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## **WARS BEYOND THE BATTLEFIELD: CHINESE AND RUSSIAN INFORMATION WARFARE APPROACHES AGAINST NATO**

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**JCSP 46**

**Solo Flight**

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SOLO FLIGHT

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CHINESE AND RUSSIAN INFORMATION WARFARE APPROACHES  
AGAINST NATO**

**Major John Southen**

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## WARS BEYOND THE BATTLEFIELD: CHINESE AND RUSSIAN INFORMATION WARFARE APPROACHES AGAINST NATO

*“A new type of war has emerged in which armed struggle has yielded its decisive place in the achievement of the military-political goals of the war to another type of struggle - the information one.”*

- Vladimir Kvachkov <sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

This paper argues that NATO states must understand the ways in which China and Russia apply information warfare (IW) in order to deter, defend, and fight back in the information domain as a coherent and united Alliance. It examines the Chinese and Russian IW approaches against NATO states, and contrasts them to identify their common elements and differences. It concludes by recommending counter-IW policy measures for NATO and its member states.

Significant events in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have heightened NATO’s awareness of the IW threats, stemming from China and Russia in particular.<sup>2</sup> In the last decade, both China and Russia have actively waged IW against NATO states in pursuit of their strategic objectives. They have each applied distinct approaches, although some of their methods have overlapped, as this paper demonstrates. Actions such as Russia’s invasion of Ukraine<sup>3</sup> and its interference in the 2016 U.S. elections,<sup>4</sup> China’s increasing

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<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Kvachkov, “Special Forces of Russia,” (translated from Russian by Google), *Military Thought*, 2004, [http://militera.lib.ru/science/kvachkov\\_vv/index.html](http://militera.lib.ru/science/kvachkov_vv/index.html).

<sup>2</sup> While there are many more IW threats facing NATO, including rogue states and non-state entities such as violent extremist organizations and transnational criminal organizations, this paper focuses on the comparison of the two primary IW threats facing NATO in the 21st century: The People’s Republic of China (PRC) under Xi Jinping and the Russian Federation under Vladimir Putin.

<sup>3</sup> Jolanta Darczewska, “The anatomy of Russian information warfare: the Crimea operation, a case study,” *Centre for Eastern Studies Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia*, No. 42, May 2014.

<sup>4</sup> United States Senate, *Report of the Select Committee on Intelligence, United States Senate on Russian Active Measures Campaigns and Interference in the 2016 U.S. Election, Volume 2: Russia’s Use of Social Media with Additional Views*, 116<sup>th</sup> Congress 1<sup>st</sup> Session Report 116-XX, last accessed 25 April 2020, [https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Report\\_Volume2.pdf](https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Report_Volume2.pdf).

aggressiveness in the South China Sea<sup>5</sup> and its hostile diplomacy<sup>6</sup> with democratic nations have all been supported by well-orchestrated IW campaigns. IW is a strategy that goes far beyond a military problem; these pernicious attacks on the cognitive space of decision makers and citizens in NATO states present a threat that cannot be tolerated or ignored. IW has not only been fought in the information domain; it has been a precursor to violence, as well as a force multiplier during military campaigns – the Russian annexation of Crimea being a prime example.

IW has been known under many terms that are sometimes used interchangeably.<sup>7</sup> The academic concept of IW has evolved from the 1990s, as the world entered the digital age; it was often understood in the literal sense of protecting friendly information systems while exploiting adversary information systems.<sup>8</sup> Sources from this era focus on nascent cyber capabilities in the context of ‘network-centric warfare’<sup>9</sup> and the ‘revolution in military affairs.’<sup>10</sup> IW efforts that influenced the outcomes of the 2016 U.S. election and the ‘Brexit’ vote have been primarily labeled as social media manipulation and ‘fake news.’<sup>11</sup> This paper takes a broader view of IW, which combines these means and all others that are used to achieve strategic outcomes.

