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THE KREMLIN'S HYBRID WARFARE: REASONS, METHODS AND OBJECTIVES

LtCol A. Stakhnevych

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Exercise Solo Flight

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LtCol A. Stakhnevych

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THE KREMLIN'S HYBRID WARFARE: REASONS, METHODS AND OBJECTIVES INTRODUCTION

After the end of the Cold War that resulted in the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the world stepped into a so called “period of unipolarity”. Russia was no longer capable of competing for global dominance, accepted a relatively friendly posture to the West, and even allowed Western actors to be involved in internal democracy building and economy development projects.¹ The beginning of the end to this posture may be Vladimir Putin’s appointment as Russian Prime-Minister in 1999 and his election as President of the Russian Federation in 2000. Events such as the Second Chechen War (1999-2009), the Yukos oil company case (2003), and later aggressions against Estonia (2007) and Georgia (2008) clearly showed the Kremlin’s complete disconnect with such civilized society’s values as human rights, democracy and state sovereignty.^{2,3} At the same time, Russia’s government still wanted to be perceived in the West as democratic, legitimate and Western friendly.

This paper argues that Russia sees the West as its main enemy, but currently doesn’t have enough resources to confront it openly. Therefore, having an externally friendly posture, Russia covertly runs a number of clandestine activities in order to weaken its opponent by undermining Western values and unity.

The paper consists of three parts. The first part describes the Kremlin’s specific understanding of today’s world, and explains why Moscow considers the West as an enemy. The second chapter proves that to confront the West, Putin’s Russia did not

¹ Janine R. Wedel. “The Harvard Boys Do Russia”. *The Nation* (June 1, 1998), at <https://www.thenation.com/article/harvard-boys-do-russia/>, accessed May 2, 2017.

² “Yukos case against Russia begins at European court,” *BBC* (March 4, 2010), at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8549226.stm>, accessed May 2, 2017.

³ Daniel Ventre. *Information Warfare*. Second; 2 ed. US: Iste, 2016, 134-138.

invent anything new, but uses the same methods and techniques as the Soviets during the Cold War, although these methods were adapted for a globalized world, because operational environment changed politically, economically, informationally and technologically. The final part shows how these methods were actually adopted, on whom they are directed, and what objectives they are assigned to accomplish.

RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC CULTURE AND CURRENT GEOPOLITICAL THREAT PERCEPTION

In order to understand Russia's strategy in the international arena, it is important to consider the "conspiracy theory" narrative, which the country's leadership has been constantly selling both to its citizens and to international actors. This narrative corresponds with the traditional Russian siege mentality, and states that Russia is operating under a long-lasting encirclement by its enemies (predominantly the United States of America), and that this encirclement aims to exclude Russia from taking part in the geopolitical game. The Kremlin sees itself as challenged by the West in four spheres – international, military, economic-energy, and internal affairs.⁴

The international domain refers to the Kremlin's belief that under the guise of democratization, Washington organised Western-friendly regime changes, decreasing Moscow's influence in a particular region. The Kremlin consider such events as the Arab Spring in North Africa and the Middle East, and the Color Revolutions in Eastern Europe as links of the same chain, designed to fulfil U.S. ambitions for global dominance.⁵ For

⁴ Bobo Lo. "Russia and the New World Disorder". Washington, DC, Brookings Institution Press with Chatham House, 2015.

⁵ Anthony Cordesman. "Russia and the Color Revolution: Russian View of a World Destabilized by the US and the West". Washington, DC, CSIS, 2014.

example, at the 2014 Moscow international security conference, Russian generals and leading defense officials blamed the U.S. for instigating the Color Revolutions, fomenting protests, destabilizing countries through political warfare, subversion, and eventually employing military operations to replace governments with those more favorable to U.S. interests.⁶

Moscow still sees NATO as a military threat, especially its expansion to the East into former Warsaw Block states and Soviet Union Republics. In the economic-energy sector Kremlin sees a threat in Western attempts to gain access to, and cultivate, non-Russian regional sources of energy, including constructing or financing construction of energy pipelines and transit corridors that outflank and bypass Russia. Given that the Russian economy heavily relies on export of energy-supplies, the protection of its markets (predominantly the EU) from any potential competitors lies within vital Russian interests. Moreover, diversification of the markets may reduce the potential of the Kremlin's "energy weapon". In the domestic (regime) security field, Moscow consider Western support and funding of pro-democracy activities and opposition groups in Russia as aggression and intervention into internal affairs. Such actions are seen as attempts to undermine the regime's power and destabilise the situation within the country in order to decrease the Kremlin's ability to compete in the international arena.⁷ Even economic sanctions imposed on Russia for its aggression against Ukraine are currently exploited by the Kremlin to enhance political messages on the intention of the West to change the

⁶ "Moscow Conference on International Security 2014, Part 1: The Plenary Speeches," Russian Military Reform (blog) (May 29, 2014), at <https://russiamil.wordpress.com/2014/05/29/moscow-conference-on-international-security-2014-part-1-the-plenary-speeches/>, accessed on 24 April 2017.

