the "Taurus scandal" will show that it is just as important to keep certain information confidential in order to ensure stability.

The tension between the opportunities and risks of these digital disruption becomes apparent (Pamment et al., 2023): on one hand, it opens opportunities for individual actors and the public to become more engaged and participate in the political discourse (Pamment, 2021). On the other hand, it also carries risks, that it is abused for more hostile ways of influence. Disinformation or fake news, to name the more prominent examples, are just one way to manipulate public opinion and undermine trust in governments and democratic institutions (Pamment, 2021). The Taurus-Case exemplifies another phenomenon, which became increasingly prevalent in contemporary international affairs: "the purposeful disclosure of classified intelligence information and assessments as an instrument of foreign policy (Riemer & Sobelman, 2023, p.1)"; therefore, showcasing an example where transparency resulted in political and diplomatic turmoil.

The question arises, what happens when transparency, access to information and participation take over, and public diplomacy becomes diplomacy that is public?

1.2   Research Problem

Jürgen Habermas is one of the most influential sociologists when it comes to deliberative democracy theory. He argues that communication plays a central role in a functioning democracy since political decisions and the formation of public opinion should be based on a free and open exchange of ideas and information. In order for everyone to participate in this open, constructive dialogue, access to relevant information is essential for exchanging informed opinions and arguments. Habermas refers to this as the "ideal speech situation" (Habermas 2022, p. 69), which is

considered the normative ideal for democratic discourse and political decision-making. Although such an ideal situation is rarely achieved in reality, it nevertheless provides a guide for improving public discussions and creating fairer and more inclusive societies.

However, in today's democratic society, realistically the public sphere can rhetorically more be described with the metaphor of the "wrangle in the marketplace" (Heath et al., 1992, as cited in Nothhaft & Nothhaft, 2022, p.133), where winning ideas and conclusions are not necessarily built upon a rational consens but rather on a type of "bargaining" with the intent of pursuing one's own goals. This underscores the competitive nature of international relations in the information age, where soft power and the ability to persuade and attract others through appealing narratives became as crucial as traditional hard power like military and economic strength (Riemer & Sobelman, 2023).

With this in consideration, the concept of the ideal speech situation, which represents transparency as a normative ideal, should be reassessed. It is obvious that secrecy holds power as well, and that confidentiality can be particularly important from a diplomatic perspective in order "to maintain stability and to conduct their affairs with relative legitimacy and manoeuvrability. (...) When another actor gains visibility into their secrets, they become potentially vulnerable to strategic manipulation (Riemer & Sobelman, 2023, p.281)." The coercive release of information can pressure stakeholders to act in a certain way. Therefore, confidentiality is in fact crucial for democracies to protect themselves and build resilience.

The success of Information Influence Operations (IIO), such as intelligence disclosure, is linked to the tension between the high expectations for transparency and the necessity of safeguarding confidential information to ensure self-preservation. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how this issue can be approached from a strategic communications perspective.

1.3   Research Objectives and Knowledge Contribution

This thesis aims to add new dimensions to our understanding of the increasingly observed phenomenon of Intelligence Disclosure as a form of IIOs. Military scholars have dealt with the topic from a war leader's perspective. So far, there is a lack

of systematic research, especially by communications scholars, on how transparency is used as a strategic tool in public diplomacy, and in particular how they are managed. It is unclear how to communicate about or with information that was not intended for the public after such an incident. Hence, understanding intelligence disclosure is crucial to modern diplomacy. This not only contributes to the growing body of literature on digital disruptions in public diplomacy but also provides valuable insights for policymakers and communications strategists to respond effectively to the challenges of the digital age.

In order to recognize the problematization of Habermas ideal speech situation, the research focuses on three main objectives: (1) analyzing the strategies employed by governments and stakeholders to respond to intelligence disclosure and (2) to contribute to a deeper understanding of strategic transparency as a form of strategic communication. Furthermore, the research aims to (3) investigate if there are negative effects of transparency and, if so, how they unfold in context of information warfare. Based on this, the following research question will be addressed:

RQ: *How did the various actor groups within the rhetorical arena surrounding the Taurus scandal make sense of the intelligence disclosure?*

2. Literature Review

After outlining the objectives of this thesis, it is essential to review the current literature. This review will explain the transformation of communication, particularly in the realm of public diplomacy, in response to the contemporary digital landscape characterized by an information disorder. It will also cover the evolution of this untamed media landscape into a venue for information warfare and summarize the current state of research on intelligence disclosure. This literature review provides a comprehensive insight into the previous studies and theoretical approaches that form the basis for understanding the strategic use of intelligence disclosures in public diplomacy.

2.3 Information Disorder

With the rise of information and communication technologies (ICTs), significant changes have occurred. The public now has much greater access to information, often termed the "democratisation of access to information" (Cotton & Sebastião, 2021; Verčič, 2021). Scholars have analyzed the current communication environment in detail.

In the past, when the world was less globally connected, there were fewer channels and sources of information. This environment meant that official information was more tightly regulated (Bennett & Livingston, 2018). Trust in institutions was higher as authorities and the press could easily present a desired view and suppress "wild or dangerous narratives from the social fringes or foreign adversaries" (Bennett & Livingston, 2018, p. 128).

However, with the increasing abundance of media, platforms and channels in combination with new technologies like AI and machine learning, people now have not only access to alternative sources of information but also the ability to create content, reach a large audience, and organise themselves into movements to

promote their own agendas (Bennett & Livingston, 2018). The rise of new and numerous voices is challenging journalists for the role of information producers and has especially "social media a global stage for anyone who has something to say (Acampa, 2024, p. 4)". By creating online news content, they are becoming "influencers or diplomats," recognising that communication is the primary driver of social influence since gaining public support enables them to achieve also political goals (Verčič, 2021, p. 349f).

"Information has long been considered by policymakers as a powerful weapon to promote the interests of the state (Acampa, 2024. p. 3)." But the significance of information and communication in navigating complex conflict situations and its role as a major driver of political and economic dominance has increased in recent times. This indicates a strengthening correlation between information and power (Van Vuuren, 2018). And where is power, illiberal and undemocratic behavior is not far away.

The abundance of personalised information makes accessing content that mirrors one's emotions and reinforces existing views easier, leading to a rise of alternative realities (Bjola et al., 2019). Moreover, users subconsciously expect content to meet their personal standards in order to capture their attention. In today's attention economy, whoever or whatever captures attention is considered the winner (Acampa, 2024). Studies have shown that fake news spreads further online than the truth (Miskimmon et al., 2017), leading to more extreme opinions and growing political polarisation. What some see as obviously false information or even propaganda contains deeper emotional truths for members of some newer movements, which are intentionally opposing rational arguments (Bennett & Livingston, 2018). This makes it more difficult to distinguish between true and false. It also undermines trust in democratic media and institutions, working against mutual understanding and societal consensus, weakening the foundations of a liberal, informed and engaged public, which is essential for a healthy democracy (Bennett & Livingston, 2018; Acampa, 2024). As Fjällhed (2023) states: "(...) people did not engage in a common discourse but were locked into echo chambers, they did not build a conversation on valid claims but on alternative facts, and instead of a rational discourse one would find a post-truth environment. (p. 5)".

Bennett (2017) also observes the "post-truth era" and wonders whether truth still holds significance since fake news and manipulation seem to be quite

successful. She argues against it, stating that "despite the flood of misinformation, history shows that truth is one of our most powerful weapons" (Bennett, 2017, p. 67). It is crucial to address the issue of false information being spread quickly and easily, leading to feelings of uncertainty, mistrust, and chaos (Bennett, 2017). A term used by many scholars to describe the chaos in our contemporary communication environment is "information disorder" (Bennett & Livingston, 2018, p. 123).

2.4 Public Diplomacy in the Digital Age

According to Aggestam and Duncombe (2023) point out that new technologies also play a crucial role in global politics, mitigating and exacerbating international relations disorder.

"Diplomacy has been, since the dawn of times, an art of communication (Cotton & Sebastião, 2021, p. 39). However, historical and practical conditions have contributed to remarkable changes in the classical understanding of diplomacy over the years. Traditionally, diplomacy was defined as the cultivation of official relations between mostly bilateral, sovereign states (Verčič, 2021). Under this fundamental condition, diplomacy focused mainly on exchanges between governments of these sovereign states or their selected government representatives, avoiding interference in the public affairs of other states. Communication with the populations of other countries was initially conflicted with this traditional understanding of diplomacy, from which, therefore, the elitist position of diplomats grew (Verčič, 2021). The way diplomacy has been traditionally practised was based on confidential negotiations and private communication channels (Roselle et al., 2014; Verčič, 2021).

With the collapse of the old world order at the end of the last century, accompanied by the rise of ICTs, the new accessibility of information has empowered the public by increasing transparency and strengthening government accountability. With easier access to information, citizens can better monitor government actions and expose potential wrongdoing or corruption (Wehmeier, 2018). This compels governments to act even more transparently and carefully to maintain public trust. Additionally, the broad access to information allows citizens to educate themselves,

think critically, and participate more effectively in democratic processes (Edgar, 2006). This shift strengthens the power base of ordinary citizens against traditionally powerful actors. Consequently, the discipline of public diplomacy has gained importance, allowing governments to communicate directly with a globally informed public and positively influence opinions and attitudes. Through strategic communication, governments can explain their policies and gain support for their international goals, essential in an interconnected world.

Fitzpatrick (2010) identifies six functions of public diplomacy: advocacy, communication, relationship building, promotion, political involvement, and warfare. Sevin (2017) analyzes how public opinion can be influenced through the benefit of the doubt, socialization, direct influence, agenda setting, and framing. These functions and strategies are not exclusive to traditional state actors; multinational companies, NGOs or activists also adopt them for their interests. Consequently, contemporary scholars have examined non-state actors more closely in practice and research. Theoretically, digital media allows anyone to have a voice in the political context, leading to public diplomacy practised by "non-diplomats" (Cotton & Sebastião, 2021, p.49). Some researchers term this a quasi-democratization of diplomacy, introducing the concept of "civil society diplomacy" (Sebastião & De Carvalho Spínola, 2021, p. 4). Additionally, Bjola et al. (2019) observed that hyper-connectivity through digital media makes it impossible to separate the domestic public from the foreign or diaspora public, resulting in the idea of "domestic digital public diplomacy" (p. 89). Others describe public diplomacy as a "bazaar" with a non-hierarchical structure involving various interconnected and interdependent actors, creating an understanding of a "network diplomacy" (Fisher, 2008, as cited in Marschlich & Storie, 2022; Zaharna, 2013).

In this new perspective, the focus is no longer on one-way communication but on an interactive dialogue at eye level. Instead of the previous top-down communication models, which were primarily based on broadcasting and media campaigns, a dynamic, interactive, and horizontal dialogue model is now needed (Zaharna & Huang, 2022). Zaharna & Huang (2022) suggested the concept of "human-centred diplomacies" which focuses "on humanity's broader needs, general interests and goals. These public diplomacies are not about informing, influencing or promoting the goals of individual actors but are focused on collective problem-solving as an international community (p. 3)".

In light of this new dynamic, Hedling and Bremberg (2021) highlight that the question is not just who can be a diplomat but rather what constitutes a diplomatic act. This means that in the context of modern digital diplomacy, the focus has shifted to determining how these actors can establish their legitimacy and agency within the diplomatic sphere (Bjola et al., 2019; Pamment, 2021).

2.5 Information Influence Operations in Public Diplomacy

To illustrate the nexus between information disorder and today's network diplomacy, it is evident how these developments influence each other. In an environment where it is increasingly difficult to distinguish reliable sources from unreliable ones, the potential for manipulation logically increases, creating opportunities for malicious behaviour. Both foreign and domestic actors can intentionally spread disinformation to manipulate public opinion in their favour. This has already been witnessed in various elections and political events (Fjällhed & Pamment, 2023).

To determine who actually has the legitimacy to raise their voice or act in diplomatic processes, James Pamment (2021b) worked on a model that recognises that not only legitimate public diplomacy but also disruptive communication, which has similarities to public diplomacy but differs in intent, method, and legitimacy of communication techniques, plays a role. Particular focus should be paid when disruptions are strategically used to undermine authoritative information flows. Much research has already been conducted on disinformation and fake news and how they lead to global political instability (Bennett & Livingston, 2018; Aggestam & Duncombe, 2023). Political actors strategically deploy information influences that bypass conventional information flows by offering their followers a set of emotionally persuasive narratives and beliefs to cultivate support around which they can organise (Bennett & Livingston, 2018). The authors note: "This breakdown of core processes of political representation, along with the declining authority of institutions and public officials opens national information systems to a mix of strategic disinformation from national and foreign actors (Bennett & Livingston, 2018, p. 127)."

Nevertheless, there is little research in the literature to date regarding digital disruption and its impact, which is why the researcher James Pamment (2021b) suggests that more theoretical thinking in this direction should be developed in

order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how external actors can influence communication between states and audiences and how this impacts the effectiveness and credibility of public diplomacy. In his works, he further illustrates how manipulation or disruption in any of these steps can influence public opinion. Coordinated activities aimed at distorting information or subverting the flow of information can result in public opinion being swayed in a particular direction. "Opportunistic, creative, and sometimes technologically advanced methods" (Pamment, 2021b, p. 8) from foreign powers are often used for this purpose.

Probably the most prominent example is the Russian "St. Petersburg troll factory", a company officially called the Internet Research Agency. It employs around 600 people to spread targeted comments on social networks through "trolling", with an annual budget of US$10 million (Bennett & Livingston, 2018). In this way, propaganda and partisan information shall flow into the domestic public discourse and contribute to more discord and political destabilisation in favour of their political or even military missions. The situation has intensified to the point where information has kind of "weaponised" (Bjola & Pamment, 2019; Szostek, 2020), and it is difficult to differentiate between communication measures and politically-motivated military actions, leading to the widespread use of the term hybrid warfare (Verčič, 2021). This goes so far that Russia has set up special units called "information operations troops" (войска информационных операций) as part of the Russian Armed Forces, as announced in 2017 by the Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu (Latsinskaya et al., 2017 as cited in Szostek, 2020, p. 2732).