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<sup>5</sup> Scott N. Romaniuk and Tobias Burgers, “China’s Next Phase of Militarization in the South China Sea,” *The Diplomat*, last updated 20 March 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/03/chinas-next-phase-of-militarization-in-the-south-china-sea/>.

<sup>6</sup> Donald Clarke, “China’s Hostage Diplomacy,” *Lawfare*, last modified 11 January 2019, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/chinas-hostage-diplomacy-0;>

<sup>7</sup> ‘information operations,’ ‘gray zone warfare,’ ‘subversion,’ ‘political warfare,’ ‘psychological warfare,’ ‘strategic influence,’ ‘strategic communications’ (StratCom) to name a few.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Waltz, *Information Warfare : Principles and Operations*, Norwood: Artech House, 1998;

<sup>9</sup> David S. Alberts, John J. Garstka, and Frederick P. Stein, *Network Centric Warfare: Developing and Leveraging Information Superiority (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Revised)*, CCRP, 2000.

<sup>10</sup> William A. Owens, “The Emerging U.S. System-of-Systems,” *Strategic Forum*, No. 63, February 1996, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA394313.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Robert S. Mueller III, *The Mueller Report: The Final Report of the Special Counsel into Donald Trump, Russia, and Collusion*, New York: Skyhorse, 2019, 31; Clint Watts, *Messing with the Enemy: Surviving in a Social Media World of Hackers, Terrorists, Russians and Fake News*, Harper, 2019;

For clarity's sake, this paper will use the following definition of IW: the coordinated activities of a state (or organization) to create desired effects on the will, capabilities and understanding of a target audience (e.g. a nation or a specific population) in pursuit of its strategic objectives. These effects can be achieved through any means, using any or all elements of national power.<sup>12</sup> This definition is adapted from the NATO definition of 'information operations.'<sup>13</sup>

The concept of IW has deep roots in the history of war, dating back to antiquity. The oft-cited Chinese General Sun Tzu famously wrote that "all warfare is based on deception"<sup>14</sup> and that "supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting,"<sup>15</sup> which captures the essence of IW. When an adversary's behaviour can be suitably modified without resorting to major warfare, this is the most efficient path to achieving strategic goals.

## **MANIPULATION: HOW CHINA CONDUCTS INFORMATION WARFARE**

*"Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain!"*

*– The Wizard of Oz, 1939*

### **China's Overall IW Approach**

China's overall approach to IW against NATO could be described as a massive campaign of manipulation that takes a comprehensive approach to achieve its intended

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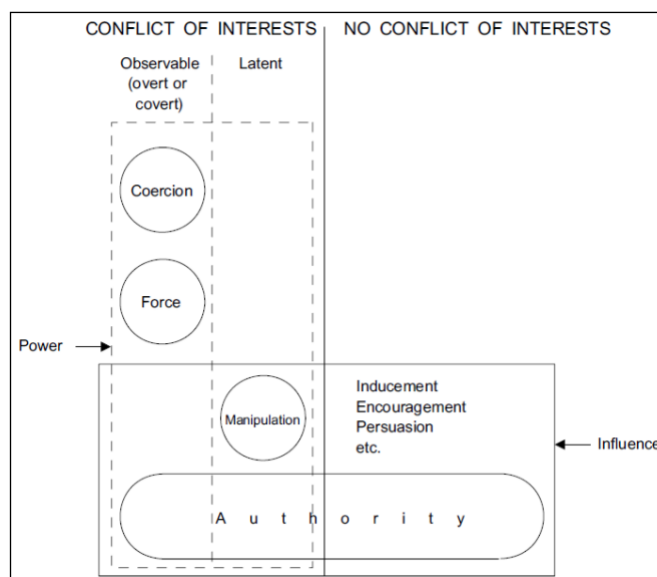
<sup>12</sup> Various models can be used to describe the elements of national power, frequently expressed in acronyms like DIMEFIL (Diplomatic, Information, Military, Economic, Financial, Intelligence and Law Enforcement) and PMESII-PT (Political, Military, Economic, Social, Infrastructure, Information, Physical Environment, and Time).