⁷ Dmitry (Dima) Adamsky. "Cross-Domain Coercion: The Current Russian Art of Strategy." IFRI (November 2015), at <http://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/pp54adamsky.pdf>, accessed April 26, 2017.

regime, thus reinforcing the conspiracy theory, and trying to justify the need for dictatorship.⁸

One can argue whether this Western conspiracy against Russia really exists, or whether there are other reasons (weak economy, poor leadership, wrong strategies, etc.), but within the existing global order Moscow is rapidly losing its competitiveness. And under such circumstances, one of the solutions for Russia may be to change the norms and rules of existing international relations. Given the Kremlin's ambitions to be a significant international player, but inability to compete with world's "Big Dogs", Russia wants to re-establish in international relations the concept of so called mutually recognized "zones of privileged interests" or "spheres of influence", where the dominant state can do whatever it wants and no one will interfere.⁹ According to Russian sources, such model was implemented in Europe in 1945 at the Yalta Conference.¹⁰ Another historical example proclaiming the idea of zone of privileged interests is the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, the U.S. policy of opposing European colonialism in the Western hemisphere.

For Russia, this zone definitely includes its neighbour states. Therefore, during the last 20 years the Kremlin has always given clear signals that it claims to hegemony in the region, which Russia considers its periphery.¹¹ For example, Russian president Vladimir Putin in his interview to the German newspaper Bild stated that former Warsaw Block states and Soviet Union Republics should not have become NATO members but

⁸ Matlary Haaland, Janne and Tormod Heier. *Ukraine and Beyond: Russia's Strategic Security Challenge to Europe*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 54.

⁹ Ibid, 88

¹⁰ Анна Prokhorovskaya. "Крымская (Ялтинская) конференция (4–11 февраля 1945 г.)". Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, at http://mil.ru/winner_may/history/more.htm?id=12007251@cmsArticle, accessed on 22 April 2017.

¹¹ Neil MacFarlane and Anand Menon. "The EU and the Ukraine". *Survival*, vol. 56, no. 3.

the Alliance continued to grow without taking into account the interests of Russia.¹² In the Kremlin's eyes, pro-Russian regime change in Ukraine in 2014 was a culmination of Western aggression and interference into its sphere of influence, and was directly related to the U.S. containment of "Russia rising from its knees." In Moscow's view, the more powerful Russia becomes in the international arena, the more the West tries to contain it. Therefore, Russia today doesn't see itself as an aggressor, but a victim, carrying out a defensive counter-attack against a Western aggression.¹³

At the same time, the Kremlin's gap between its objectives (i.e. desire to change norms and rules of existing international relations) and its real capabilities (i.e. a projected 2017 GDP that is smaller than Italy's)¹⁴ make the Kremlin use a specific strategy frequently dubbed in the West as Hybrid Warfare (HW) or New Generation Warfare (NGW). This strategy was exposed to the public by the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation General Valery Gerasimov, and is usually referred to as the "Gerasimov Doctrine".

RUSSIA'S HYBRID WARFARE: ALL NEW IS WELL FORGOTTEN OLD

HW/NGW strategy is a combination of military, technological, information, diplomatic, economic, cultural and other tactics, which are then deployed towards one set of strategic objectives. It is preferred to physical conflict because it is cheaper, safer and

¹² BILD-Interview with Russian President Vladimir Putin (January 11, 2016) at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/51154>, accessed April 26, 2017

¹³ Dmitry (Dima) Adamsky. "Cross-Domain Coercion: The Current Russian Art of Strategy." IFRI (November 2015), at <http://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/pp54adamsky.pdf>, accessed April 26, 2017.

¹⁴ International Monetary Fund, at <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2017/01/weodata/index.aspx>, accessed on 23 April 2017.

with fewer consequences.¹⁵ In fact this strategy is not an invention of Putin's regime, but a recovery and modification of old Soviet techniques usually referred as "political war" on the strategic level with so called "active measures" as operational and tactical tools for its conduct.