In fact, countries like Russia were already using communication in warfare like propaganda intensively before the digital revolution. However, new tools and opportunities, e.g. in terms of collecting data to understand and target the opponent even better, have elevated the country to a significant player in the international information war (Bechis, 2020 as cited in Acampa, 2024). From a strategic communication perspective, it is therefore important to understand that war takes place "beyond material and military dimensions" but is also built on "perceptions and persuasion" (Archetti, 2017, p. 218).

Archetti (2017) provides the following description:

"The contemporary operations environment (...) has two dimensions: the first is the actual tactical field of battle in which bullets fly, bombs explode and blood is shed; the second is the virtual, informational realm in which belligerents contend with words and images to manufacture strategic narratives which are more compelling than those of the other side and better at structuring the responses of others to the development of events" (p. 218f).

Understanding how information operations (IOs) interact with other military activities can be challenging (Vandomme, 2010). Nevertheless, there is a growing effort to enhance the coordination and integration of various activities. The term "information operation" is often equated with "information warfare", although they are actually different things. There are different forms of information warfare, such as command and control warfare, reconnaissance, electronic warfare, network warfare, economic warfare, cyber warfare and psychological warfare. Each form has its own methods to protect, manipulate or exploit information (Vandomme, 2010). In this work, the focus lies on psychological warfare, "in which information is used to modify the state of mind of friends, neutrals and adversaries (Vandomme, 2010, p. 7)", whereby IOs and strategic communication play a crucial role "to influence the emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior (Riemer, 2021, p. 559)".

The comparison between military strategies and how strategies are developed in the business world is particularly interesting. Marketing departments use similar communication and influencing strategies to persuade customers to buy or to build their brands by using techniques reminiscent of psychological warfare (Vandomme, 2010).

To take a more critical look: Communication scholars have examined the term information warfare and concluded that rhetoric plays a particularly important role here (Archetti, 2017; Szostek, 2020). The term "war" is used to underline the matter's urgency and enact political measures (Szostek, 2020). However, it is essential to remember that it creates a false image of how communication practitioners can control communication. Unlike real weapons, communication cannot precisely target predetermined objectives accurately. Outcomes are less predictable because it

is not possible to say exactly who will ultimately come into contact with the messages (Archetti, 2017), and the perception of these may differ from recipient to recipient (Szostek, 2020). "You can't straightforwardly assess results and tweak your tactics, as if you were a strategic communication version of a forward artillery spotter (Corman 2009a as cited in Archetti, 2017)."

The actual goal of information operations is to influence the decision-making ability and, thus, the target group's behaviour (Archetti, 2017). Many scholars also refer to a "battle of narratives" (Archetti, 2017; Miskimmon et al., 2017, 2018; Bjola & Pamment, 2019), where the goal is to capture the hearts and minds of the audience. This ties into the information disorder mentioned earlier, highlighting the importance of the content people choose to focus on in the midst of overwhelming information. In IOs, the population plays a central role because they live their normal while barely recognising that they find themselves at the battleground of information warfare (Vandomme, 2010).

Trolls on social media are just one way to seed narratives and strategically democratic processes in a certain direction and are therefore considered hybrid warfare measures (Bennett & Livingston, 2018). Pamment (2021b) identified several types of disruption that are particularly relevant to Public Diplomacy. These include trolling, adversarial media coverage, malinformation, misinformation, information influence operations (IIO), and foreign interference. The latter two often use a combination of the techniques mentioned first.

There is a growing body of literature on combating disinformation and misinformation in public diplomacy, including strategies for counteraction (Pamment, 2021a) and identifying those responsible (Pamment & Smith, 2022). Recent case studies, such as those analysing information influence tactics related to the Bucha massacre (Fredheim et al., 2021), further highlight that disinformation and fake news are not isolated incidents but are part of broader information influence operations (Bennett & Livingston, 2018; Pamment & Smith, 2022).

There are many ways to distort information, with techniques expanding alongside technological and societal advancements (Acampa, 2024). An increasingly notable phenomenon, especially since the Russia-Ukraine war, involves the publication of secret information, known as intelligence. Unlike classic disinformation, this type of IIO reveals previously hidden information to the public, which will be further examined in this paper.

2.6 Intelligence and Intelligence Disclosure

There is only limited research on intelligence disclosure, especially from a communications perspective. Most of the existing studies are derived from the field of military, intelligence or international relations studies – although there are some papers that overlap with strategic communication and therefore offer valuable insights.

If there is one thing sure, what we can learn from the previous studies is that there is power in secrets (Riemer, 2021; Dylan & Maguire, 2022; Riemer & Sobelman, 2023). They enable states and actors to protect their plans and strategies without opponents or competitors being able to see through and exploit them. In reverse, if another actor gains access to their secrets, they become vulnerable and more susceptible to strategic manipulation (Riemer & Sobelman, 2023, p. 281). Secrets are necessary to maintain stability and establish room for manoeuvre (Riemer & Sobelman, 2023).

Jackson & Scott (2004) began to examine the role of intelligence more deeply in the early 2000s, as the major failure of intelligence agencies in the context of 9/11 brought the issue much more into the public spotlight. They noted that "intelligence is understood as the process of gathering, analysing and making use of information (p. 2)". They refer to the fact that already *"Von Clausewitz considered knowledge of 'the enemy and his country' to be 'the basis of all our ideas and actions' (p. 7)"*, which establishes the link to international relations and positions intelligence as an instrument of foreign and defence policy (Jackson & Scott, 2004; Riemer & Sobelman, 2023). Intelligence information is assumed to offer "unique insights" (p. 37) due to its nature of being kept confidential for specific reasons (Dylan & Maguire, 2022). So, it is not only about safeguarding one's own secrets but also about acquiring and utilising others strategically.

To understand the use of intelligence, it is important to realise that there are extreme costs involved in both *holding* and *collecting* the information (Dylan & Maguire, 2022; Riemer & Sobelman, 2023). Disclosure is, therefore, also a cost-benefit calculation that leads to the so-called "disclosure dilemma", which is extensively discussed in the literature (Carnegie & Carson, 2019, as cited in Riemer & Sobelman, 2023, p. 220; Dylan & Maguire, 2022).

Of course, the power of intelligence lies in its ability to use it. However, the problem is often that disclosure also reveals how and where hard-earned information has been collected, thereby revealing important elements of one's strategy regarding sources and methods (Dylan & Maguire, 2022; Riemer & Sobelman, 2023). It must, therefore, be weighed whether there are sufficient tactical gains and also if there is political momentum to accept this trade-off.

Another important component that must be taken into account is that more than the mere publication of information is needed to have a political impact. Rather, the information must have a "cultural meaning" (Adler, 2010, p. 204 as cited in Riemer & Sobelman, 2023) in order to have a far-reaching effect. Information disclosure is therefore always a performative act. To succeed, "the discloser requires social capital, performative capabilities, control over information flow, and media access (Riemer & Sobelman, 2023, p. 295)".

In his earlier study, Riemer (2021) thoroughly explores this point, examining *Official Public Intelligence Disclosure (OPID)*, which is the deliberate disclosure of intelligence information by states, using Israel as a case study. His research delves into the motivations behind this practice, highlighting the domestic political incentives for its implementation. Interestingly, Riemer also draws strong parallels between the contemporary information and media landscape and these new handlings. The article suggests that states use OPID as a performative act to enhance diplomacy and shape the international agenda by grabbing the attention in an over-saturated information environment. Also, he found, that many intelligence practioners "stated that the world is transparent, and that the lion's share of information is already ʹout there,ʹ making it extremely difficult to keep a secret (p. 563)."

Furthermore, he also describes the aforementioned weaponising of information, which serves in this case as "ʹsofterʹ measures of warfare, such as strategic communications (p. 559)" to shape the behaviour of others below the threshold of war.

Another study by (Trenta et al., 2023) also addresses selective disclosure. While Riemer's study focused on the influence and impact within the domestic citizenry, an additional international perspective was introduced. It suggests that covert actions are still used internationally to achieve strategic goals without open conflict, while secrecy is necessary within a country to calm the local public. This is in line with the statements of the interviewees from Riemers' (2021) study when they admitted that, nevertheless, there is still more information that is kept confidential

than is made public. These insights demonstrate that both –secrecy and disclosure – are important, and information is released only selectively, leading to a "performative opacity" (Trenta et al., 2023, p. 582).

However, it is important to note that these studies refer to OPID, which should not be confused with more unauthorised forms of intelligence disclosure (Riemer, 2021). Therefore, in another recent study, Riemer and Soebelmann (2023) have dealt with the phenomenon from a more hostile perspective. As stated, secret information can ultimately be used to shape the actions of others. This is because victims have to pay a price for disclosure, which is often expressed not only in material terms but also in political consequences. The mere threat of publishing sensitive information can put other parties under pressure to do certain things, which is why the literature often refers to *coercive disclosure* (Riemer & Sobelman, 2023).

Riemer & Sobelman (2023) identified two situations for publishing classified information in the face of the disclosure dilemma: when a state cannot influence its target through other, most likely military means or when a state believes that another third actor can apply better pressure on the target. Furthermore, they formulated three main objectives for coercive disclosure. Firstly, it can simply disrupt an adversaries strategic and operational objectives as planned. Secondly, it can lead to more indirect pressure by influencing the local population through the publication of specific information. And thirdly, it can be useful for the discloser to strengthen a certain narrative in order to mobilise others and exert further pressure on the target (Riemer & Sobelman, 2023).

Also, Dylan & Maguire (2022) helped to categorise the usage of intelligence into (1) *good faith deployment* – when the information is accurate, reliable and intends mainly to inform an internal audience; (2) *strategic deployment* – when information is purposefully collected, organised, and presented with the primary goal of influencing external audiences and (3) *deceptive deployment* – the type when disseminators intentionally fabricate information to support an act of disinformation, with the aim of confusing or deceiving audiences (Dylan & Maguire, 2022, p. 35 ff).

Furthermore, these two researchers, also originally from war studies, recently investigated secret intelligence and its nexus to public diplomacy. As previously noted, more cases of intelligence disclosures came to light in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. During the Cold War, covert influence

operations allowed communication without public political pressure. Today, however, there is a much more frequent and extensive release of public intelligence disclosures, marking a new chapter in international relations. In liberal democracies, this shift increases pressure, as social support and avoiding domestic reputational damage are more critical (Dylan & Maguire, 2022; Shaaban Abdalla et al., 2022 as cited in Riemer & Sobelman, 2023).

As information monopolies by governments decrease and, at the same time, state transparency increases, "the permeability of the membrane between the secret and open worlds offers many opportunities for politicians to use intelligence creatively (Dylan & Maguire, 2022, p. 39)".

Dylan and Maguire's study discusses Russia's use of information manipulation to gain narrative superiority but also how Western intelligence disclosures disrupted Russia's disinformation and covert operations. These disclosures helped to form a compelling and credible narrative, leading to the creation of an international front against Russia's actions (Dylan & Maguire, 2022).

In fact, the role of the battle of narratives and the influence of foreign publics is evident here. But the mixing of intelligence and the public is not without risks, as it only makes it more susceptible "for deception operations using disinformation and so-called 'chicken feed' (accurate but unimportant information)" (Dylan & Maguire, 2022, p. 53).

Furthermore, the authors note: "Intelligence is there to be used, and intelligence services provide just that, a service. But when intelligence is deployed publicly it is inherently political, lacks the nuance of secret communications, and is consumed by a public that is largely unfamiliar with the uses and limits of intelligence" (p. 61). In contrast to professionals, the public often knows little about the applications and limits of intelligence information and is not even aware of its power. Instead, the frequency of disclosures leads to a normalisation, potentially causing the boundaries between deliberate, strategic disclosures and unauthorised revelations to become blurred – both by external observers and internal officials.

Facing the increased public use of intelligence, the authors raise the question of whether we entered a new age of "intelligence diplomacy" (p. 61). Other scholars have proposed similar concepts, such as "naked diplomacy" (Sánchez et al., 2017, p. 848), which, despite sounding contradictory, are based on the same developments – namely (public) diplomacy objectives, methods, and tools are becoming more and

more transparent. However, what can be concluded from the current state of litera-ture: "Intelligence is an element of state power. Employed judiciously, it has its uses in the public sphere, just as it does in its more natural, secret habitat (Dylan & Maguire, 2022, p. 62)."

2.7 Synthesis

The literature review examined the impact of digital technologies on diplomatic practices and the media landscape by enabling new sources of information and con-tent creation that empowered the public. These transformations have given rise to the concept of information disorder, which undermines trust in democratic institu-tions and provides fertile ground for malicious activities aimed at achieving politi-cal and strategic goals. In the context of the so-called information war, which is not waged purely on the military but also on a communicative level, there are various tactics of influence in the form of IIOs. One of these is the disclosure of intelligence information, which will be in the focus of this thesis.

It has become clear that this particular type of IIO is unique because disclosure is a form of transparency. Transparency has become even more desirable and de-manded in recent years and is deeply rooted in the ideals and values of digital West-ern society. An important question to consider for the discussion later on will be the potential adverse effects of transparency, particularly how it can be employed as a hostile tactic in information warfare.

Although research has already been done on how and when targeted intelligence disclosures influence public diplomacy, there is a lack of research from a commu-nicative perspective on this.

3. Theoretical Framework

The digital era has transformed the fundamental conditions and practices in the discipline of public diplomacy. This change requires a reassessment of the theoretical foundations. Therefore, this framework draws on the concepts by Habermas, the rhetorical arena and strategic transparency.

Jürgen Habermas describes in his grand theory the ideal conditions for well-functioning democratic societies in which the free and open exchange of opinions is crucial to safeguarding democratic principles. In order to analyze the real-world communication processes in times of crisis, the Rhetorical Arena Theory offers a framework that ties in with Habermas' theory and draws parallels, particularly to his public sphere. From the literature review, it is clear that there is a dual nature of transparency and secrecy, e.g. in the form of intelligence. Therefore, the concept of strategic transparency will be introduced and serves as a lens for analyzing the communication of the individual actors that appear in the arena later. It shows how it is used to achieve their individual strategic goals.

The following chapters will explain these theories and outline their relevance for analyzing deliberate intelligence disclosures in the digital landscape.