<sup>13</sup> NATO, *AJP-3.10 Allied Joint Doctrine for Information Operations*, November 2009, 23.

<sup>14</sup> Lionel Giles, *Sun Tzu on the Art of War – the Oldest Military Treatise in the World*, Allandale Online Publishing, 2000, 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

effects. China's IW strategy applies the 'third face of power:' seeking to change the preferences of a target audience in ways that are often invisible and unknown to those being manipulated.<sup>16</sup> This concept is well illustrated by the economist Steven Lukes,<sup>17</sup> as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1 – Lukes' Concept of the three faces of power**

Source: Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, New York: Palgrave-McMillan, 2005, 36.

In accordance with Lukes' concept, China's authoritarian political system has enabled it to harness and synchronize all its instruments of national power to enhance its IW campaign's effectiveness.

While some of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) actions have attracted negative attention in NATO states,<sup>18</sup> many of its IW activities have gone unnoticed or

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Nye, *The Future of Power*, New York: Public Affairs, 2011, 13.

<sup>17</sup> Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (Second Edition), New York: Palgrave-McMillan, 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda: Beijing's Campaign of Influence and Intimidation in Canada*, Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2019.

have been denied<sup>19</sup> by those targeted. Despite awareness of Beijing's malfeasance, the volume of exports from China grew by over \$445 billion USD from 2012 to 2018<sup>20</sup> and there have not yet been targeted economic sanctions of enough consequence to force China to change its approach.

### **China's Strategic Context: Hegemonic Aspirations**

China has greatly prospered since the re-opening of diplomatic relations with the U.S.; the country's GDP<sup>21</sup> jumped from \$113.688 Billion in 1972 to the world's second largest economy at \$13.608 Trillion in 2018,<sup>22</sup> and predictions indicate that China will become the world's largest economy by 2030.<sup>23</sup> China has the largest population in the world as well as an enormous diaspora that the CCP seeks to exploit in pursuit of its objectives.

Aside from the domestic factors that help perpetuate the dominance of the CCP regime, China's global strategic goals, according to the U.S. Department of Defense, are to: "defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity; secure China's status as a great

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<sup>19</sup> Keith Doucette, "Canada's defence minister says China is not an adversary," *The Canadian Press*, last updated 22 November 2019, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/canada-s-defence-minister-says-china-is-not-an-adversary-1.4698187>.

<sup>20</sup> World Integrated Trade Solution, "China Exports to World in US\$ Thousand 2012-2018 - China Export in thousand US\$ World between 2012 and 2018," last accessed 21 April 2020, <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/CHN/StartYear/2012/EndYear/2018/TradeFlow/Export/Partner/WLD/Indicator/XPRT-TRD-VL>.

<sup>21</sup> Gross domestic product (GDP) defined by Encyclopedia Britannica: "the total market value of the goods and services produced by a country's economy during a specified period of time. It includes all final goods and services—that is, those that are produced by the economic agents located in that country regardless of their ownership and that are not resold in any form. It is used throughout the world as the main measure of output and economic activity." <https://www.britannica.com/topic/gross-domestic-product>.

<sup>22</sup> The World Bank, "GDP (current US\$) – China" Last accessed 13 April 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=CN>.