From the beginning of the Cold War, the possibility of the Soviet's involvement in so-called regional (limited) military operations along territorial perimeter of the USSR, especially its western part, was the constant concern of NATO. And the Soviets were perfectly aware about this concern. Therefore, Soviet leadership spent a lot of time trying to identify the correlation between the Soviet's participation in limited combat operation and risk of the beginning of a full-scale nuclear war.¹⁶ American diplomat George Kennan described new Soviet concept of warfare in his "Long Telegram" from 1946, which was based on logic limited wars, and included creation of intra-NATO ambiguity and uncertainty through Soviet influence activities, including deception, subversion, and surprise.¹⁷ The KGB defined influence activities as actions aimed to exercise useful influence on aspects of the political life of a target country which are of interest, its foreign policy, the solution of international problems, misleading the adversary, undermining and weakening his positions, disrupting hostile plans, and other aims.¹⁸ Simply put, there were different operations limited only by creativity of the half-million army of KGB operatives that could include anything from ordinary propaganda to

¹⁵ Molly K. McKew. "Putin's real long game". Politico, at <http://www.politico.eu/article/putin-trump-sanctions-news-hacking-analysis>, accessed on 25 April 2017.

¹⁶ Matlary Haaland, Janne and Tormod Heier. *Ukraine and Beyond: Russia's Strategic Security Challenge to Europe*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 10

¹⁷ George Kennan. "Policy Planning Staff Memorandum". Washington, DC, 4 May 1946, at <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/history/johnson/65ciafounding3.htm>, accessed on 24 April 2017.

¹⁸ Vasily Mitrokhin. *KGB Lexicon: The Soviet Intelligence Officer's Handbook* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), 13.

bribery, blackmailing, kidnapping, assassinations, drug trafficking or terrorism.¹⁹ In reality for Soviet leaders there was no big difference between simple propaganda and covert operations, or between diplomacy and political violence. In practice, all these activities were under the control of the Politburo and the Secretariat of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which approved objectives and trends of influence activities operations.²⁰

The Soviet Union projected its influence abroad using three types of activities, so-called "white," "gray," and "black". White or overt category referred to normal diplomacy, trade, aid, and informational efforts. Gray category included cooperation and coordination of communist fronts, foreign communist parties, clandestine radio stations and different media outlets in order to run disinformation campaigns. Although the Soviets didn't officially acknowledge its linkage with these "grey" players, their actions were widely known to be under the Kremlin's direction and control. At the same time, black category referred to activities that were completely covert, including the use of agents of influence, bribing and blackmailing people (politicians, journalists, etc.), spreading false rumors or disseminating forgery and fake documents. Influence activities referred to either the "gray" or the "black" category.²¹

There were four main categories of active measures. The first was disinformation and forgery, which often were used to discredit institutions, policies or persons that had been considered dangerous because of their particular actions, positions or skills. A few

¹⁹ "The Making of a Neo-KGB State," *The Economist*, 23 August 2007, at <http://www.economist.com/node/9682621>, accessed 24 April 2017.

²⁰ Fletcher Schoen and Christopher J. Lamb. "Deception, Disinformation, and Strategic Communications: How One Interagency Group made a Major Difference." *INSS Strategic Perspectives* no. 11 (2012): 5.

²¹ Dennis Kux. "Soviet Active Measures and Disinformation: Overview and Assessment." *Parameters* 15, no. 4 (1985): 19.

examples include KGB forgeries of “official” U.S. government documents authorizing assassinations and government overthrows as well as the KGB’s use of the World Peace Council to petition the U.S. government to make nuclear disarmament terms that were favorable to the USSR.²² Today’s analogy of this is the falsification of the protocol of the NATO Centre of Excellence for Strategic Communications meeting, which took place in Riga (Latvia) in 2014. The protocol was published on the anonymous Internet blog, where to the original version a sentence was inserted under the heading “Challenges for Ukraine”: “Increased popularity of the Russian leadership among the population of the south/east of the country.” Later these “original” protocol was used by such Russian media outlets as “Nezavisimaja Gazeta,” “Pravda,” “Nakanune,” “Ridus,” “Vzgljad Dni,” “Direct-Press,” “Donbass Novosti” and “Geopolitika” to run anti-Ukrainian propaganda.²³ A thirty years old Soviet active measures operation claiming AIDS was “germ warfare by the U.S. government against gays and blacks” was reborn in today’s story that the CIA invent Ebola.²⁴ When it comes to individuals, the Kremlin wanted to discredit the lead U.S. expert on Soviet disinformation, Herbert Romerstein, by disclosing a false letter from him that showed the Washington’s attempts to lie to the Western public about the number of deaths caused by Chernobyl accident.²⁵ A

²² U.S. Department of State. “Soviet Influence Activities: A Report on Active Measures and Propaganda, 1986-1987” (Washington, DC, U.S. Department of State, 1987), 81.