3.1   Habermas' Principles of Deliberative Democracy

Jürgen Habermas, one of the most influential sociologists of the 20th century, presents a normative framework with his *Theory of Communicative Action.* His theory is especially relevant to the context of this thesis, which focuses on public diplomacy – a politically motivated sub-field of strategic communication. Habermas aims to explain the foundations of a functioning democracy and suggests that political decisions should result from open and rational discourses (Habermas, 1984). His approach, known as the concept of *deliberative democracy*, enhances the

legitimacy and effectiveness of political procedures by fostering inclusive, transparent, and equitable dialogues where all participants exchange their arguments and find common solutions.

Therefore, the author emphasises the importance of *communicative rationality*, which means that participants of the discourse truly understand a statement in order to know why it is considered acceptable (Habermas, 1984). This requires knowing the reasons that make it true, correct, or understandable. The common consensus is formed through genuine exchange, or as he calls it – *communicative action,* and is the ultimate goal (Ross & Chiasson, 2011). In contrast, the author differentiates *strategic action*, which is aimed at achieving only one's own goals. These different forms of action cannot coexist, as mutual understanding and safeguarding one's own interests simultaneously is impossible (Ross & Chiasson, 2011). Habermas (1984) describes strategic action as "parasitic" on communicative action (p. 288).

Another crucial concept of Habermas is that of the *public sphere* – "a virtual or imaginary community which does not necessarily exist in any identifiable space (Frandsen & Johansen, 2020, p. 197)". In its ideal form, private citizens can discuss political issues and participate in the formation of opinion when they express concerns of the society (Edgar, 2006; Frandsen & Johansen, 2020). A functioning democracy requires a lively and accessible public sphere in which political debates are conducted transparently. After all, democracies are based on the principle of popular sovereignty, guided by public opinion and are based on the conclusion that all political power is based on the *communicative power* of the citizens (Flynn, 2004).

Since the public sphere can be described as the source of public opinion (cf. Frandsen & Johansen, 2020, p. 197), it can be argued that political institutions, such as the Bundestag in Germany, also serve as such kind of source. They have a number of elected representatives from the public who form the legislative body. These institutions promote public dialogue by creating forums and frameworks for discussion, and they incorporate the results of these discussions into the executive government's decision-making process. Additionally, they are responsible for ensuring transparency and accountability to the public.

Miskimmon et al. (2017) argue that today's media environment can also be understood as a public sphere. Mass media, in particular, inform citizens, provide access to relevant information while at the same time they make different opinions

visible and offer therefore a platforms for public debate. They kind of serve as a bridge between the political sphere and private individuals (Roggeband & Vliegenthart, 2007).

What lies at the heart of this is the *ideal speech situation,* which describes the conditions that are needed for all participants to be equal and able to express their opinions without coercion or manipulation in the discourse. Edgar (2006, p.64) refers to it as "the conditions for free and transparent communication." He emphasises that people participating in the discussion must be able to assume that it is transparent until proven otherwise (cf. p. 66). This presumed sincerity is important because a dialogue at eye level would not work if the other participants were always distrusted from the outset.

According to the theory, an informed, participatory public is essential for a functioning democracy. In conclusion, Habermas would reject political decisions made in secret or, more generally, confidentiality in the context of international politics (Senigaglia, 2023). Since transparency is the basis for assessing the legitimacy of political processes, for example secret diplomacy would, according to him, tend to lead to a decline in trust in political institutions (Senigaglia, 2023).

Therefore, transparency is seen as a basic prerequisite and normatively positive. The thesis aims to shed light on the fact that this is actually a much more complex concept that may need to be reassessed. Moreover, it is taken into account that these considerations are supposed to function as a normative ideal and that Habermas himself never intended to explain phenomena or things with his theory (Fjällhed, 2024). Edgar (2006) also states: "It does not describe a realisable set of conditions, but is rather used to highlight the imperfections of actual communication. (p. 65)"

However, this paper argues that the ideal he created can be somewhat problematic because it leads to the expectation that disclosure and transparency are necessary for a functioning democratic society but neglects the point that secrecy does as well. This, in turn, can lead to the weakening of our democracy. Our society is strongly characterised by these values and results in a vulnerability that is exploited against us by hostile actors, as the data and discussion will also show later on.

3.2 The Rhetorical Arena: Crisis Communication and the Public Sphere

As mentioned before, Habermas' theory is more of a normative nature. A theory that additionally offers a practical framework and aims to analyze and explain the complex communicative processes associated with the phenomenon is the Rethorical Arena Theory (RAT) by Frandsen and Johansen (2007). The theory stemms from the field of crisis communication and has its origins in sensemaking. In the context of hybrid warfare, intelligence disclosure can be seen as a form of attack, carrying consequences for the target similar to those of a crisis situation.

After an IIO occurs, various processes must be implemented to address the situation properly. These processes include crisis management efforts aimed at minimizing damage. Strategic communication plays a crucial role in managing and connecting different stakeholders (Coombs, 2015) and involves monitoring public opinion. First, it is crucial to make sense of the incident and understand how the decision-maker in question perceives it. Then, a co-created understanding of the situation must be developed since it is assumed that reality is socially constructed (Weick, 1995; Falkheimer & Heide, 2015). This process is critical in this context because, as the name suggests, information is often distorted, and confusion and ambiguity prevail, making it particularly challenging for practitioners to communicate effectively.

But what is the theory about? Basically, it is a model that describes the dynamics of communication when a crisis arises. It is important to understand that crisis communication is not just something that takes place between an organization and the public but is rather a "multivocal" process in a complex "arena" in which different stakeholders and voices meet and interact (Frandsen & Johansen, 2017). Different actors use different communication strategies to achieve their individual goals, which in turn influence each other. The theory views crises as events that are constructed through discourse and rhetorical actions. The way in which the crisis is talked about influences how it is perceived and managed. (Frandsen & Johansen, 2017). Building on this, scholars such as Coombs and Holladay (2013) have further elaborated that there is not just a single arena but multiple sub-arenas in which

different discussions and debates occur. These can overlap and interact with each other.

The theory provides a suitable framework for this thesis as it shares similarities with Jürgen Habermas' theory on the public sphere and communicative action. Other researchers, such as Vatnøy (2016) or Nothhaft and Nothhaft (2022), have also drawn parallels, viewing the RAT as a reimagining of the public sphere (cf. Frandsen & Johansen, 2020, p. 208). In this context, the principle holds that the political affairs of a state are influenced by dialogue among various participants (Frandsen & Johansen, 2020). The difference lies in the fact that this model could also be applied to all other kinds of organizations, and the formation of a public sphere is not based on consensus but instead on the sharing of a common reality – but all in all it is both about "participatory democracy" processes (Frandsen & Johansen, 2020, p. 197).

There are two levels of analysis in RAT. The *macro-level* helps to illustrate the connections between the different voices, providing the big picture and explaining how they are interrelated. On the other hand, the *micro-level* gives information about what is happening within the arena at the individual actor level. Therefore, the authors defined four properties of crisis communication that guide the actions of each voice.

Actor groups have specific *(1) interests* that shape their perspectives and actions. They continuously interpret events, altering their *(2) interpretations* and attributions of meaning based on others' viewpoints, as crises are socially constructed. All actor groups develop a (3) *strategy* in order to achieve their goals, considering the past and future strategies of others. And *(4) communication behaviour* by these actor groups, which also includes semiotic resources such as indications from words, images or symbols (Frandsen & Johansen, 2020).

Obviously, their different interests usually lead to disagreements, conflicts of interest or the exploiting of the crisis for their personal agenda, which is why it can be considered an antagonistic model (Frandsen & Johansen, 2017). But even if not all actors are interested in two-way communication, it is important to understand that they are all equally interrelated in the roles of sender and receiver. Furthermore, Frandsen und Johansen (2020) describe that "today we are also witnessing more and more interventions from other kind of third parties or "unauthorized" actors such as trolls or hackers" (p. 205), which is also confirmed by the latest literature

on digital disruptions in public diplomacy for example by Pamment (2021b). Hostile actors take advantage of the opportunity to provoke disorder by using verbal aggression about an issue, especially in this new age of society where people can easily express their opinions (Frandsen & Johansen, 2020, p. 206).

It is therefore important to take into account the characteristics and interactions in such settings. Many examples from theories now make it clear that transparency and intelligence disclosure are not just the passing on of information. They always depend on the underlying meaning and interpretation and are thus a kind of performative act (Archetti, 2017; Wehmeier, 2018; Riemer & Sobelman, 2023). Communication professionals must consider "that information does not flow randomly" (Archetti, 2017, p. 23). Therefore, the context and underlying motives of how or when information is disclosed must be carefully considered. Frandsen and Johansen (2020) used a metaphor which concludes it: "However, as in a game of chess, it is important to anticipate the communication of the other voices in the arena, in order to 'play the game' " (p. 199).

This communication complexity is addressed by RAT, which seeks "to identify, describe, and explain patterns within the multiple communication processes taking place inside the arena" (Frandsen & Johansen, 2016). According to RAT, crises are actualized conflicts for definitional hegemony in which opposing viewpoints contend over how to perceive both – the crisis itself and the appropriateness of the crisis response. Each communication activity can be viewed as a "intervention in or a contribution to the crisis," which forms a component of the rhetorical arena (Frandsen & Johansen, 2016). The many voices can enter and exit the arena as the crisis develops.

3.3   The Concept of Strategic Transparency

Not only in RAT, which implies that transparency can be part of the strategies of various voices, or in Habermas' theory where transparency plays a fundamental role, but also in practice, e.g. in the field of international relations, a constantly growing demand for transparency is especially in light of the increasing complexity observable (Miskimmon et al., 2013; Sánchez et al., 2017). The notion that organisations should unquestioningly strive for greater transparency reveals that it has

attained an almost mythical status, highlighting the extent to which the processes and expectations of transparency have become ingrained and accepted as the norm in the early 21st century (Pamment, 2018). Therefore it is time to reexamine this concept from the outset as well as its strategic components more closely.

In the book "International Encyclopedia of Strategic Communication," Wehmeier (2018) discusses the concept, as its meaning is not clear-cut. Different disciplines and paradigms offer varying understandings of what transparency truly means (Wehmeier, 2018).

The main differences are rooted in differentiating between a functionalist approach, an interpretative, and a critical approach. The functionalist perspective defines transparency as "information giving" (p.1). This perspective assumes that providing more information enhances the public's understanding of an organisation's or institution's activities, leading to increased legitimacy and greater trust through open communication. In contrast, the interpretive perspective focuses more on the recipient's understanding of transparency and, specifically, "the communicative interaction" (p.1) between senders and recipients (Wehmeier, 2018). In the academic discourse, a critical perspective is often included as well, overlapping with the interpretivist perspective, but is more emphasising the challenges or even negative effects that transparency can bring to organisations (Wehmeier, 2018).

In the realm of political communication, transparency is often related to access to documents or meetings, closely tied to the legal regulations and requirements of democracies. It is generally assumed "that transparent governments are seen as more democratic, accountable and legitimate (Wehmeier, 2018, p.4)", although the actual level of public insights about internal processes and decision-making remains uncertain. Also, Christensen and Langer (2009) state: "In such perspectives, a crucial dimension of a good and just society is the availability of information, availability that limits opaqueness and complexity and thus helps reduce the potential for power abuse, fraud, corruption, and other types of corporate or institutional evil (p. 2)." Sánchez et al. (2017) go one step ahead and even claim: "It has turned into a mandate by international institutions because transparency levers the neutrality of administration, promotes control systems and creates barriers to corruption (p. 840)." However, transparency in the political context is viewed more critically than in other disciplines due to the extensive research and corresponding findings resulting from legal requirements. Since transparency is required by law, it enables more

robust research on the topic from the outset. For instance, findings show, that there is a discrepancy between political experts and the public on "how transparency should be performed" (Wehmeier, 2018, p.4). Experts often advocate a *defensive* usage, suggesting that information should only be disclosed after careful consideration and when necessary. On the other hand, the public advocates an *offensive* approach, leading to a higher demand for transparency than it is actually practised (Wehmeier, 2018).

It is worth noting that in the field of communication science, transparency is often viewed as a tool to build trustful relationships (Wehmeier, 2018, p. 2f) or "mutual accountability (Pamment, 2018, p. 2) and, therefore, can be a significant asset for organisations, institutions and entities. Taylor and Kent (2002) add that next to a precondition for trust, transparency also helps to foster "collaboration, dialogue, insight, accountability, rationality, and freedom (as cited in Christensen and Langer, 2009, p.2). Transparency also plays a role in crisis communication regarding the success of recovery strategies (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015). These assumption aligns with the functionalist approach but always under consideration *that* and *how* transparency is understood by the recipient (Heald, 2006), which reflects the more interpretative nature of it.

However, transparency, often seen as this effective and rational tool, can also be viewed critically. Following this way of thinking, it describes the emergence of a higher level of communication symmetry with reduced power imbalances – according to James Grunig's model of excellent public relations – in which participants can engage in dialogue and negotiations on an equal level (Christensen & Langer, 2009). Some scholars argue that the idealistic notion that transparency leads to a fair distribution of information and, therefore, fosters more equal relationships among stakeholders needs to be questioned (Roper, 2005, as cited in Wehmeier, 2018). On the contrary, transparency can also reinforce hegemonic power structures, for example, by only disclosing specific information to gain trust, distract from problems or exert control over public perception. Another perspective by Tsoukas (1997), particularly relevant in today's digital age, where content and information are abundant, suggests that "more information may lead to less understanding and the undermining of trust and rationality" (as cited in Wehmeier, 2018, p.7).

The different perspectives presented indicate that there is no clear understanding of transparency. However, one thing is evident and applies to each approach: "There is no transparency without secrecy (p.7)." As previously discussed in this thesis, there are numerous arguments in favour of secrecy, particularly the power and security it holds. Especially diplomacy – "born in a framework of confidentiality" (Sánchez et al., 2017, p. 835) has to calculate how and how much transparency it can stand. So actually there is no "natural need" to disclose basically everything. From the organisational perspective, it is even more the other way around: "Organisations may not want transparency at all – even when they officially celebrate it (Christensen & Langer, 2009, p. 2)." It must be recognised that privacy and security are just as necessary as openness (Lazarus & McManus, 2006, as cited in Christensen & Langer, 2009).