<sup>23</sup> Simon Kennedy, "China will overtake the U.S. economy in less than 15 years, says HSBC, challenging Trump's claim," *Financial Post*, Last updated 25 September 2018. <https://business.financialpost.com/news/economy/china-will-overtake-the-u-s-in-less-than-15-years-hsbc-says>.



power and, ultimately, reacquire regional preeminence; and safeguard China's interests abroad."<sup>24</sup> This indicates, at the very least, that China seeks to supplant the U.S. as the dominant power in Asia.<sup>25</sup>

Analysts Jonathan D.T. Ward<sup>26</sup> and Michael Pillsbury<sup>27</sup> believe that China's strategic ambitions go beyond the dominance of the Asia-Pacific region. They argue that it seeks to attain superpower status and eventually overtake the U.S. as the global hegemonic power. Mao Zedong, the founder of the People's Republic of China whose party still governs China, clearly stated its superpower ambitions in 1955: "our objective is to catch up with America and then to surpass America. [...] on the day that we catch up with America and overtake America, then we can let out a breath of air."<sup>28</sup>

Contemporary Chinese sources lend credence to this analysis as well, including *The China Dream*, a book first published in 2010 by former People's Liberation Army (PLA) Colonel Liu Mingfu.<sup>29</sup> After his inauguration in 2012, President Xi Jinping "echoed the book's language and one of its key themes – "the dream of a strong military" – repeatedly in speeches."<sup>30</sup>

China's mounting military sophistication and belligerence further reveal the CCP's global ambitions. As historian David Bercuson argues, China's approach signals

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<sup>24</sup> United States Department of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2018*, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 16 August 2018, 43.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Jonathan D.T. Ward, *China's Vision of Victory*, Arlington: Atlas, 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower*, New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Jonathan D.T. Ward, *China's Vision of Victory*, Arlington: Atlas, 2019, 90.

<sup>29</sup> Liu Mingfu, *The China Dream: Great Power Thinking & Strategic Posture in the Post-American Era*, New York: CN Times Books, 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Kathy Gilsinan, "The World Is Too Important to Be Left to America' A Chinese bestseller charting a path for global dominance appears in English for the first time." *The Atlantic*, last updated 4 June 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/06/china-dream-liu-mingfu-power/394748/>.

that it seeks dominance, not accommodation.<sup>31</sup> Beyond being a nuclear power, China has the world's largest military, totaling approximately 2,285,000 personnel.<sup>32</sup> It has been building its naval power at an extraordinary pace<sup>33</sup> and militarizing disputed islands in the South China Sea,<sup>34</sup> despite the U.N. Permanent Court of Arbitration's ruling that refuted China's 'nine-dash line'<sup>35</sup> claim.<sup>36</sup> China increased its projection of military power abroad, conducting several exercises with Russia<sup>37</sup> and was contributing more troops to the U.N. than the top three<sup>38</sup> NATO states combined as of February 2020.<sup>39</sup>

### China's IW Doctrine

Beyond China's increasingly sophisticated conventional armed forces, it has invested heavily in unconventional forces<sup>40</sup> that support its IW strategy.<sup>41</sup> This is consistent with the writings of PLA Colonels Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui. In 1999,

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<sup>31</sup> David J Bercuson, "China seeks dominance, not parity," *The National Post*, last updated 10 January 2019, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/david-j-bercuson-china-seeks-dominance-not-parity>.

<sup>32</sup> Cynthia Lardner, "The Rise of Chinese President Xi Jinping," *International Policy Digest*, 17 January 2018. <https://intpolicydigest.org/2018/01/17/the-rise-of-chinese-president-xi-jinping/>.

<sup>33</sup> H.I. Sutton, "The Chinese Navy Is Building an Incredible Number of Warships," *Forbes*, last updated 15 December 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/hisutton/2019/12/15/china-is-building-an-incredible-number-of-warships/>.

<sup>34</sup> Scott N. Romaniuk and Tobias Burgers, "China's Next Phase of Militarization in the South China Sea," *The Diplomat*, last updated 20 March 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/03/chinas-next-phase-of-militarization-in-the-south-china-sea/>.

<sup>35</sup> Hannah Beech, "Just Where Exactly Did China Get the South China Sea Nine-Dash Line From?" *Time*, last updated 19 July 2016, <https://time.com/4412191/nine-dash-line-9-south-china-sea/>.