²³ Matlary Haaland, Janne and Tormod Heier. *Ukraine and Beyond: Russia’s Strategic Security Challenge to Europe*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 196.

²⁴ Fletcher Schoen and Christopher J. Lamb. “Deception, Disinformation, and Strategic Communications: How One Interagency Group made a Major Difference.” *INSS Strategic Perspectives* no. 11 (2012): 5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

contemporary analogy is the informational attack on Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland, presenting her grandfather as a Nazi collaborator.²⁶

The second category included the front group and friendship societies. These organizations were established during the Cold War, they presented themselves as non-political or non-governmental, but acted solely in the Soviet's interests. For example, a network of "peace organizations" were created to promote the so-called "Soviet peace initiatives," as well as to form for the Soviet Union the image of a peaceful country, thereby undermining Western unity regarding the desire to invest in defense and security. Another task for such organizations was to portray NATO as an aggressor. They also called for disarmament, supported and financed anti-Western peace initiatives.²⁷ The first such Soviet "peace offensive" happened after the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953, when direct confrontation was replaced by a strategy aimed at weakening the unity of NATO.²⁸ Today, the front organisations are those organizations representing Russian minorities abroad, the so called compatriot organisations.

The third category of Soviet influence activities was called "political influence operations" and included support and financing of foreign communist and leftist parties. Today's analogy of this is the Kremlin's cooperation with any political party (left or right) sympathetic to Moscow, including the French National Front and Hungarian Jobbik. In these "political influence operations" the Kremlin's collaborators promote

²⁶ Paula Simons. "School of hate: Was Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland's grandfather a Nazi collaborator?" Edmonton Journal, at <http://edmontonjournal.com/news/politics/paula-simons-school-of-hate-was-foreign-affairs-minister-chrystia-freelands-grandfather-a-nazi-collaborator>, accessed on 25 April 2017.

²⁷ U.S. Department of State. "Soviet Influence Activities: A Report on Active Measures and Propaganda, 1986-1987" (Washington, DC, U.S. Department of State, 1987), 7-28.

²⁸ Linda Risso. "Propaganda and Intelligence in the Cold War". The NATO Information Service (London: Routledge, 2014), 73-76.

desired end-state and shape the societal perception by active participation in governmental, political, media, business, labour or academic life of the targeting country.²⁹

Covert foreign deployment of regular forces (as happened in Ukraine) is also not modern Russia's invention. The Soviet Union managed to sneak thousands of soldiers into Syria in 1983 during the Lebanese civil war, in which Syria, their ally, was involved. The soldiers arrived in Syria on cruise liners pretending to be civilian tourists. They were told to grow their hair long, were given civilian clothes, and addressed one another as "comrade tourist".³⁰

The above clearly indicates that Russia has adapted its traditional methods in order to promote its foreign policy interests worldwide. These adaptations are based on political, economic, informational, and technological changes in the operational environment. These methods are enabled by technology and are, therefore, much more sinister, with far greater range and speed. Through modern information technologies these new techniques are able to influence popular opinion on a scale never before possible.³¹

²⁹ U.S. Department of State. "Soviet Influence Activities: A Report on Active Measures and Propaganda, 1986-1987" (Washington, DC, U.S. Department of State, 1987), viii.

³⁰ Andrew E. Kramer. "Russia's military 'tourists' want recognition." *International New York Times* (Paris 21 Dec 2015): 4.

³¹ Steve Abrams. "Beyond Propaganda: Soviet Active Measures in Putin's Russia." *Connections : The Quarterly Journal* 15, no. 1 (2016): 5.