And still, "the citizen demand of objective information and access to documentation for scrutiny has peaked (Sánchez et al., 2017, p. 848)". Thinking about the roots of this strong desire for transparency, it often stems from a fear of being manipulated – a sense of anxiety (Phillips, 2011). Pamment (2018) also pinpoints it, as "transparency is not simply about revealing the realities of organisational activity, but also of the ritualised social construction and legitimisation of a form of manageable reality. (p.2)" Following this line of thought, some argue that transparency might not just be a tool for a democratic society, but rather a totalitarian instrument (Wehmeier, 2018, p. 7). Alternatively, how Christensen and Langer (2009) summarise it: "Although transparency is essential in generating trust, collaboration, dialogue, and accountability, its institutional forms tend to produce organisational closure rather than openness, control rather than insight, discipline rather than autonomy and freedom. (p. 26)"

Furthermore, even if there is infinite access to information, the interpretation of this still lies with the recipient and is dependent on influences such as previous experience or timing of the individual person (Christensen & Langer, 2009). For example, it also plays a role whether transparency takes place in "real-time" or "retrospectively" (Christensen & Langer, 2009). It should also be noted that truth is not part of the definition of transparency and that ideas, opinions and truths can be interpreted and negotiated individually (Christensen & Langer, 2009; Heath, 2001). This primarily rhetorically "negotiable" character suggests that it is increasingly

about controlling and managing information flows and the communication around them, whereby the act of disclosure is also part of this due to stakeholder demands.

Transparency is, therefore, often an illusion, as complete openness is difficult to achieve. But how should an organisation, institution or entity deal with the pressing demand and the simultaneous unattainability of transparency? And how much inconsistency can be tolerated? Christensen & Langer (2009) argue that the solution is to deal openly with these challenges and discrepancies and clearly communicate one's own standpoints. Those who fail to explain themselves and their actions lose their legitimacy, weakening their ability to influence and protect democratic values as trust diminishes. It becomes evident that some form of strategic communication is needed to handle this challenge (Sánchez et al., 2017).

It becomes clear that there is a strategic dimension to transparency, namely whenever it is used to achieve organisational goals (Pamment, 2018). In this sense, Pamment (2018) has defined the concept of strategic transparency:

> "*Strategic transparency*, an adaption of strategic communication – in the sense of "purposive" communication (Holtzhausen, 2008, p. 4848) – aimed at rearticulating transnational transparency practices within organisational goals. Just as strategic communication is described as purposive communication, strategic transparency is a matter of *purposive transparency*" (p.2).

3.4   Synthesis

In summary, the aim is to gain a better understanding of the empirical phenomenon of intelligence disclosure. But how can the theories be used to explain the phenomenon?

Habermas's grand theory aims to explain how deliberative democracy is based on communication. In this context, transparency serves as the basis for a good democratic discourse and, thus, a stable and functioning society.

RAT forms the analytical framework that manages to both reflect Habermas' idea of the public sphere and, at the same time, take into account the idea of developments from traditional diplomacy to a networked public diplomacy, pursuing a

multivocal approach to gain a more holistic understanding of communication processes in the field.

Strategic Transparency is the concept serving as a lens that attempts to explain the phenomenon of intelligence disclosure within this framework. It is possible to observe strategic transparency efforts by the individual actors of the rhetorical arena to achieve specific goals.

Intelligence disclosure is only one example of how transparency is used strategically. It is a good example of why the functionalist idea is insufficient since it is obviously not just about transmitting information by making it visible to the public, but more about the meaning behind it. Moreover, it can be viewed from a critical stance. According to Habermas's logic, intelligence disclosures seem legitimate because they bring information about state activities to light that normally would remain hidden. This would be in favour with the ideal speech situation with the preconditions for informed discussion and allows all participants to argue and reflect based on a common set of information. Only through these information the public is able to make an informed decision and hold the government accountable.

The following case intends to reconstruct what the democratic discourse can look like after such an incident and aims to evaluate transparency under these circumstances on the basis of empirical data.

4. Methodology

The upcoming chapter outlines the research strategy. It starts with categorizing the study based on its ontological and epistemological aspects, followed by a detailed description of the research design. The thesis examines the disclosure of an eaves-dropped conversation of German military officers by Russia in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war. Due to its complexity, the case will be analyzed first. Both the research design and analysis are closely aligned with the theoretical framework anchored in Habermas Grand Theory as well as using RAT and the concept of Strategic Transparency as analytical lenses. The chapter also explains the rationale behind selecting this case and its empirical materials for investigation and how the data analysis will contribute to addressing the research question. The chapter ends with considerations on ensuring the credibility of this work.

4.1   Research Paradigm and Tradition

The present study follows an interpretive research paradigm that is well-suited to analyze complex and subjective meanings (Prasad, 2018), such as those found in intelligence disclosures.

The ontological approach of this study is social constructivism, which assumes that reality is constructed by social actors (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This is particularly reflected in the analysis section, where RAT is used to analyze how different actors negotiate and construct meanings. This shows that reality is not seen as objectively given but as the result of social interactions and interpretations.

Epistemologically, the study follows an interpretative approach, which is implemented through qualitative methods such as document and media analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These methods make it possible to capture and understand the subjective meanings and perspectives of the actors involved. By understanding and interpreting the collected data, knowledge is generated that provides deeper

insights into the phenomenon and communication processes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). More specifically, official documents, speeches, press releases, media reports and articles were systematically collected and analyzed. The interpretative tradition is suitable for unlocking a deeper understanding of the intentions and the communication strategies behind them.

The goal is to produce "richly descriptive" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 41) outcomes in order to understand what happens on a communicative level after an intelligence disclosure and to formulate hypotheses on how transparency is used strategically.

4.2   Research Design and Case Selection

A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 63)" in its real environment. The increasingly frequent occurrence of intelligence disclosures remains under-researched within the field of communications, making the recent "Taurus scandal" a fitting subject for this study. This allows for examining strategic transparency in a real, timely and highly significant inner and geopolitical context and aims to investigate the rationale behind Russia's decision to publicize confidential information. Given the inherent challenge of gaining insight into the intentions of those responsible in Russia, this research focuses more on analyzing the implications of this incident. For this purpose, the rhetorical arena that emerged post-disclosure will be reconstructed by identifying the key actors and making visible what happened after the event, especially regarding their communication. It aims to underscore how different actors made sense of the incident and set the stage for interpreting the event as a crisis (Iannacone, 2021). The immediate and far-reaching reaction of German governing actors and their representation in media provides rich data for analyzing the impact of such disclosures on policy decisions. If Russia's aggression serves as a prime example of contemporary hybrid warfare, then Germany's response represents an inherently interesting case that we can learn from in order to build more resilience for the future.

As already mentioned, IIOs and, therefore, the Russian attack can be considered a German crisis, as it fulfils several crisis characteristics such as unexpectedness, high threat level, time pressure, uncertainty and media attention (Seeger et al., 2003). These factors require quick decisions and effective crisis communication and management. The link between crisis communication and public diplomacy is not particularly common but is inspired by previous studies that have similarly looked at management strategies of public diplomacy actors (c.f. Cassinger et al., 2016) or how disinformation can be managed through public diplomacy (c.f. Fjällhed, 2020).

The case study uses a structured format to create a "bounded system", isolating the case for research purposes based on factors like time and events, allowing for established limits around the subject under examination (Creswell, 1994; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). One limit in this study is set by the voices which appear in the rhetorical arena focusing on political institutions and their representation in the mass media landscape. Timewise, the study covers the initial period directly after the incident. A 14-day timeframe, from March 1st, 2024 to March 15th, 2024, has been chosen because Russia Today released the audio on this date, bringing it to public attention and initiating the initial crisis stage. According to Seeger et al. (2003), this stage is crucial for communication practitioners to shape and manage the course of the crisis. The "unit of analysis" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 65) is, therefore, the communication used after the information disclosure.

4.3 Data Collection and Sampling

Since it is not possible to "study everyone everywhere doing everything" (Miles & Huberman, 1994 as cited in Priya, 2020, p. 99), the choice of sampling of material in a case study is crucial. One challenge that was considered when collecting the data was that a lot of probably interesting information and discussions in the field of intelligence most likely continue to take place behind closed doors. Nevertheless, this is irrelevant to the study as the aim is to analyze how such an incident is managed publicly. The general public only has access to publicly available information, and it is, therefore, precisely this information that should be analyzed to understand the reactions and communication strategies of the actors involved.

The goal is to derive thick descriptions and credible explanations for the phenomenon under investigation from the examined data (Priya, 2020). To achieve this, a purposeful sampling method was employed, under the assumption that the researcher can gain the most insight into the phenomenon from the material (Patton, 2015). The research design involves gathering data from various sources, such as documents produced and published by German governance institutions and online media articles from German newspapers. This two-part sampling procedure was implemented to collect diverse material and data, thereby gaining a comprehensive understanding of the different perspectives, voices, and interpretations regarding this complex phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To ensure reliability, specific criteria are defined to guide the data selection, which are influenced by the theoretical orientation of the researcher, the research problem, and the study's purpose (Priya, 2020).

When it comes to examining networked crisis communication with RAT, it must be taken into account "that public debate is carried out in different forums: in the mass media, in parliament, in public gatherings, in the streets and other places (Roggeband & Vliegenthart, 2007, p. 525)." This thesis focuses on material from two key arenas, the political and the media, and brings them together to create one holistic picture. Within these forums, the different stakeholder involved express their specific perspective on the issue (Roggeband & Vliegenthart, 2007) and have the ability to shape both the political and cultural agendas, thereby establishing the parameters for public discourse (Taylor & Kent, 2006 as cited in Iannacone, 2021).

4.3.1 Content Analysis

Firstly, a detailed content analysis was carried out. All official documents related to the Taurus affair that were publicly available on government websites in the reasoned 14-day period following the incident were collected and analyzed. When collecting documents, one must always keep in mind the purpose for which they were originally created (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015). Many of the collected documents used in this study were produced and published by German government institutions to ensure public traceability and accountability of parliamentary work. They can be considered as primary data sources as they reflect the exact wording of what was said. For example, plenary protocols of the Bundestag serve to transparently

document the debates and decisions in parliament and thus offer comprehensive and lucid insights into parliamentary debates and decision-making processes. Of course, it is taken into account that other documents such as press releases or press conferences are created by organizations to convince the media and the public that an issue has been addressed or handled in a certain way (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015). Nevertheless, the documents provide insights into the rhetorical arena at the political level where it is naturally assumed that opinions are in a way biased and antagonistic (Frandsen & Johansen, 2020). The following 21 documents served as a base for rich data:

Qty.	Type of Document
1x	Stenographic report of the 156th session of the German Bundestag (5h 36min), including i.a.:
	1x Chancellor Hearing (Chancellor holds a speech and answers questions from members of the Bundestag)
	15x Speeches by representatives of all parliamentary groups represented in the Bundestag (Special parlia mentary session called "Aktuelle Stunde")
3x	Printed matter (written questions from members of the Bundestag that are officially answered and published on the website of the Federal Government)
8x	Protocols of German federal press conferences
2x	Transcript video recording of the official press statement from the Defense Minister Boris Pistorius
4x	Press releases in form of articles on the website of the federal government and Bundestag
3x	Press release from FDP in an interview-format (disclaimer: only press statements from this party could be considered, as they were the only ones that have published press statements)

Table 1. Overview of analyzed documents within the cases.

All documents have been downloaded and stored as PDF files for the purpose of coding.

4.3.2 Media Analysis

To supplement the aforementioned sources, the analysis draws on German news reportage by prominent news websites in the country of interest. In this study, the media was seen as a forum for expressing and amplifying the crisis rather than as a voice of its own (Desmarais & Wallace, 2018). Classical mass media platforms are experiencing diminishing attention in contemporary times; nonetheless, they continue to serve as crucial arenas for negotiating interpretations of a crisis since the public still relies on these platforms to acquire vital information regarding the crisis at hand (Roggeband & Vliegenthart, 2007; Raupp, 2019; Iannacone, 2021).

Therefore, in total 45 articles from Tagesschau.de and Bild.de were collected as objects of analysis. This selection stems from the empirical core findings from the country comparison project "Media Performance and Democracy" by Stark et al. (2021), which examined the quality of the news offerings with the highest reach in Germany. The quality index developed in this study indicates that they have a significant impact and extensive reach within the German media system. Simultaneously, they represent the opposite ends of widereach online journalism. Analyzing these two platforms represents the media offering that probably reaches the widest range of the German public as a target audience.

Tagesschau.de (overall quality index 7,4) stands for its high-quality, fact-based journalism characterized by high source transparency and professional standards. It is considered to be at the top of the quality spectrum and provides well-researched, balanced reporting (Stark et al., 2021). On the other hand, *Bild.de* (overall quality index 6,3) is representative of tabloid journalism, focusing strongly on sensationalism and entertainment, often lacking in source transparency and professional standards (Stark et al., 2021). Despite these shortcomings, Bild.de has a wide reach and significant influence on public opinion.

After selecting these two media houses, all articles in the specified period of 14 days were searched for in the respecting online archives. German keywords such as "Taurus", "Taurus-Skandal", "Abhörskandal" oder "Abhöraffäre" were used for this purpose. This search revealed a total of 45 online articles which were distributed 30 from Tagesschau and 15 from Bild. All articles were downloaded and saved as pdf-files for coding.

Overall, the wide variety of data sources, ranging from speeches to requests, to video transcripts and different media articles, made it possible to gain a comprehensive perspective on the unit of analysis. Methodological saturation was achieved, as central themes and statements were repeated in the various sources and therefore consistent patterns of communication strategies could be observed. A comprehensive overview with detailed information, including publication dates and content, of the collected data can be found in Appendix 1.

4.4 Data Analysis Procedures

When analysing data in qualitative research, it is particularly important to proceed systematically to minimise the subjectivity of the analysis and ensure the comprehensibility of the research results (Tracy, 2019). NVivo 14 was used for this purpose, as the software improves the accuracy and efficiency of the research through its efficient coding functions.

