

BLACK SWAN Vs. STEEL SWAN

-An Hybrid Warfare Brief-

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THE BLACK SWAN

The fashion. The Black Swan had a good run. Ever since 2008, no disaster has been permitted to occur without someone in a well-cut blazer solemnly declaring it one. The term was coined to describe the rare, the unforeseeable, the catastrophe nobody saw coming and within a decade it had become the single most predictable item in any boardroom. There is now a Black Swan slide in every risk deck, which rather defeats the point of a bird nobody was supposed to see.

The idea. Underneath the cliché was something genuinely useful. Some shocks are so improbable that planning for them is impossible, yet so vast in impact that ignoring them is fatal. A pandemic. A collapse. A war that *couldn't* start, right up until it did. Fair enough. We have all become reluctant connoisseurs of the improbable.

The world is no longer paralysed by the things it failed to see coming. It is paralysed by the things it cannot stop seeing.

BLACK SWAN

UNEXPECTED.
RARE.
HIGH IMPACT.



VS

STEEL SWAN

ENGINEERED.
PERSISTENT.
DESIGNED TO PARALYZE.



THE STEEL SWAN

Meet the bird. The Steel Swan is not an event. It is a condition manufactured, maintained, and quietly profitable for whoever builds it.

Where the Black Swan erupts from chaos, the Steel Swan is welded together on purpose: a strategic environment deliberately hardened through cognitive overload, ambiguity, and relentless informational pressure, until governments, companies, and entire populations can no longer separate signal from noise and, eventually, stop trying.

The battlefield has moved. It is no longer confined to tanks, missiles, and aircraft carriers, all of which are ruinously expensive and tediously visible. It now unfolds inside human cognition, which is cheaper, far harder to defend, and conveniently located behind everyone's eyes.

The objective is no longer to convince you that something is true. It is to ensure that nobody — yourself included — can establish what is true at all.

The result is a peculiar species of paralysis. Boards hesitate. Governments commission a review.

Markets flinch at a rumor and apologise to it later. Newsrooms amplify confusion faster than anyone can correct it, then sell advertising against the confusion.

In a genuine crisis, where hours carry consequences, this produces a thoroughly modern form of defeat: total information, zero decision.

1 INFORMATION FLOOD

Minor actors amplify the noise.

Great powers use volume as a weapon to overwhelm, distract and exhaust.



STATE ACTORS



MINOR POWERS



NON-STATE ACTORS



EVERYONE PUBLISHES.
FEW ARE TRUSTED.

2 INFLUENCE ARCHITECTURE

Great powers build systems.

Minor powers exploit gaps.

Influence is no longer loud — it is embedded, patient and systemic.



3 CONTESTED REALITY

Reality becomes fragmented.

Trust erodes.

Decision-making paralyses.

In the new spy world,
control of perception
is power.



INFORMATION IS PLENTIFUL.
CLARITY IS RARE.
DECISION IS THE REAL
BATTLEFIELD.

The mechanism. Physicists call it *entropy* the tendency of any system to drift toward disorder unless someone spends energy keeping it tidy. Apply that to the information ecosystem and you have the Steel Swan's entire business model. *Danyk and Briggs*, who named the thing, describe two instruments working in tandem.

White Noise multiplies versions: flood every question with so many competing "truths" that the field of possibilities expands faster than anyone can search it.

Black Noise does the opposite, systematically discrediting the sources that might cut through until authority itself reads as just one more agenda with a logo. Run both at once and a population's collective uncertainty climbs toward its theoretical maximum. The decision loop does not make the wrong choice. It simply stops closing.

Black Swans shock systems. Steel Swans freeze them. One is a heart attack; the other is a slow, generously funded anaesthetic.

We have seen it. In February 2022, Russian armor sat in plain view on commercial satellite imagery; British intelligence had been ringing the alarm for weeks; the invasion was, by any honest reading, foretold. And still European capitals, newsrooms, and even Kyiv struggled to act as one, because the information environment had been pre-saturated into doubt long before the first column moved.

The tanks were visible. The decision was not. The system had been anaesthetised before it was struck which is the entire point of the exercise.

The craftsmen Several major powers have, with varying degrees of elegance, learned to build these things.