EXAMPLES AND TENDENCIES IN RUSSIA'S RECENT ACTIVE MEASURES

Groups of targeting auditory

Russia's influence activities are designed for and directed on two major groups of targeting audience – internal and external. To internal audience refers to the population of Russia itself and all native Russian speakers living abroad, regardless of citizenship. For this group, the strategic center of gravity of the Kremlin's influence activities is the so called "Russkiy Mir" (Russian World) concept. The purpose of "Russkiy Mir" is to unite people who identify themselves as Russians throughout the world based on ideas of their uniqueness and exceptionalism, and to make them blindly believe in and support the Kremlin's policy, and act according to its will. Domestically, the Russian ruling elites need this concept to stay in power despite the failure to provide better quality of life for population under the favorable economic conditions. Simply put, if Russia is great, all Russians automatically are great regardless their wealth. Internationally, "Russkiy Mir" refers to states that the Kremlin wants to keep in its sphere of influence.³²

This concept may be considered as the new ideology that replaced communism. There are three main very emotional buttons which the Kremlin is constantly pressing in order to propagate it and to make people associate themselves as a part of it. These are: common language (Russian), common historical memory (usually the victory in the World War II), and common religion (Russian Orthodox Church).

In the Kremlin's view, foreign interventions are sometimes justified, because Moscow positions itself as the center and leader of this Russkiy Mir and claims the rights to protect its followers by all means, usually without even asking if they really need or

³² Anton Shekhovtsov. "The Russian World Will Destroy Russia". Anton Shekhovtsov's Blog (August 28, 2014), at <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.co.uk/2014/08/the-russian-world-will-destroy-russia.html>, accessed on 25 April 2017.

want this protection. For example, the concept of *Ruskiy Mir* currently serves as an official justification for Russian aggression in Ukraine. It was also used in Georgia in 2008, and it may be used elsewhere else, when the Kremlin needs to reinforce its position. When it comes to non-kinetic intervention, one can see how it works in Georgia, where the Orthodox Church has 94% of popular support. And when the country's Patriarch (senior Orthodox official) opposes such EU principles as gender equality (with regard to LGBT rights), it becomes a significant obstacle for Georgia's course on European integration.³³ Furthermore, despite Russia's military aggression in 2008, the Patriarch and senior Church officials openly support and regularly call for better relations with Moscow as the only way to return breakaway regions (approx. 20% of Georgian territory).³⁴ In other Former Soviet territories, the Kremlin has focused its efforts on Ukrainians and Belarusians, influencing them to give up their national identity in favor of to be a part of "*Ruskiy Mir*."³⁵

External audience refer all other internationals (mainly Westerns), regardless if they are peoples, societal groups or countries. Here, the main Kremlin strategy is to exploit any divisions that Moscow may find within and between these groups. For example, the Kremlin tries to improve relations with both the European right, by portraying Russia as the protector of conservative family values while promoting an anti-

³³ Ellen Barry. "Church's Muscle Helped Propel President's Rivals to Victory in Georgia." *The New York Times* (October 13, 2012), at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/14/world/europe/churchs-muscle-aided-win-of-presidents-rivals-in-georgia.html>, accessed on April 26, 2017.

³⁴ The CIA World Factbook, at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>, accessed April 28, 2017.

³⁵ Matlary Haaland, Janne and Tormod Heier. *Ukraine and Beyond: Russia's Strategic Security Challenge to Europe*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 28

EU message, and the left through old ideological links, anti-Americanism and anti-capitalism.³⁶

There are significant differences between those two targeting groups. The first group supports the Kremlin's policies intentionally because of ideological or religious reasons. And this audience, since they accepted Russkiy Mir concept, will most likely stay loyal to the very end. The second group helps Russia either for some benefit or without realising it, and are not as loyal. Therefore, to influence the second group requires significantly more resources and creativity.

Methods used by Russia

To influence the above mentioned audience, the Kremlin uses a number of methods and techniques such as: diplomatic deception (Moscow's statements about the absence of Russian troops in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine); demonstration of force (Russian military exercise Zapad-2013, the deployment of Iskander (SS-26 Stone) Short-Range Ballistic Missile in Kaliningrad); front groups and agents of influence (support to so called compatriot organizations, ultra-right/left political parties); "public execution" of the enemies of the state (assassination of a former officer of the Russian secret service Alexander Litvinenko or Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov); "energy weapons" (blackmailing governments of the countries dependant on Russian energy supplies). Those techniques were inherited from the Soviet Union so are not new to the international community. At the same time, it is important to focus on methods that were either significantly modernized or newly invented by the Kremlin, including media manipulation and propaganda (modernized), and internet and social media trolling (new).