The data evaluation was carried out through a combination of deductive and inductive procedures and, therefore, can be considered abductive as a whole. This approach allows the collected data to be interpreted in light of existing theories while leaving room for new, unexpected findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During the first cycle of coding (Tracy, 2019), all documents and articles were scanned line by line, whereby the research question and theoretical framework served as reference points, acting as "lenses throughout the process," as described by Tracy (2019, p. 219). In accordance with the suggestion by Frandsen and Johansen (2017) in their textbook and inspired by the research design by Raupp (2019) and Iannacone (2021), a list of all key voices was compiled during this open coding. The term "voices" refers to the actors who actively contributed to communication in the context of the scandal, be it through public statements, comments or

interviews. In the next step, those were categorised into six actor groups to make the plenty of voices more tangible for the analysis. The categorisation was done according to their roles and functions within the scandal. It included different levels of the German government, stakeholders, international allies, and Russia in the role of the disruptors, as shown in the following table.

Main functional actor groups	Subcategories
German Government (executive)	01 Chancellor Olaf Scholz 02 Defence Minister Boris Pistorius 03 Press spokespersons of the Federal Government
Governing Parties "Ampel-Koalition" (legislative)	04 SPD 05 Grüne/ Bündnis 90 06 FDP
Opposition Parties (legislative)	07 CDU/ CSU members 08 AfD members 09 BSW members 10 Die Linke members 11 Non-affiliated members of the Bundestag
NATO-Allies	12 Great Britain 13 France 14 United States
Other Stakeholders	15 Journalists 16 Experts (for e.g. MAD employees) 17 Bundeswehr employees
Russia	18 Russia Today Employees 19 Wladimir Putin 20 Kreml Speaker (for e.g. Dmitri Peskow, Maria Sacharowa)

Table 2. Overview of actor groups.

In the next step of the Second Cycle Coding, the researcher matched larger hierarchical codes from the RAT theories to each actor group. To better understand the different actor groups, Frandsen and Johansen (2020) developed four properties of a voice in their theory. Each group was therefore analysed in terms of its specific *interests*, how it *interpreted* the event, the *strategies* it developed, and its *communication behaviour*. This detailed analysis made it possible to understand and interpret the different communication patterns and actions of the actors more closely.

In addition, many codes stemmed from open coding, indicating the use of strategic transparency by many actors that were iteratively matched to the categories in the analysis to cover all relevant aspects.

By focusing on insights from the macro and micro analysis, the study can gain deeper insights into communication strategies and their effects in the context of information influence operations, which helps to answer the research questions and fits into the interpretive tradition.

4.5   Trustworthiness and Reflections

To ensure the master thesis meets high-level standards, it follows Lincoln et al.'s (1985) four criteria for trustworthiness: *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability*.

To ensure *credibility*, multiple data sources were utilized, and detailed descriptions of the criteria and procedures followed in selecting and analyzing the material were provided (Lincoln et al., 1985). For example, the choice of media outlets was based on the results of the recognized report "Media Performance and Democracy" by Stark et al. (2021), which should contribute to this. *Transferability* means that the results can be applied to other contexts, for which purpose the "thick descriptions" in particular should allow the reader to assess how the results can be transferred (Lincoln et al., 1985, p. 314). In addition, the discussion lists findings that should generally contribute to understanding the phenomenon in another context. *Dependability* is maintained through the researcher's reflective practice and the documentation of all research steps and decisions. Finally, *confirmability* refers to how consistent and repeatable the research results are, which is why the RAT was chosen as a practical framework and for creating the deductive codes that can be reused in further cases (Lincoln et al., 1985).

Also, the researcher plays an essential role in data collection as well as the analysis and must, therefore, be aware of her role and influence (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, the author recognizes that her background of being from Germany and socialized in a democratic society significantly shapes her research. She is aware that the cultural, historical and intellectual contexts of her background can influence her research questions and methods. At the same time, she reflects that

her Western perspective contains certain assumptions and prejudices that could influence her work. Sensitive to these cultural differences, she strives to avoid ethnocentric bias and to include a wide range of perspectives by deliberately drawing on different voices and media for the analysis.

4.6   Limitations

The study has certain limitations in its design as it specifically focuses on the "Taurus scandal" and carries a specific historical and contextual background. Furthermore, the study concentrates heavily on Germany and the Western alliance. As a result, the findings may not apply to other countries or cultures, which have distinct political and media landscapes and fundamentally different perspectives on transparency. Additionally, the study only captures short-term reactions and strategies without considering the long-term effects of the information disclosure.

This case study focuses only on the rhetorical arena from a political perspective, aiming to understand how intelligence disclosure is managed communicatively in terms of a crisis. The decision to limit the study to articles from mass media was explained in more detail in the sampling strategy. However, it is acknowledged that, e.g. social media could also be a valuable source of insights, offering sub-arenas with diverse perspectives, including minority and Russian perspectives. However, these voices were not present in the dominant rhetorical arena that arguably shapes the public opinion. Furthermore, the main focus of this work is to question the ideal of transparency – an already quite specified aspect in terms of theory.

It also raises the fundamental question of whether it makes sense to empirically challenge a normative theory like Habermas'. In fact, scholars like Schaal und Ritzi (2009) have taken a closer look at empirical deliberation research and concluded that "*Should implies can* – those who demand that citizens and politicians behave in a certain way must prove that it is actually possible for them to do so, and those who promise that deliberation produces advances in knowledge and understanding must show that this is also the case under real conditions (Landwehr, 2010 as cited in Schaal & Ritzi, 2009, p.8)". This calls for a critical review, considering the high standard of transparency set in recent years.

5. Analysis

"Making sense of a rhetorical arena is like unwinding a twisted, knotted ball of yarn with more connections and complications as it unravels toward its center. (Iannacone, 2021, p. 3)" In order to untie the yarn, the Taurus Scandal will be analyzed at both macro and micro levels in the following chapter. The first part will provide context for the case, including an overview of the actor groups listed in the methodology and their patterns of interaction. The following questions posed by Frandsen and Johansen (2017): "How do the voices communicate with each other? Do they communicate to, with, against, or past each other? Do the voices form sub-arenas?" (p. 175) will guide this part.

The micro-analysis will focus on analyzing individual communication strategies and how they utilize transparency to achieve strategic goals (Pamment, 2018). Crises are not just objective events; they are influenced and constructed by how people talk about them. The communication about it, meaning how it is framed and which language is used, shapes how it is understood and dealt with (Frandsen & Johansen, 2020), which is what is aimed to investigate. This study does not attempt to capture every single voice due to its enormous complexity but rather focuses on the key figures who shaped the early interpretation of the Taurus Scandal. Therefore, the data aims to answer the following research question:

> **RQ:** *How did the various actor groups within the rhetorical arena surrounding the Taurus scandal make sense of the intelligence disclosure?*

5.1 Macro Analysis

Since the 24th of February 2022, Ukraine has been facing an aggressive war initiated by Russia. To withstand Russian aggression, it relies on weapons deliveries from the West (Gressel, 2024). Germany is the second-largest supporter of Ukraine,

providing 13.1 billion Euros, following the USA's 75.1 billion Euros (Trebesch et al., 2024). Since May 2023, Ukraine has been requesting Germany to supply so-called Taurus cruise missiles (Reuters, 2023). France and Great Britain are already providing Ukraine with Scalp and Storm Shadow missiles (Article #18; Document #07). These are some of the most advanced weapons, capable of hitting important targets up to 500 km away (Bundeswehr, 2024) without soldiers having to enter the respective airspace. Within this range, potential targets like Moscow could be reached from Ukraine. However, the programming and control of the Taurus require specially trained expertise (Bundeswehr, 2024).

The Chancellor of Germany, Olaf Scholz, has refused a delivery, sparking an ongoing debate not only in the political arena but the whole country. He justifies his decision by arguing that due to the required expertise, German military specialists would have to be on-site and German soldiers on Ukrainian territory would cross his "red line" as he wants to avoid German involvement in the war at all costs (cf. Document #13). As the government's head, the Chancellor has the final say and aims to prevent escalation.

The analysis also reveals that the German government, especially the Chancellor, occupies a central position in the reconstructed communication network (see Figure 1). Additionally, the Minister of Defence Boris Pistorius and the press spokespersons of the government are also extensively interconnected and exert a significant influence in disseminating information and managing the crises. The numerous connections to and from the government emphasize its significance in shaping the discourse and the political agenda.

In order to understand the formation of the other actor groups, a closer look at the political German democratic system is needed. The current 20th Bundestag, representing the legislative body of the government and consists of 726 members belonging to 7 factions as well as 7 non-attached members (Deutscher Bundestag, 2024). As mentioned earlier, the Bundestag is represented by delegates elected directly by the public. The factions form the governing parties – currently the so-called "Ampel"-coalition of SPD, FDP, and Die Grünen/ Bündnis 90 – and the corresponding opposition are CDU/CSU, AfD, Die Linke, Bündnis Sarah Wagenknecht and the non-attached members (Deutscher Bundestag, 2024). The governing parties, represented by most members of the Bundestag, are primarily responsible for shaping current policies. On the other hand, the other parliamentary

groups contribute to the diversity of opinions and also provide a check and balance on the current government.

Regarding the missile deliveries, there is confusion and a lack of understanding about why the line for weapons deliveries is drawn specifically at the Taurus, as many parliament members believe Ukraine should receive the utmost support for self-defence. The population is divided on the issue as well, but the majority supports the Chancellor's decision due to a general fear of war. According to the survey from ARD Deutschland Trend (2024), 61% of the population is against the delivery. The decision obviously benefits Russia as well.

The debate was reignited when, on 1st of March 2024, an audio recording was published on the Russian propaganda platform "Russia Today," initiating the crisis. The recording consisted of a confidential conversation of Bundeswehr officers discussing how the use of German Taurus missiles could be planned without the direct involvement of German soldiers. The discussion served as a briefing for the German Defence Minister. In addition to discussing various scenarios, it is also mentioned that British and French, possibly also American, forces would be on-site, raising new questions not only within Germany but also causing tensions with alliance partners.

Scholz arguments are mainly based on the the fact that Taurus cruise missiles would need German military staff in Ukraine onsite. The intercepted conversation now suggests that a delivery could theoretically also be possible without them, hinting that there might be other reasons which are not transparent to the public.

Also it seems paradox: why would Russia release this information at all? Experts argue that in the past, Scholz has changed his opinions on weapon deliveries multiple times, therefore shifting his "red lines" repeatedly (cf. article #30; document #13). Russia wants to ensure that this time he sticks to his decision by revealing the information that put the Chancellor in a tight spot.

What becomes apparent in the following analysis is that the disclosure mainly benefits the German opposition and critics of Scholz. The new information raises several questions: Why does the Chancellor insist so rigidly on his stance and literally claim the opposite? Why can British and French soldiers be on-site without being considered war participants, but not Germany? Does this imply that they already are? A direct involvement of the Allies could mean a NATO alliance case, which would draw Germany into the conflict anyway. If the Taurus delivery is not an option, why are there still discussions at all? Or more particular, why are Defense Minister Pistorius and Scholz only now being briefed, even though Ukraine has been requesting this since 2022? These questions cast doubt on Germany's security policy preparedness and caused unrest among the population. The German government must explain itself to the public and its NATO partners.
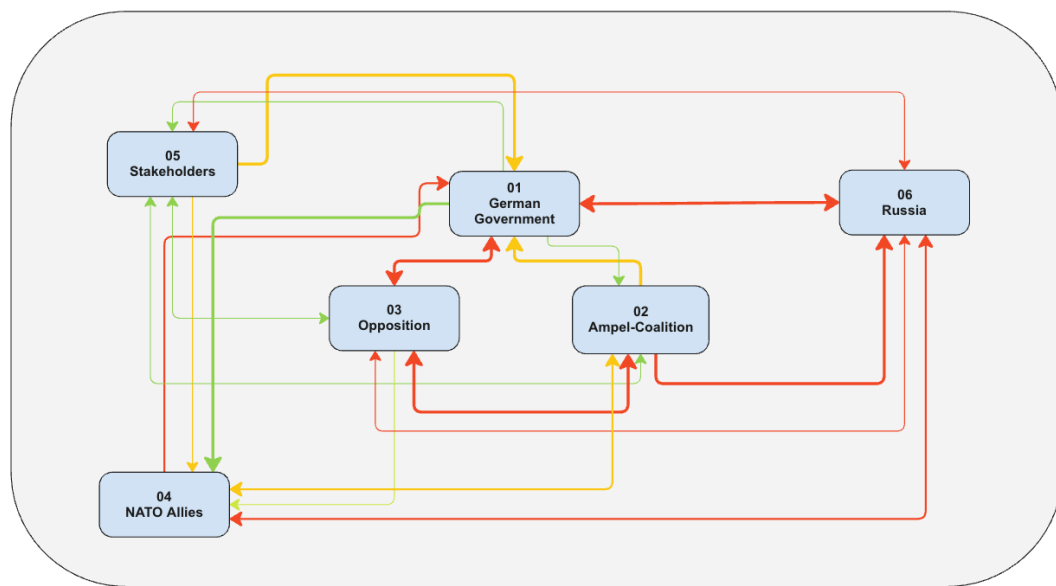
Figure 1. Rethorical Arena Taurus Scandal.

Therefore the intelligence disclosure has created a complex and dynamic rhetorical arena with various actors operating with different interests and strategies in line with the multivocal approach from RAT (Frandsen & Johansen, 2016). At the centre of this arena are the German governing institutions, which are trying to manage the fallout. Russia and its media channel Russia Today are strategically using the leaked information to disrupt the previous debate and therefore destabilize Western

alliances and undermine trust in democratic institutions. Through the systematic coding of statements, reactions, and communication patterns from each group of actors, relationships between the actors could be identified, as illustrated in Figure 1. The colors of the arrows indicate whether the rhetorical relations conveyed a primarily positive, cooperative (green), ambivalent (yellow) or tension-filled and conflict-driven (red) dynamic.

Overall, the debate unfolds on two distinct levels. One concerns the act of espionage itself and the related security breach, while the other revolves around the interpretation and implications of the conversation. At the beginning of the crisis, the focus is higher on the first level, while more focus is shifted to content in the later stages of the ongoing discussion.