<sup>36</sup> STRATFOR, "What a U.N. Ruling Against China Means," *STRATFOR Worldview*, 12 July 2016; Scott N. Romaniuk and Tobias Burgers, "China's Next Phase of Militarization in the South China Sea," *The Diplomat*, last updated 20 March 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/03/chinas-next-phase-of-militarization-in-the-south-china-sea/>.

<sup>37</sup> Jonathan D.T. Ward, *China's Vision of Victory*, Arlington: Atlas, 2019, 75.

<sup>38</sup> China's contribution was the 10<sup>th</sup> largest overall personnel contributor, with 2550 personnel. The top three NATO states were Italy in 19<sup>th</sup> place with 1083 personnel, France in 29<sup>th</sup> place with 752 personnel, and Spain in 33<sup>rd</sup> place with 644.

<sup>39</sup> United Nations Peacekeeping, "Summary of Troops Contributing Countries by Ranking: Police, UN Military Experts on Mission, Staff Officers and Troops," Report of February 2020, [https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/02\\_countryranking\\_21.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/02_countryranking_21.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> Roger Faligot, *Chinese Spies: From Chairman Mao to Xi Jinping – Updated English Edition Translated by Natasha Lehrer* (London: Hurst & Company, 2019), 429.

<sup>41</sup> Larry M. Wortzel, *The Chinese People's Liberation Army and Information Warfare*, Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, March 2014, <https://publications.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/2263.pdf>, 30.

they published *Unrestricted Warfare*, a book that challenged the West's fundamental concept of warfare. In Chapter 7, *Ten Thousand Methods Combined as One: Combinations That Transcend Boundaries*, they envision that future war "will be fought and won in a war beyond the battlefield; the struggle for victory will take place on a battlefield beyond the battlefield,"<sup>42</sup> referring to the concept of IW as defined in this paper.

This notion is also reflected in China's 'three warfares' doctrine, which conceptualizes IW as the combination of public opinion (media) warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare.<sup>43</sup> China's doctrine emphasizes comprehensive national power (CNP) as well: "the sum total of the powers or strengths of a country in economy, military affairs, science & technology, education and resources and its influence."<sup>44</sup> China puts these concepts into practice through the "United Front,"<sup>45</sup> which combines its informational, military, economic, and social instruments of power in the pursuit of its national strategic goals.

China targets NATO nations' decision making ecosystem by seeking to change the perceptions and voting behaviours of citizens. They achieve this through business connections that depend on China, and through various means of political influence. Part of its IW strategy is countering the narratives of the so-called 'five poisonous groups' that

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<sup>42</sup> Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui. *Unrestricted Warfare*. Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, February 1999, 179.

<sup>43</sup> Larry M. Wortzel, *The Chinese People's Liberation Army and Information Warfare*, Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, March 2014, <https://publications.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/2263.pdf>, 30.

<sup>44</sup> Hu Angang and Men Honghua, "The Rising of Modern China: Comprehensive National Power and Grand Strategy," *Strategy & Management*, No. 3, 2002. Last accessed 21 April 2020, <https://myweb.rollins.edu/tlairson/china/chigrandstrategy.pdf>, 2.

<sup>45</sup> Kerry Brown, *The World According to Xi: Everything You Need to Know About the New China*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2018, 116.

are seen as threats to the CCP: those who promote independence for Tibet, Xinjiang, and Taiwan respectively; those who promote democracy in China; and followers of Falun Gong.<sup>46</sup> China therefore dedicates significant resources on its IW campaign against these groups inside NATO nations, where they enjoy freedom of expression forbidden in China.