³⁶ Ibid, 183

Media manipulation and propaganda did exist and was used by the Soviets during the Cold War, but the main difference between propaganda in the USSR and Russia is that in Soviet times the concept of truth was important. Even if they were lying, they took care to prove what they were doing was the “truth”. Today’s Kremlin does not even try proving the “truth”. It just creates new realities by saying whatever fits Moscow’s narrative.³⁷ It is worth noting that for domestic audience, a lot of Russians realise that state controlled media are not telling the truth. But it looks like the Kremlin’s power domestically is so strong that it can simply dictate what the “truth” is.³⁸ For example, Russian Deputy Minister for Communication Alexei Volin gave a lecture in Moscow State University, where he stated to journalism students that they should forget about making the world better: “We should give students a clear understanding: they are going to work for The Man, and The Man will tell them what to write, how to write, and what not to write about certain things. And The Man has the right to do it because he pays them.”³⁹

But in creating those realities, Moscow does try to make things more realistic. To achieve, the “redefining” propaganda methods is used, where the truth is interpreted in such a way as to fit the desired outcome.⁴⁰

³⁷ Pomerantsev Peter and Weiss Michael. “The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money”. Institute of modern Russia, at http://www.interpretermag.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The_Menace_of_Unreality_Final.pdf, accessed April 26, 2017.

³⁸ Stephen Holmes and Ivan Krastev. “The Weakest Strongman”. New Republic (January 11, 2012), at <https://newrepublic.com/article/99527/strongman-putin-march-kremlin>, accessed on 25 April 2017.

³⁹ Anastasia Ivanova. “Сейчас хочется верить, что я буду писать только правду”. Bolshoi Gorod Magazine (February 11, 2013), at http://bg.ru/education/otvet_mgu_volinu-17070/, accessed on 25 April 2017.

⁴⁰ Joshua Yaffa. “Dmitry Kiselev is Redefining the Art of Russian Propaganda”. New Republic (July 1, 2014), at <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/118438/dmitry-kiselev-putins-favorite-tv-host-russias-top-propogandist>, accessed on April 26, 2017.

There are numerous Russia sponsored media outlets that broadcast internationally. In this regard, it is worth to mention the techniques used in order to increase foreign audience. For example, notorious channel Russia Today was launched in 2005 with the formal aim to create a better picture of Russia. Initially the network was not used as a propaganda tool, but covered a similar topics as leading Western channels such as the BBC and CNN, while broadcasting also “puff” and innocent stories about Russian culture, history, lifestyle, etc. But during the Russian-Georgian war, the channel changed its rhetoric and took a strong pro-Russia posture, calling Tbilisi’s actions in South Ossetia (Georgian Tskhinvali Region) a “genocide” while showing Russian troops as peacekeepers. But it didn’t bring desired results, because the channel, given its name and previous content, was directly associated with Russia, and the Western public was not interested in the Kremlin’s point of view. After 2008 the channel’s editorial policy shifted, trying to cover its direct links to Moscow. First of all the channel changed its name from “Russia Today” to “RT”, which sounds more neutral, and minimized news about Russia. Today instead of trying to promote Russia, RT concentrates its efforts on making the West, and especially the US, look bad. Now the estimate audience of RT channel is 600 million people globally. Moreover, there are around 3 million hotel rooms across the world, there the customers can access the channel.⁴¹

Another method to expand western audience is the so called Russia Beyond the Headlines (RBTH) project. It is a Kremlin-sponsored insert about Russia featured in major newspapers and websites across 23 countries and in 16 languages, including the

⁴¹ Pomerantsev Peter and Weiss Michael. “The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money”. Institute of modern Russia, at http://www.interpretermag.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The_Menace_of_Unreality_Final.pdf, accessed April 26, 2017.

Telegraph in the UK and the Washington Post, New York Times, Wall Street Journal and International New York Times in the US. Such an approach potentially exposes Russia propaganda (the Kremlin prefers to call it an “alternative point of view”) to readers of all media where RBTH is implemented.

NATO analysed three Russia-sponsored channels (“RT,” “Sputnik” and “Pervii Kanal”) coverage of the Russian aggression in Ukraine. The research discovered 22 manipulative techniques used by these channels to influence Western audience.⁴²

Another domain through which the Kremlin is trying to influence its targeting audience is the internet and social media. Russian President Vladimir Putin called the internet a “CIA project.”⁴³ Such statements gives Russian leadership formal reasons to increase both Internet censorship domestically, and on-line aggressiveness internationally.