The German government engages extensively both internally and with external actors such as NATO allies, journalists, and experts. This demonstrates the significance of communicating in a coordinated manner that considers both national and international interests and "spill-over-effect" (Frandsen & Johansen, 2020, p. 204) of the debate to related countries like France and Great Britain took place. The opposition, particularly the CDU/CSU and AfD, participates in numerous interactions, especially critical ones, which reflects the highly polarized political landscape and their active involvement in the debate.

At this point it is important to highlight that the previously identified actor groups are formed on the basis of the systemic functions they hold and do not correspond to the rhetorical positions expressed within the discourse. As described by several scholars (cf. Coombs & Holladay, 2013; Raupp, 2019; Frandsen & Johansen, 2020), overlapping sub-arenas emerge within the arena. Previous literature ambiguously defines these arenas, but in this work, sub-arenas within the defined actor groups can be recognized and help show how fragmented the arena actually is.

For instance, the emergence of a sub-arena surrounding the Bundestag is observable (see figure 2). While within the Ampel-coalition, the SPD has expressed full support and stressed the significance of unity – they are backing up the Chancellor, which also a member of SPD. However, differences in opinions have emerged among them since Die Grünen and the FDP in return are supporting Taurus deliveries. Especially in the initial stage of the case, the FDP publicly opposed the Chancellor's stance and advocated for a re-evaluation of the strategy regarding arms deliveries. Nonetheless, the coalition presented a united front in a subsequent voteas

the case goes on. This shift is clearly observable in the data and indicates ongoing closed-door negotiations, which may have led to the change of opinion.

Furthermore, the opposition parties are using written requests and a strong emotionalized rhetoric to emphasize the disunity within the governing coalition and to present their own positions. The CDU/CSU in particular is emphasizing the need for greater military support for Ukraine in order to guarantee European security and is taking center stage in the sub-arena. Also the interaction pattern of "hijacking" (Frandsen & Johansen, 2020, p. 205) gets visible for e.g. when the CDU started to advocate for a National Security Council, one of their previous election topics, or when the AfD uses the debate to portray the government as hesitant and weak, one of their ongoing narratives.
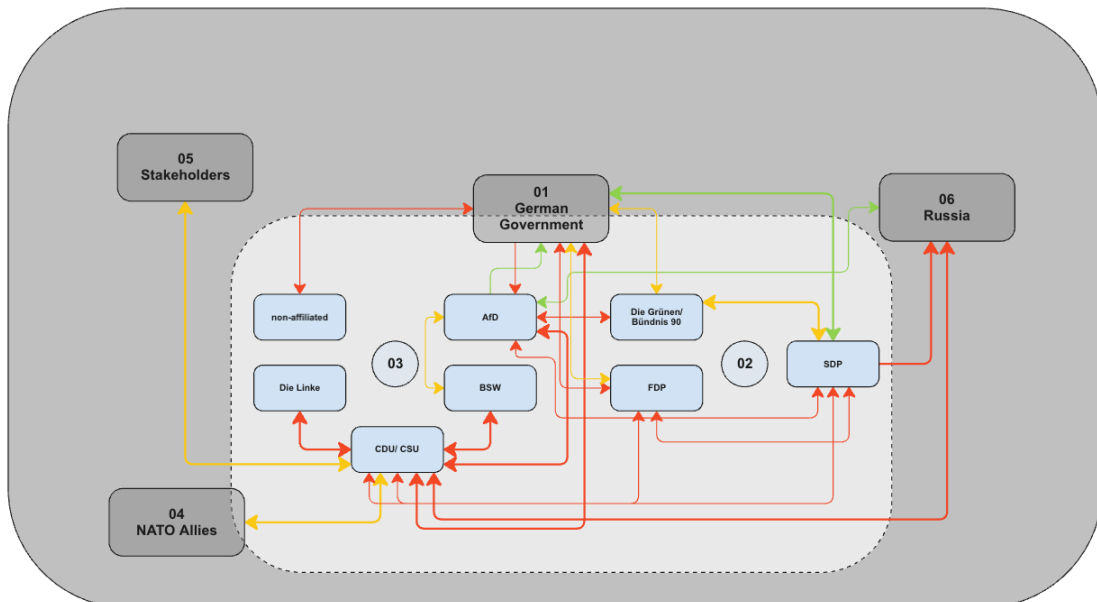
Figure 2. Rethorical Sub-Arena German Government

The patterns of interaction between the parties paint a picture of a strongly polarized German political landscape and revealed deep disagreements within both the governing coalition and the opposition parties. The intensive internal discussions and contradictory public statements reveal an inconsistent external communication strategy of the German government.

Despite the common conviction that Russia poses a threat - a view shared by almost all parties - there is no visible effort at consensus within the Bundestag. Instead, each party pursues its own strategic interests and uses the debate to

strengthen its political positions and put pressure on the government. This behavior is evident through a range of communication strategies and media presentations, which will undergo further examination in the following micro-analysis.

5.2   Micro Analysis

The four properties introduced by Frandsen and Johansen in their revised work in 2020 are part of the analytical tools within RAT which serve to decode the complex interplay of interests, interpretations, strategies, and communicative behaviour of the various actors in a crisis situation. They help to develop a comprehensive understanding of communication processes and show how actors shape and influence the crisis through their interactions. Since the data was rich in information, the following part aims to summarize and highlight the most important insights in order to highlight how they used strategic transparency.

3.5.1   *German Government (Executive)*

One of the most central actors in this case is the German government, which emphasizes its main interest in the German population's security and therefore firmly opposes the shipment of Taurus missiles (cf. document #4; #05; #13).

In their communication, the German government classifies the incident as seriously concerning and categorizes it as a hybrid attack, disinformation and Russian propaganda portraying themselves as unfair victims of a malicious IIO. According to Coombs (1995) this behaviour could be categorized as the "suffering" crisis response strategy. This shifts attention away from the content of the leaked information towards the portrayal of the government as the target of an unfair attack. In this sense, it is also particularly emphasized in the initial phase that there will be a comprehensive investigation into the case. After all, the government is accountable to the population and must manage to maintain trust in it.

In general, the government is in a delicate situation. It is clear from the data that they are deliberately withholding information and yet find themselves in the dilemma of having to meet society's demands for transparency. A quote from the Chancellor, which was widely reported in the media, illustrates that this issue was

not being dealt with thoughtfully. In a press conference, he was backing up his arguments against a delivery with "I'm the Chancellor, so that's the way it is. (Document #13)". This was probably intended to demonstrate authority and leadership strength. However, this statement has left stakeholders with an unsatisfied feeling of not having enough reasoning for his decision why he got even more criticised.

Later in the debate, he wants to defend himself and claims that it is time to "to clear up a number of half-truths that are spread in the public debate in order to create a false impression. (Document #13, p.19982)."

> *"These half-truths include, for example, the fact that many who have a good understanding of the details of what others are doing and what we are doing always leave this information out because they rely on it never being discussed and on not being caught withholding much of the knowledge they have from the German public." (Olaf Scholz, document #13)*

By mentioning these "half-truths", he draws attention to the opacity of others while positioning his own selective disclosure as a necessary measure to protect national security. In particular, he attacks an opposition politician by accusing him of knowing everything but engaging in public communication which is based on the knowledge that is not public knowledge." Furthermore, the chancellor added: "I don't think that should be the case in a democracy (document #13; Article #31)."

The government spokespersons also choose a similar strategy by informing people about conversations, but not their content, and otherwise not disclosing any information, exemplified by the following statement: "There (in a close circle with partners and allies) we discuss the things that need to be discussed. But we do that internally and not on the open stage at the Federal Press Conference (Document #04)".

This tactic allows him to gain the public's trust while retaining the freedom to protect strategically important information. The German government uses strategic transparency by deliberately withholding information and only disclosing what it deems necessary to maintain public order and trust.

5.3.2 Governing Parties "Ampel-Coalition" (Legislative)

The second actor group aknowledge the seriousness and gravity of the incident as well. Member of the Bundestag Agnieszka Brugger (Die Grünen) states: "The events of the last few days show once again how Vladimir Putin is trying to exert a massive negative influence on our open society, especially in Germany, through disinformation, destabilization and espionage" (Article #05).

The Ampel coalition is facing conflicts and division within its ranks. While the SPD supports the Chancellor, dissenting voices are emerging within the FDP and Die Grünen due to their support for missile delivery. Despite differing opinions, the parliamentary alliance presented a united front in the final vote against sending Taurus missiles, aiming to maintain unity and symbolism in the public eye. The labeling of the incident as a calculated hybrid attack emphasizes the importance of staying united and is used as an explanation for this contradictory behavior within the parliamentary group.

Additionally, there are accusations towards the oppositional parties and their actions playing "party political games" (Article #27) and driven by "selfish and base motives" (Arcticle #29).

They advocate for staff training and increased security policies and measures to protect against cybersecurity and espionage. Strategically, they seek to divert attention from the ambiguities from the content of the disclosure, highlighting the malicious intentions behind the incident, and demonstrate initiative in improving future actions. Daniel Baldy (SPD) claims: "The greatest vulnerability in IT is the human factor, and this vulnerability is ruthlessly exploited.".

The Ampel coalition appears to use transparency in a Habermasian sense, by explaining and justifying their stance on government actions. They also appear to have reached a consensus, demonstrating political unity. That goes in line with the statement of Dr. Ann-Veruschka Jurisch (FDP): "Putin deliberately exploits both our greatest strength and our greatest weakness: He turns our free and open society, our free discourse, and our democratic decision-making process against us (Document #13)."

However, a critical analysis of this approach suggests that it could be a type of performative transparency intended to mask internal conflicts and present a united front that may not necessarily reflect the most rational choice.

One of the most notable contributions to this debate comes from SPD parliamentarian Johannes Arlt, who criticizes the opposition for bringing the issue of weapon supply into the public domain. The main point is that while the demand for more transparency is generally seen as positive, it also brings complex challenges in foreign and security policy. Arlt poses the question: "Is transparency in inherent value in a democracy, and how does transparency relate to a justified secret? " (Document #13). He explains that "the secret is essentially characterized by the moment of creating a feeling of community (*Vergemeinschaftung*)" (p. 2044). He delves into the essence of secrecy, highlighting that sharing confidential information is a demonstration of trust between parties and forms the foundation for stable relationships. He stresses that this is a key aspect of foreign and security policy, both in terms of the government's decision-making process and in terms of intergovernmental relations. Some discussions cannot be held in public, for example, because they rely on evaluations of the political and military stability of the partners, and if these were made public, the trust of the allies would be compromised. Also, Germany's national security interests may be compromised by the full disclosure of information on agreements, weapon stocks, military operations or contingency capabilities, or technical details.

> *"The effect of Clausewitz's fog of war, referring to the moment of uncertainty about the state of the opposing side – which is nowadays, to be honest, very, very difficult to achieve – but which can result in tactical, operational or strategic advantages, would no longer be possible. (Johannes Arlt, Document #13, p. 2044f)"*

He also explicitly states that too much transparency in foreign and security policy could be used by adversaries to create instability through means of information warfare using it to manipulate public opinion, affect decision-making processes and undermine the stability and values of the state.

According to this, the pursuit of "greatest possible transparency" is feasible only in specific contexts and under certain conditions, rather than for its own sake. Arlt's argumentation occurs on a highly reflective meta-level. As a representative of the SPD, he is tasked with justifying the actions of his governing party. He faces the dilemma of balancing the democratic obligation to be accountable to the public with

the need to act strategically which is also in the interest of the German population. The explanations are actually a prime example of strategic transparency that shows how it ultimately contributes to the survival of the organization aligning with the definition of strategic communication itself (Zerfaß et al., 2018). Similarly, FDP member Strack-Zimmermann stated: "Resilience is developed when people are informed about what is happening (Document #18)." Communication and actual transparency about the practised transparency can be therefore viewed as a strategic approach in itself.

5.3.3 Opposition Parties (Legislative)

Different perspectives also exist within the opposition. However, they are not obligated to form a united alliance and therefore don't have to mask their differing opinions.

When analyzing the opposition, it is particularly interesting to observe how they utilize the revealed information. They argue, the Chancellor is using misrepresented information and disregarding the opinions of experts. His actions are contradictory and have damaged his own image, as well as Germany's reputation. There are concerns about Germany's weakening position within NATO and diminishing support from Western countries. They also warn of potential divisions between Germany, France and the UK.

It has been also recognized that Russia is attempting to provoke crises through espionage and sabotage. The leaked information is seen as a sign of numerous covert activities that have been strategically disclosed and are part of information warfare. The CDU is leveraging this to reintroduce their campaign topic such as the call for a "national security council" which got neglected during the previous election (cf. Document #13).

The previous mentioned controversy between Olaf Scholz and Norbert Röttgen strongly indicate that there are discussion behind-closed doors. The need for closure is further supported by their decision to hold a special non-public defence committee. The opposition seems to be instrumentalizing transparency for political gain with the information they selectively and purposefully disclose in the public debate, rather than aiming for genuine clarification and improvement of the security

situation. There is a risk that the public debate will be distorted by party political interests, which could lead to a polarization of society.

In contrast, the right-wing AfD takes a completely different position. Rüdiger Lucassen (AfD) expressed the view that it was inappropriate to blame Russia for the interception of the secret conversation (cf. Document #13, p. 20008) indicating again that they are using the moment for their own agenda. Surprisingly, at one point they are even siding with the Chancellor, as they are also against a Taurus delivery, albeit for different reasons than the government. Not only are parliament members surprised, but a journalist also concludes, "Praise comes from the AfD – the confusion is perfect." (Article #26; cf. Article #45; Document #13), displaying the chaos in this whole debate.

5.3.4 NATO Allies

The allies' reactions to intelligence revelations initially caused diplomatic tensions with Germany. It seems that Great Britain and France attempted to hide the potential presence of their military staff in Ukraine, which made the leaked conversation public. At this point, the ambivalence of strategic transparency is evident, as it is crucial to maintain operational and strategic advantages while on the other hand it could be questioned who has the right to know?

In their response, British officials either denied the contents of the leaked conversation or attempted to justify their own actions (cf. Articles #13; #18). They stated that it was inappropriate to comment on the military affairs of other nations, which aligns with Johannes Arlt's arguing.