Russia favors the blunt instrument, wielded with real artistry. White Noise as a national style. Its specialty is not persuasion but confusion: release six contradictory versions of an event before lunch, deny all of them by dinner, and let Western fact-checkers do the exhausting work of disproving a negative.

The aim is rarely to make you believe Moscow. It is to make you doubt everyone else and, ideally, yourself.

China prefers the long game and superior engineering. Rather than manufacturing chaos, Beijing builds architecture: economic dependency, digital infrastructure, technical standards, data ecosystems, and the patience to let all of it set like concrete.

It is less interested in your opinion this week than in owning the rails your opinions will travel on for the next thirty years. Chaos is loud; influence, done properly, is silent and load-bearing.

The United States remains the undisputed heavyweight of narrative projection through Silicon Valley, financial gravity, entertainment, and an algorithmic reach the rest of the world can only envy.

Washington would never dream of calling any of this cognitive warfare. It merely happens to own most of the platforms on which everyone else conducts theirs.

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The democratisation of confusion

Here is the genuinely new part: none of this requires a state anymore. Once, a planetary-scale influence operation demanded an intelligence agency's budget and a building full of people in identical grey suits.

Today it requires a laptop, a generative model, and a vaguely plausible grievance. Activist networks, cyber collectives, private intelligence firms, ideological movements, freelance influencers, and anonymous forums now command reach that would have made a Cold War spymaster weep partly with envy, partly at the overheads he was paying.

Artificial intelligence simply pours accelerant on the fire. For the first time in history, industrial-scale narrative production is cheap, automated, and globally distributed. Synthetic media, auto-generated reports, and hyper-personalised disinformation make it perfectly feasible to flood a population with bespoke nonsense tailored to each recipient individually, at roughly the price of electricity.

The point

So the defining vulnerability of our era is not a shortage of information. We are drowning in the stuff.

The vulnerability is density the sheer, suffocating volume that makes decisive action feel reckless and inaction feel prudent, right up to the moment it very much isn't.

This is why the Steel Swan should trouble people well beyond intelligence circles. Business leaders, investors, infrastructure operators, and technology executives are all standing in the same fog, whether or not they have noticed the weather.

The next systemic crisis may not resemble a recession, an invasion, or a crash. It may resemble a boardroom with every dashboard glowing green, every analyst gainfully employed, every report duly filed and not one soul willing to decide anything, because deciding requires knowing, and knowing has been quietly abolished.

The uncomfortable bit. Danyk's sharpest observation is that the vulnerability being exploited is not stupidity. It is *rigor*.

The professional, democratic, entirely sensible habit of verifying before deciding waiting for confirmation, commissioning the review, hearing the other side becomes the precise lever the adversary pulls.

He calls it the "arsenalisation" of rationality: turning our most disciplined instinct into the weapon used against us. The better behaved your institutions, the longer they freeze.

That may prove to be the signature of the twenty-first century. Not the age of ignorance.

The age of cognitive saturation , in which we finally possess every answer, and no idea which of them are real.

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Addendum on steel Swan official origin

STEEL SWAN WHERE THE TERM COMES FROM

*"Steel Swan" is not a marketing flourish. It was coined by **Maj. Gen. Yuriy Danyk** (ret.), of the Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute, and **Dr. Chad M. Briggs** of Johns Hopkins University, in their founding paper:*

"Modern Cognitive Operations and Hybrid Warfare," Journal of Strategic Security, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2023), pp. 35–50. DOI: 10.5038/1944-0472.16.1.2032

Danyk ,a combat veteran and former rector of the Zhytomyr Military Institute — reportedly wrote it under Russian bombardment in Kyiv, which lends the theory an unusually short distance between desk and detonation.

The framework was extended in 2026 with **Robert Weiss** (Virginia Tech) in *"The Gorgon Trap: Entropy, Cognitive Paralysis, and the Mechanics of Cognitive Warfare"* (Zenodo, 2026), which models how adversaries push a target's *von Neumann entropy* toward maximum until its decision loop collapses.

Brought to wider **European attention by Le Grand Continent's May 2026** investigation, which framed it bluntly: the event arrives, but the system cannot respond it was anaesthetised before it was struck.