The most notorious Russian invention in this sphere is the St. Petersburg based special agency usually referred to in open sources as “troll farm”. The trolls of this agency serve to manipulate the information in social media and online editions (Russian and international) covering regional, national, and international issues. Some spread disinformation, some make derogatory comments about Kremlin’s opponents, and some write political messages in non-political blogs and outlets. Daily working load is about

⁴² NATO. “The manipulative techniques of Russia’s information campaign”. NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence (Riga, 2015), at <http://www.stratcomcoe.org/manipulative-techniques-russian-information-campaign-against-ukraine>, accessed on April 27, 2017.

⁴³ Ewan MacAskill. “Putin calls internet a “CIA project” renewing fears of web breakup”. The Guardian (April 24, 2014), at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/24/vladimir-putin-web-breakup-internet-cia>, accessed on 26 April 2017.

100 postings and comments per person on given themes, which promote the Kremlin's point of view.⁴⁴

The main objectives of such trolling are as follows: to make it impossible for the normal Internet user to separate truth from fiction, thereby shaping the environment for other Russian influence campaigns and messaging;⁴⁵ to disrupt, using the concept that it is far simpler to create doubt and fuel discontent, than it is to persuade someone to believe something that is not true;⁴⁶ to pollute and destroy the debate on any undesirable topic for Moscow (for example, Russian aggression in Ukraine);⁴⁷ to increase social, ethnic or religious tension in the West, and recycle this back into the domestic storyline; to create doubt and uncertainty by arguing that you will find problems and abuse everywhere, and that Russia is not so bad after all,⁴⁸ and even to delay and frustrate journalistic work by having to clear Twitter feeds of trolls or spend money on IT people to clear up the mess.⁴⁹

Besides trolls, who use fake identities, the Kremlin also uses real people, usually well known in certain Western circles, to deliver their messages as widely as possible. When those people are used blindly and didn't realise that they are tools of influence

⁴⁴ Adrian Chen. "The Agency". New York Times (June 2, 2015), at http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/07/magazine/the-agency.html?_r=0, accessed April 27, 2017.

⁴⁵ United States Information Agency. "Soviet Active Measures in the "Post-Cold War" Era (June 1992), at http://intellit.muskingum.edu/russia_folder/pcw_era/, accessed April 26, 2017.

⁴⁶ Matlary Haaland, Janne and Tormod Heier. *Ukraine and Beyond: Russia's Strategic Security Challenge to Europe*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 191.

⁴⁷ Shaun Walker. "Salutin' Putin: inside a Russian troll house". The Guardian (April 2, 2015), at <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/may/04/pro-russiatrolls-ukraine-guardian-online>, accessed April 27, 2017.

⁴⁸ Matlary Haaland, Janne and Tormod Heier. *Ukraine and Beyond: Russia's Strategic Security Challenge to Europe*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 191.

⁴⁹ Pomerantsev Peter and Weiss Michael. "The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money". Institute of modern Russia, at http://www.interpretermag.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The_Menace_of_Unreality_Final.pdf, accessed April 26, 2017.

activities, such method in some sources is called “use of useful idiots”.⁵⁰ An example of this technique is an Instagram post made by popular National Hockey League hockey player Alexander Ovechkin (a Moscow native). In 2014, he Instagrammed a photo of himself bearing the hashtag “#SAVECHILDRENFROMFASCISM,” this hashtag reflects Russia’s narrative about atrocities committed by the Ukrainian Army and Kyiv authorities in the Eastern Ukraine.⁵¹ Given that Ovechkin has 786,000 Instagram followers, and 2.47 million on Twitter,⁵² the fake Russia-invented message about fascism in Ukraine was delivered to millions of people in seconds.

In general, Russia’s behavior clearly indicates that the Kremlin sees the West as an enemy. But Moscow currently doesn’t have enough resources to confront it openly. Therefore, Russia covertly runs a number of clandestine influence activities in order to weaken its opponent by undermining western values and unity.

⁵⁰ Steve Abrams. “Beyond Propaganda: Soviet Active Measures in Putin's Russia.” *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 15, no. 1 (2016): 5.

⁵¹ “Ovechkin Speaks Against Fascism in Ukraine, Faces Criticism From Americans,” *Sputnik News*, 10 September 2014, at <https://sputniknews.com/world/20140910192814040-Ovechkin-Speaks-Against-Fascism-in-Ukraine-Faces-Criticism-From/>, accessed April 27, 2017.