Chancellor Scholz's comments have provoked anger and criticism particulary in the UK. The incident has highlighted the urgent need for action and the different perspectives in the UK and Germany. Germany's reliability has been called into question, with the argument being that Germany has been penetrated by Russian intelligence services (cf. Article #13). Overall, the incident was seen as an indiscretion, but not as a betrayal of secrets (cf. Articles #02; #18; #43)

There appears to be also tension with France, even though Chancellor Scholz has repeatedly denied this in his statements. Alongside the opposition, experts and journalists are drawing attention to the strained relationship. For example, the

French Institute for International Relations characterizes the relationship between Germany and France as "une relation chaotique" (Document #13). One journalist interprets statements by the French president as if he had indirectly labeled Scholz a "coward" and warned him that this would not be beneficial in the confrontation with Putin (Document #5).

Allover, the allies have responded cautiously to the wiretapping case, indicating an effort to prevent further escalation and leaving the communication about it to Chancellor Scholz. The USA has also reacted rationally, viewing the incident as an attempt by Russia to sow discord. John Kirby (USA) emphasized that Russia is trying to portray the West as disunited (cf. Article #14). Despite mixed reactions, trust within the alliance remains unbroken at least according to the German Government. The analysis suggests that the allies' defensive and strategic reactions focus on preserving national sovereignty and maintaining the alliance.

5.3.5 Other Stakeholders

The stakeholder which falls into this actor group are primarily journalists and experts who offer insights into the public's perspective on events since they ask the questions which people concerns and express the overall concerns and sentiments of the population.

Many stakeholders' initial response was to verify the authenticity of the leaked recording and clarify the facts. They stressed that a comprehensive investigation was needed to confirm the recording's genuineness. These stakeholders recognize that the incident could be seen as Russian propaganda, potentially indicating that Putin is already finding himself in a conflict with the West. On the other hand, it is pointed out that clear categorization is needed and not everything can be dismissed as Russian propaganda since for example, Western media also report on the UK's issues they must be taken seriously (cf. Document #04).

Notably, this actor group is tackling the case pragmatically and examining it from a quite rational perspective. Journalists and experts acknowledge that the leaked information was not intended for the public. They criticize the way in which the debate is being conducted, as well as the media's hype surrounding the topic. At the same time, it is emphasized that this information could be used to intimidate the

population. "Every citizen in Germany has the right to know why we are helping Ukraine. But in matters of war and peace, we don't need 83 million defense ministers" (Article #30). It is noted that no other European country discusses weapons systems, delivery problems, and the capabilities or inabilities of its own army so openly as Germany does which makes them a weak spot and therefore a suitable target for Putin (Document #13).

Experts argue that content of the conversation between the high-ranking officers wasn't even that explosive as it was framed in the media, since the information was already publicly known. According to a Tagesschau article: "If Putin seriously doesn't know what the 'Taurus' can do, a week of German talk show reality is enough to bring him up to speed. There they all sit (...) the experts, and show off the alleged procrastinator Scholz. They talk about reach, programming and 'Taurus' explosive power. And forget thereby explosive power of such transparency (Article #30)."

These diverse responses from journalists and experts underscore the complexity of the situation and emphasize the necessity for a balanced and responsible approach to presenting security policy information in public discussions. It seems like the topic is being discussed from a more distant perspective, as it's not about pursuing individual interests as some actor groups do. For them it is much more possible to maintain the view of the big picture. "Scholz is not a peace chancellor. He is the Federal Chancellor. And he needs strategic freedom. Wanting to take this away from him will ultimately please one person in particular: the war criminal Putin," summarizes one of the experts (Article #30) and undermines this interpretation.

5.3.6 Russia

The response of Russian actors to the incident indicates a deliberate use of disclosures to intensify political tensions and weaken Western alliances. The information was unauthorizedly published through the Russian propaganda channel "Russia Today", which released the audio file with the original German audio and a Russian text version online (cf. Article #01).

The Russian media and official representatives intentionally distorted the information to support specific narratives. Maria Zakharova, spokeswoman for the

Russian Foreign Ministry, claimed that the conversation provided evidence of "plans for hostilities against Russia, including the destruction of civilian infrastructure" and demanded explanations from Germany (Article #42). She emphasized that "attempts to avoid answers will be seen as an admission of guilt." Russia Today even spoke of a "terrorist attack with German 'Taurus' cruise missiles on the Crimean bridge" and claimed that "Germany is preparing for war with Russia".

Despite the aggressive rhetoric, President Vladimir Putin mentioned his commitment to exercising restraint but stated that they were closely monitoring the situation and would be assessing Germany's response. He further recommended that people carefully consider their actions, hoping to dissuade political and military decision-makers in Germany from taking further action.

The Russian actors pursued several strategic goals with the publication of the intelligence disclosure. First, their aim was to create the impression that Russia is already at war with NATO, possibly to legitimize their own actions among the civilian population and diaspora. Secondly, they attempted to sow mistrust and destabilize the political landscape in Germany. Thirdly, their aim was to drive the Allies apart and weaken cooperation within NATO. Additionally, by portraying Germany as an active participant in the war, they aimed to prevent further support for Ukraine through arms deliveries. However, it should be clearly noted that this is a distortion of information and can therefore be categorized as disinformation, part of a larger IIO.

Overall, the analysis indicates that Russian actors utilized the intelligence disclosures to realize their geopolitical objectives even though they claim to have made the information transparent in order to reveal the "true" interests of Germany to the public. What sets this type of transparency apart from others? The key distinction between why this action may be perceived as hostile rather than strategic lies in the underlying intentions. In the discussion will be emphasized how disclosing intelligence was used as a tactic in information warfare.

5.3 Synthesis

To address the research question, the investigation showed that the identified actors in the rhetorical arena surrounding the Taurus scandal made sense differently of the intelligence disclosure.

While all countries, except Russia as the disclosers themselve, recognized it as a hybrid attack against the West, the debate caused tension within its own ranks. The incident not only stirred up politics and media within Germany but also had international implications. The fact that the disclosed information could be interpreted in different ways allowed the different parties to use it to advance their own agendas.

However, the new transparency of information has not created a conducive environment for rational discussion where the better argument wins in the Habermasian sense but is utilized all the more for the "bargaining" tactics of individual stakeholders. The importance of keeping secrets is generally acknowledged, but it has become evident that all participants used strategic transparency as a form of strategic communication (Pamment, 2018) and purposefully employed it to achieve their individual objectives. The communication strategies observed in the analysis do not correspond to the principles of political deliberation. Instead, they seek to expose other actors and provoke conflict between them.

This thesis does not deny that transparency is incredibly important for democracy. In fact, transparency is crucial to keep governments accountable. Rather, it aims to shed light on the fact that it is neither black nor white since the case shows that full transparency is not achievable and strategic transparency can also lead to political instability, weakening democracy. Which leads to the discussion where these findings will be discussed in order to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon and connect it to the previous literature.

6. Discussion

The analysis revealed that transparency is being used purposefully to accomplish organizational goals. Moreover, this case has demonstrated that transparency is indeed not always a normative ideal in a way to empower people to make more informed and effective decisions (cf. Pamment, 2018, p. 2). Beyond that, it is imperative to consider how intelligence disclosure is utilized and what implications arise from its utilization as an information warfare tactic. Since in the data the Taurus scandal was labeled multiple times as a hybrid attack, it is important to consider the case in the context of the findings from the literature review.

Many themes and findings of intelligence studies can be applied to the case. The much-discussed "disclosure dilemma" (Dylan & Maguire, 2022; Riemer & Sobelman, 2023) could easily be bypassed in the Taurus scandal, as it was an application error by the German officers that allowed eavesdropping, meaning Russia did not have to disclose any of their sources. Furthermore, the perfomative nature and the cultural meaning as described by Riemer & Sobelman (2023) were evident. It becomes clear how Russia uses intelligence disclosure both as a performative act and as a soft warfare measure, as Riemer (2019) identified originally in the context of OPID.

Determining the legitimacy of withholding or releasing information for the common good versus serving one's own interests domestically is often a matter of interpretation and a fine line. The rationale for labeling Russia's actions as a hybrid attack should be critically questioned. Especially when contemporary scholars like Dylan & Maguire (2022) and Riemer & Sobelman (2023) have consistently highlighted the way Western states employ intelligence as well. Furthermore, during a government press conference, a journalist posed an eligible question towards one of the press spokespersons from the German Federal Ministry of Defence:

"On one hand, he (Defence Minister Pistorius) has fully confirmed the authenticity of the Taurus leak. At the same time, he has called it a disinformation campaign. Therefore, I would like to ask: In the eyes of the Minister, where does the aspect of disinformation lie in the release of an unedited document or audio recording that the Bundeswehr itself has deemed authentic?" (document #5)

It is important to note that the term "leak" may be misleading in this context since no information was intentionally released from the inside. Instead, the information was used purposefully from Russia to influence foreign and domestic public debate and set people against each other (cf. document #5). Therefore, it can be considered a case of "deceptive deployment" (Dylan & Maguire, 2022, p. 35), which is distinct from the strategic deployment, which can be attributed to Western states' behaviour.

The following findings aim to demonstrate how this deceptive deployment can be applied in the context of information warfare. They demonstrate how strategic transparency can be used to:

1. **Coerce**

What has already been pointed out by other intelligence scholars is that the revealation of certain information forces actors to do or not to do certain things. It is obvious: Russia is using the situation to gain geopolitical advantages and to weaken Germany and its allies. Germany is, in some ways, forced to not deliver the Taurus. No missile deliveries may mean a weakening of Ukraine and advantages for Russia in the war.

Since Russia can't attack Germany military-wise – otherwise they would risk a military escalation on another dimension – they used the disclosure as a coercive tool. Also, the pressure from third parties like allies or oppositional parties as well as the power of the public is used to put Germanys government into distress. The three objectives of coercive disclosure which Riemer & Sobelman (2023) describe are recognizable since it (1) leaves Germany with less room for manoeuvre and strategic ambiguity in terms of missile deliveries, (2) influences the public perceptions and aims to put pressure on the government and (3) strengthens the Russian narratives of an aggressive West.

2. Disguise & Distract

Transparency can sometimes cause other important topics to be overshadowed or pushed into the background. This can happen even more easily when new information is released in an already saturated information environment, making it challenging to focus and prioritize. This forces recipients to select and filter, which is crucial in today's attention economy.

By controlling the flow of information in a certain direction, public and political attention is focused on information that has more newsworthiness. This can be achieved through disclosing information at a specific moment and time to shift focus away from other important but less prominent issues highlighting again the performative character of intelligence disclosure (Riemer & Sobelman, 2023). This tactic is particularly effective in today's media landscape and attention economy, where specific news factors are crucial for bringing certain topics to the forefront.

Reference points for this can also be found in the analysis. The choice of the publication date was on Navalny's funeral day as well as when there are new findings on another Russian espionage case are being overshadowed. Also, the fact that the debate is also increasingly focusing on inner political issues such as security policy or a potential National Security Council could be an indication of how the actual debate is being redirected (cf. document #04).

3. Sow Distrust

It can be argued that transparency does not always build trust but even undermines it. The disclosure of sensitive information and the subsequent debate may have weakened public confidence in the government's ability to handle national security issues effectively. The public expects their representatives to, nevertheless, have everything under control, which is why a clear line should be drawn in terms of communication and not, as in the Taurus scandal, a series of contradictions that leads to even more confusion. In order to find the best solutions for society, however, debates must first be held that are not in the public eye. There are non-public hearings such as the mentioned Defense Committee where discussion and disputes can take place but behind the scenes.

As not only public influence continues to grow but also their anxieties (Phillips, 2011), governing institutions increasingly need to legitimize themselves and their

actions. However, due to security concerns and other reasons, not all information can be disclosed, leading to what has been called "performative opacity" (Trenta et al., 2023), which hostile actors can abuse to sow distrust, as in the Taurus case.

4. Polarize

According to Habermas, debates and rational arguments should be used to find a common consensus. However, when transparency is used strategically, it can also lead to conflict and fuel different political opinions. This not only jeopardizes domestic political stability but also decision-making and the ability to act accordingly.

The Taurus scandal sparked disagreement not only in the whole rhetorical arena but also within the Bundestag namingly the coalition, opposition, and political parties. As mentioned, there is an expectation for transparency, so political opponents are clashing and accusing each other of using half-truths in debates. Instead of presenting a united front against the true aggressor, many players are trying to exploit issues for their own agendas.

Also, the fostering of strategic narratives (Miskimmon et al., 2018) supported by the disclosed information tainted with a cultural meaning aims to polarize domestic as well as international publics against each other.

5. Compromise National Sovereignty

In an increasingly networked world, many actors are interconnected. This leads to so-called "spill-over effects", which are not only taken into account in the RAT (Frandsen & Johansen, 2020, p. 204) but also in the literature on networked diplomacy (Bjola et al., 2019). Too much transparency therefore jeopardizes not only one's own interests but also those of allies, which can quickly lead to diplomatic tensions, as the case also shows. The public debate exposed NATO allies. This potentially affected international cooperation and confidence in Germany's ability to protect sensitive information.

6. Decrease Transparency

In a world where transparency is hailed as normative ideal, it's paradoxical to consider that excessive transparency could eventually result in less transparency

overall. In a world where transparency is abundant, the true value of confidentiality and keeping secrets grows.

An example from the case which supports this paradox is that the scandal may lead the government to become more cautious about releasing information in the future. All stakeholder groups are calling for more stringent security measures. This could result in a more restrictive information policy that reduces transparency and potentially hinders democratic accountability, as more arguments can be made for withholding information and using it in cases where public debate would be more appropriate.

Intelligence Disclosure features characteristics of all of the above categories and thus reflects the heightened threat of information warfare. It takes advantage of the value placed on secrecy, which opposes the democratic principles of openness and transparency. This gives significance to the disclosed information, which individual actors strategically exploit to achieve their goals. One of the main issues is the expectation that has been generated in society, partly due to the normative ideal of Habermas' theory.

