

# Peering through the fog

**W**eapons are fired and targets are struck, causing smoke clouds, clamour and chaos and a resultant breakdown in communications and loss of oversight. Despite meticulous planning and preparation, it is the ‘friction’ inherent in the fog of war that dictates the course of every battle.<sup>1</sup> The same is true in our digitalised world, where uncertainty and ambiguity caused by digital noise, perceptions and deceptions have become increasingly crucial instruments of war. The possibilities offered by the internet, social media and ongoing technological developments have changed society and the battlefield of the 21st century.

Secrecy constitutes part of this friction. It is used to dissipate the fog and achieve victory, but also to wrong-foot adversaries. An organisation such as the Netherlands Defence Intelligence and Security Service (NLD DISS) is only too aware of this paradox, operating as it does in a democratic society where both privacy – or personal secrets – and transparency are of paramount importance. Secret services are tasked with protecting these crucial democratic triumphs. However, due to the nature of their activities they may be forced to violate this very privacy while sometimes failing to provide the required degree of openness.<sup>2</sup>

Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the use, importance and necessity of intelligence to support national and international security have been at the forefront of everyone’s thoughts, reinforced by the unprecedented disclosure of classified information in the months prior to the dropping of the first Russian bombs. But such disclosure cannot entirely dispel the secrecy in which intelligence is shrouded. Both military personnel on the physical and digital battlefields and civilians on the sidelines continue to peer through the fog. Correct and reliable information appears to be becoming increasingly scarce. More than ever, digital friction is becoming a part of the battlefield and contributing to the fog of war 2.0.<sup>3</sup>

In this special edition of *Militaire Spectator*, NLD DISS aims to dissipate some of the fog enshrouding its activities. Despite the limitations that it is faced with, it contributes to transparency by examining aspects of military intelligence and security. The authors discuss the historical development of the service and its predecessors, its future, cyber operations and intelligence, and the relationship between the producers and recipients of military intelligence. In a unique double interview, the CHOD and the Director of NLD DISS also discuss at length the current and future relationship between the service and the armed forces. ■

1 ‘Friktion ist das einzige Begriff (...) was den wirklichen Krieg von dem auf dem Papier unterscheidet’, Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege* (Berlin, 1832).

2 Dennis Broeders, *Het geheim in de informatiesamenleving* (The Hague/Rotterdam, 2015); Paul Frissen, *Het geheim van de laatste staat. Kritiek van de transparantie* (Amsterdam, 2016).

3 Maarten Katsman, ‘Fog of War 2.0. 20 jaar MIVD: Wat nieuwe ontwikkelingen vragen van inlichtingen- en veiligheidsdiensten’, See: [www.militairespectator.nl](http://www.militairespectator.nl), 30 June 2022.