⁵² <https://instagram.com/aleksandrovechkinofficial> (accessed April 27, 2017); <https://twitter.com/ovi8> (accessed April 27, 2017).

CONCLUSION

Russia runs covert aggression against the West that is based on the ancient concept “divide and conquer”. This aggression currently is mainly focused on undermining fundamental principles of the EU (freedom of trade, freedom of movement, member-states unification into one “big family”) and NATO (collective defence). Russia knows that the EU is divided. Therefore, the Kremlin tries to manipulate European fears aiming to immobilize Europe from acting to defend its interests. In order to effectively resist this aggression, Europe must develop effective counter-measures that should consist of two parts: development of kinetic defence capabilities (especially relevant to Poland and the Baltic States), and development of capabilities to resist the Kremlin’s influence activities.

For both of these countermeasures there is a need for two things: resources, which is doable given the EU’s economic power, and the willingness of European society to allocate those resources. And here lies the problem. Despite on intense Western media campaign, and a vivid discussion of the Kremlin’s hybrid warfare in military and academic circles, the average EU-citizen doesn’t perceive Russia as a threat. Moreover, even on the political level, the vast majority of Western leaders (with the exception of the United Kingdom) deny that they have an adversary or enemy in Vladimir Putin. Whether out of wishful thinking, naiveté, cynicism, or the successes of the Kremlin’s influence activities, a useful myth was cultivated over the last fourteen years: namely, that the EU had an honest partner or ally in Moscow, no matter how often the latter behaved as if the opposite were true.⁵³ For example, France, at least before Emmanuel Macron was elected

⁵³ Pomerantsev Peter and Weiss Michael. “The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money”. Institute of modern Russia, at

as a new president, considered tensions over Ukraine as a diplomatic quarrel that should be solved as soon as possible.⁵⁴ Therefore, there is no consensus between EU member-states about the desired end-state with Russia. But it is impossible to develop effective “ways” and “means” without clear “ends.”

It is worth mentioning that Brussels did implement some counter-measures against the Kremlin’s covert aggression. For example, to strengthen EU unity, the European Council at its meeting in March 2015 adopted an action plan on strategic communications that aims to promote EU policies, particularly in the Eastern neighbourhood, to strengthen of the overall media environment and support for independent media organisations, and increase public awareness of Russian attempts to spread disinformation.⁵⁵ To address Russia’s disinformation campaigns, East StratCom Task Force was created.⁵⁶ Moreover, a on a national level number of similar anti-propaganda units were created in some European countries (i.e. Germany, Poland, the Baltic States). But all of this looks more like symptoms treatment rather than a comprehensive strategy to defeat the actual disease.

When it comes to NATO and the alliance’s commitment to providing physical security to all its members, the Kremlin’s hybrid warfare can still create scenarios that might be too large for individual NATO members, but too small for NATO as a whole. Take for example, the kidnapping of an Estonian State Security officer in September 2014 by a Russian Special Forces unit. This unit crossed the Estonia-Russia border,

http://www.interpretermag.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The_Menace_of_Unreality_Final.pdf, accessed April 26, 2017.

⁵⁴ Matlary Haaland, Janne and Tormod Heier. *Ukraine and Beyond: Russia’s Strategic Security Challenge to Europe*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 11

⁵⁵ <http://archive.eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Action%20Plan.pdf>, accessed April 30, 2017

⁵⁶ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/2116/%20Questions%20and%20Answers%20about%20the%20East%20StratCom%20Task%20Force

kidnapped the officer and brought him to Russia. This kidnapping is aggressive enough to demonstrate Russian domination over Estonia, but not so aggressive as to be considered a formal act of war.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the real problem facing NATO today is not a new brand of Russian warfare or new policy of expansion, but its own reluctance to return to its original 1949 purpose, to contain and deter Russia.⁵⁸ Nobody wants war or armed conflict, nor even limited military confrontation in Europe, and the West will do everything to avoid this scenario. Knowing that, the Kremlin will keep pushing, especially when the reality shows that Russia, despite its many structural deficiencies, stands forth as a more effective and unitary actor than EU and NATO.

⁵⁷ Max Fisher. "How World War III became possible". Vox (June 29, 2015), at <http://www.vox.com/2015/6/29/8845913/russia-war>, accessed on April 27, 2017.

⁵⁸ Nick Sinclair. "Old Generation Warfare: The Evolution-Not Revolution-of the Russian Way of Warfare." *Military Review* 96, no. 3 (2016): 8.

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