7. Conclusion

The thesis aimed to analyse reactions and strategies in order to manage intelligence disclosures, to deepen the understanding of strategic transparency and to examine possible negative effects of transparency in the context of information warfare. The data was used to answer the central research question: "*How did the various actor groups within the rhetorical arena surrounding the Taurus scandal make sense of the intelligence disclosure?"* The investigation uncovered that the individuals interpreted the act as well as the content of the intelligence disclosure differently. While some actors used strategic transparency to justify their positions and maintain trust, other parties used selective disclosures for political advantage. The research highlights the tension between strategic transparency and the ideal speech situation, as addressed in the research problem. While transparency is often upheld as a normative ideal, practice shows that a balance between openness and secrecy is necessary since transparency can also lead to disorder and exploitation to advance individual goals instead of fostering a rational debate in the Habermasanian sense.

Moreover, to emphasise the critical perspective (cf. Wehmeier, 2018), transparency can be used in a hostile way in the form of information warfare tactics. In accordance with the literature, the findings showed that systematic disclosure of intelligence was used to coerce, disguise and distract, polarise, compromise national sovereignty, and even decrease transparency. Hostile actors, such as Russia in this study, used the deceptive deployment of intelligence and transparency for an information influence operation. This practice further illustrates the subjective nature of transparency, which can be misused to control information flows and build a fruitful ground for disinformation.

The theoretical implications of this study broaden our understanding of strategic transparency as a form of strategic communication (Pamment, 2018) by emphasising its dual role in modern diplomacy, particularly in public diplomacy. Traditionally, diplomacy aimed to stabilise inter-state relations and avoid conflict through

discreet communication and negotiations, while public diplomacy focused on open exchange and promoting mutual understanding between domestic and foreign publics.

The strong demands for transparency in Western democracies can lead to instability, especially when governments try to live up to these expectations. If it comes to light that the government is not fully transparent in certain areas, it can lead to a loss of trust and political fragility. This can be clearly seen in the Taurus affair, where the revelation of secret information not only undermines the government's credibility but also increases political tensions and uncertainty in their diplomatic affairs.

At an international level, however, this expectation does not naturally exist. States are not obliged to be fully transparent with other countries or the international public, as relations between states are often characterised by their strategic interests. The world is still viewed in terms of allies and adversaries, as also the rhetorical arena demonstrated, which leads governments to withhold certain information in order to protect their national interests and to preserve the government's strategic ambiguity. Maintaining this distinction is difficult in today's digital world, where information flows freely, and the lines between national and international communication are blurred. Verčič (2021) states: "We live simultaneously in an international political system of Westphalia sovereign States and in a supraterritorial global networked society – and they run (under) different rules. (Verčič, 2021, p. 35)". The ability to balance transparency and secrecy in a globally networked world will be crucial to the success of diplomatic endeavours and the stability of international relations. To address this issue, we need to ask fundamental questions about the normative aspects of strategic communication to further adapt public diplomacy theories and practices.

As a result of the practical implications, political actors could utilise the findings to adapt their communication strategies. In particular, they could reflect on how to use transparency more consciously or targeted. It is crucial to consider strategies for managing and communicating transparency proactively to ensure readiness in the event of an intelligence disclosure. Similar to crisis communication, it is important to anticipate IIOs during times of information warfare and adjust to such environments to build resilience.

The new opportunities for public participation, the easy access to information and the possibility of interacting directly with politicians through digital platforms initially create the impression that everything should be transparent. Surprisingly, the data has shown that even in the public discourse, arguments are often made in favour of secrecy and private discussions, which speaks against this impression. An effective strategy involves communicating about transparency and secrecy, offering justifications for why certain information should remain confidential. One could conclude that the challenge is not so much about managing transparency and information, as the interpretations are subjective and interpreted individually anyway, but rather about managing the expectations of the public, which could then ultimately foster more trust within a democracy.

Trust is necessary for negotiations and rational discussions to occur behind closed doors. When public scrutiny and pressure force actors to constantly legitimise and argue for themselves, they become less open to considering other viewpoints or being swayed by stronger arguments. To achieve this, the public must be well-informed and clearly understand the government's actions to counteract the earlier mentioned anxiety of the population.

According to the literature, a wisely handled crisis can also lead to something positive (Seeger et al., 2003). Perhaps the incident has not only inspired a rethinking of transparency as an ideal norm but has also prompted consideration of practical measures that could contribute to a successful democratic discourse. Inspiration for the future could come from the annual Swedish security conference "Folk och Försvar" (*People and Defense*), which offers a public forum to define goals and interests for Swedens' defence policy and then serve as a guideline and trustworthy basis for executive decisions. In general, awareness must be created that security policy begins long before the decision for or against the delivery of weapons and that war is waged on several levels today. What measures are necessary for this and whether these really create trust or replace transparency could be a good starting point for further research.

Another intriguing avenue for future research would be to gather scientific insights from the public's perspective to assess the government's communication strategies' effectiveness more accurately. This was not the focus of this study, as the primary emphasis here was on how intelligence disclosures are managed. However, for instance, results from the ARD-DeutschlandTREND survey (Schlinkert &

Heinrich, 2024), conducted precisely during the timeframe of the Taurus scandal, show that both Olaf Scholz and Boris Pistorius gained popularity among the German population, which contrasts with the media's portrayal of the situation. Nevertheless, a superficial, initial interpretation of this data suggests that the government's crisis communication may have positively influenced public opinion despite the scandal. It is important to emphasise that this interpretation is based on analytical assumptions and does not claim any statistical correlations between crisis management and the effects on public trust, as there are obviously other explanations as well.

Nevertheless, it shows that we have only just scratched the surface of the subject. The duality between strategic transparency and secrecy remains an intriguing and somewhat mysterious topic. It not only sparks the necessity but also the desire for further investigation in this area.

Appendix 1

1.1 Overview Documents

ID	Source	Date of Publication	Document Type & Title (translated)
01	Federal Government	01.03.202	Transcript: Government Press Conference of March 1, 2024
02	Federal Government	01.03.202	Transcript: Press Conference following the Munich Summit of the German Economy and the International Handicrafts Fair on March 1, 2024
03	Federal Government	02.03.2024	Transcript: Press Statement by Chancellor Scholz following his meeting with Pope Francis
04	Federal Government	04.03.2024	Transcript: Government Press Conference of March 4, 2024
05	Federal Government	06.03.2024	Transcript: Government Press Conference of March 6, 2024
06	Federal Government	06.03.2024	Transcript: Press Conference following the Chancellor's Meeting with the State Premiers
07	Federal Government	11.03.2024	Transcript: Government Press Conference of March 11, 2024
08	Federal Government	13.03.2024	Press Release: Citizens Have a Right to Prudence
09	Federal Government	13.03.2024	Transcript: Government Press Conference of March 13, 2024
10	Bundestag	06.03.2024	Printed Matter: Minor Inquiry: Western Forces and Special Units in Ukraine
11	Bundestag	07.03.2024	Printed Matter: Written Questions with Answers Received by the Federal Government in the Week of March 4, 2024

12	Bundestag	13.03.2024	Printed Matter: Diplomacy Instead of Taurus Cruise Missiles – Supporting Initiatives to End the Ukraine War
13	Bundestag	13.03.2024	Stenographic Report: German Bundestag 156th Session (5h 36min); including i.a.: • Kanzlerbefragung (Chancellor holds a speech and answers questions from members of the Bundestag) • 15x speeches by representatives of all parliamentary groups represented in the Bundestag (Special parliamentary session called "Aktuelle Stunde")
14	Bundestag	13.03.2024	Pressrelease: Questioning of the Federal Government – Scholz: Ensure Non-Involvement of German Soldiers
15	Bundestag	14.03.2024	Pressrelease: Aktuelle Stunde – Plenary Session Deals with the Wiretapping Scandal in the Bundeswehr
16	Bundestag	03.03.2024	Resolution Recommendation: Rejection of Taurus Cruise Missile Delivery
17	FDP	05.03.2024	KUBICKI Interview: Arm Up as Fast as Possible and with Everything We Have
18	FDP	07.03.2024	STRACK-ZIMMERMANN Interview: It's About Our Freedom in Peace and the Willingness to Defend It
19	FDP	07.03.2024	DJIR-SARAI Interview: The Basis for Solving Many Challenges is a Strong Economy
20	Defence Ministry	03.03.2024	Transcript Video Recording of Press Encounter: Pistorius on Wiretapping Taurus

21	Defence Ministery	05.03.2024	Transcript Video Recording Clarification of the Wiretapping Case: All Important Measures Taken

Table 3. Detailed information about analyzed documents within the cases.

1.2 Overview Articles

ID	Media	Date of Publication	Headline
01	Tagesschau	01.03.24	Bundeswehroffiziere belauscht?Russland veröffentlicht angebliche Abhöraufnahmen
02	Tagesschau	02.03.24	Verteidigungsministerium prüftWurde die Bundeswehr von Russland belauscht?
03	Tagesschau	02.03.24	Mutmaßlicher AbhörfallSuper-GAU für die Bundeswehr?
04	Tagesschau	02.03.24	Gespräch von Luftwaffen-OffizierenVerteidigungsministerium bestätigt Abhörfall
05	Tagesschau	03.03.24	Bundeswehr abgehörtUnion stellt Scholz' Glaubwürdigkeit infrage
06	Tagesschau	03.03.24	Kiesewetter im Bericht aus BerlinHatte Russland Zugangsdaten zu "Taurus"-Gespräch?
07	Tagesschau	03.03.24	Pistorius zu Bundeswehr-Abhörfall"Wir dürfen Putin nicht auf den Leim gehen"
08	Tagesschau	03.03.24	Russische Spionage bei BundeswehrWarum der Abhörfall brisant ist
09	Tagesschau	04.03.24	Alexander Graf LambsdorffDeutscher Botschafter im Außenministerium in Moskau
10	Tagesschau	04.03.24	Bundeswehr-AbhörskandalWie sicher sind Webex-Konferenzen?

11	Tagesschau	04.03.24	Bundeswehr-AbhörskandalNichts für das parteipolitische Klein-Klein
12	Tagesschau	04.03.24	Bundeswehr-AbhörfallBritische Regierung reagiert zurückhaltend
13	Tagesschau	04.03.24	"Taurus"-AbhöraffäreWarum Deutschland keine Kriegspartei ist
14	Tagesschau	05.03.24	Faeser zu "Taurus"-Abhöraffäre"Schutz gegen Spionage hochgefahren"
15	Tagesschau	05.03.24	Skandinavien-ReiseSchweres Gepäck für Pistorius
16	Tagesschau	05.03.24	Pistorius zu "Taurus"-Abhöraffäre"Anwendungsfehler" ermöglichte offenbar Abhöraktion
17	Tagesschau	05.03.24	Skandinavien-ReiseSchweres Gepäck für Pistorius
18	Tagesschau	05.03.24	"Taurus"-AbhöraffäreWas machen britische Kräfte in der Ukraine?
19	Tagesschau	07.03.24	ARD-DeutschlandTrendMehrheit gegen "Taurus"-Lieferung an die Ukraine
20	Tagesschau	08.03.24	Unionsantrag im BundestagDer "Taurus" sorgt weiter für Unruhe
21	Tagesschau	09.03.24	Streit um "Taurus"-LieferungenBriten können sich einen Ringtausch vorstellen
22	Tagesschau	11.03.24	Sondersitzung zur AbhöraffäreIm Kern geht es um Scholz' Nein zum "Taurus"
23	Tagesschau	12.03.24	Verteidigungsausschuss zu AbhöraffäreAuch Luftwaffeninspekteur nutzte unsichere Leitung
24	Tagesschau	12.03.24	Bundestag"Taurus"-Zoff vor Kanzlerbefragung und Abstimmung
25	Tagesschau	13.03.24	"Taurus"-Debatte im BundestagTrotz harter Vorwürfe - Scholz bleibt beim Nein

26	Tagesschau	13.03.24	"Taurus"-Debatte"Stierkampf" im Bundestag
27	Tagesschau	14.03.24	Debatte über "Taurus"-LieferungDie Union will es noch mal wissen
28	Tagesschau	14.03.24	Debatte um "Taurus"-LieferungenMerz wirft Scholz Spiel mit Kriegsängsten vor
29	Tagesschau	14.03.24	Abstimmung im BundestagUnion scheitert erneut mit "Taurus"-Antrag
30	Tagesschau	14.03.24	Streit um "Taurus"-LieferungEs braucht keine 83 Millionen Verteidigungsminister
31	Tagesschau	15.03.24	Verdacht auf Geheimnisverrat bei "Taurus"-Sitzung
32	BILD	01.03.24	Verteidigungsministerium bestätigt Russen-Lausch-Angriff: Bundeskanzler Scholz: „Sehr ernste Angelegenheit"
33	BILD	02.03.24	Russen hören deutsche Offiziere ab: Das Lausch-Problem der Bundeswehr Nato-Partner und Sicherheitskreise sind besorgt
34	BILD	03.03.24	Putin-Vertrauter rastet nach Abhör-Skandal komplett aus: „Deutschland bereitet sich auf Krieg gegen Russland vor"
35	BILD	03.03.24	Pistorius über Abhör-Skandal: Putin führt „Informationskrieg" gegen uns
36	BILD	04.03.24	So (un)sicher sind WhatsApp, Telegram und Signal: Hören die Russen auch MICH ab?
37	BILD	04.03.24	Lausch-Skandal erschüttert Deutschland: Darum schlug Putin JETZT zu
38	BILD	04.03.24	Ganz schön einfach!: Mit diesem Passwort schützt Pistorius sein Abhör-Statement

39	BILD	04.03.24	Nach Lausch-Angriff: Deutscher Botschafter in Putins Ministerium
40	BILD	05.03.24	Pistorius spricht von „Informationskrieg": Schlägt Deutschland jetzt gegen Putin zurück?
41	BILD	06.03.24	Top-Militärexperte warnt: Hat Putin Sex-Videos von deutschen Politikern?
42	BILD	06.03.24	Nach Taurus-Affäre: Russen-TV droht mit Brückensprengung in Deutschland
43	BILD	07.03.24	Britischer Besuch in Berlin: Putin kann uns NICHT spalten!
44	BILD	12.03.24	Taurus-Abhörskandal: Auch Luftwaffen-Inspekteur nutzte unsichere Leitung
45	BILD	13.03.24	Ungewollte Rückendeckung für Scholz: „Die AfD unterstützt Sie, Herr Bundeskanzler"

Table 4. Detailed information about analyzed articles within the cases.

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