### **Weaponized Diaspora**

China has one of the largest and most established global diaspora populations, with approximately 60 million ethnic Chinese people living outside China.<sup>47</sup> This vast diaspora is seen as a component of CNP by Beijing, and it is exploited in its IW efforts abroad. Xi Jinping referred to this population of ‘overseas Chinese’ in his 2017 address to the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China: “We will maintain extensive contacts with overseas Chinese nationals, returned Chinese and their relatives and unite them so that they can join our endeavors to revitalize the Chinese nation.”<sup>48</sup> China routinely mobilizes elements of its diaspora in NATO states, including thousands of Chinese students, to help push Beijing’s narrative and to protest on command,<sup>49</sup> as well as to pressure and threaten dissidents:

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<sup>46</sup> Jonathan Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda: Beijing’s Campaign of Influence and Intimidation in Canada*, Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2019, 13.

<sup>47</sup> Baijie, An, “Overseas Chinese can help build Belt, Road,” *China Daily*, last updated 13 June 2017, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-06/13/content\\_29719481.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-06/13/content_29719481.htm).

<sup>48</sup> Xi Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era,” Delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, *Xinhua*, last accessed 19 April 2020, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpcnationalcongress/2017-11/04/content\\_34115212.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpcnationalcongress/2017-11/04/content_34115212.htm).

<sup>49</sup> Tom Blackwell, “How China uses shadowy United Front as ‘magic weapon’ to try to extend its influence in Canada,” *The National Post*, last updated 31 December 2019, <https://nationalpost.com/news/how-china-uses-shadowy-united-front-as-magic-weapon-to-try-to-extend-its-influence-in-canada>.

Beijing works actively to influence ethnic Chinese groups, Chinese students and ethnic Chinese businesses in other countries, often curtailing their freedom of expression to promote a narrative favourable to its views. It has also often purchased control of local Chinese-language news outlets. Academics and reporters who question Chinese activities are harassed by Chinese diplomats and Chinese-controlled media.<sup>50</sup>

Of course, many are unwilling to cooperate with the CCP – people of Chinese descent have been the regime’s primary victims, and are viewed by Beijing as “an asset to be used and abused.”<sup>51</sup>

### **Economic Leverage**

China uses its vast economic power to support its IW campaign against NATO, often using economic measures in attempts to coerce nations into compliance with its agenda. For instance, “after the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010, China retaliated by banning imports of Norwegian salmon.”<sup>52</sup> Similarly, it banned certain Canadian products such as pork and canola<sup>53</sup> under the pretense of ‘safety concerns’<sup>54</sup> as an attempt to pressure the Canadian government into releasing arrested Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou.<sup>55</sup> Below the national level, any organization that receives Chinese sponsorship is prone to pressure

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<sup>50</sup> Canada, “China and the Age of Strategic Rivalry,” Report of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service academic outreach program, May 2018, <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/isis-scrcs/documents/publications/CSIS-Academic-Outreach-China-report-May-2018-en.pdf>, 8.

<sup>51</sup> Jonathan Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda: Beijing’s Campaign of Influence and Intimidation in Canada*, Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2019, 9.

<sup>52</sup> Peter Harrell, Elizabeth Rosenberg and Edoardo Saravalle, “China’s Use of Coercive Economic Measures,” *Center for a New American Security*, June 2018, [https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/documents/China\\_Use\\_FINAL-1.pdf?mtime=20180604161240](https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/documents/China_Use_FINAL-1.pdf?mtime=20180604161240), 6.

<sup>53</sup> David Common and Melissa Mancini, “Canola growers caught in middle as Canada-China relations sour,” *CBC News*, last updated 15 May 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/national-canola-canada-china-trade-1.5135241>.

<sup>54</sup> Mike Blanchfield, “Canada calls out on China at WTO council meeting, demands evidence to back canola ban,” *The Canadian Press*, last updated 7 May 2019, <https://globalnews.ca/news/5248431/canada-u-s-help-china-trade-dispute/>.

<sup>55</sup> David Common and Melissa Mancini, “Canola growers caught in middle as Canada-China relations sour,” *CBC News*, last updated 15 May 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/national-canola-canada-china-trade-1.5135241>.

from China, as many have discovered.<sup>56</sup> Even when such coercive measures are not overt, the implicit threat of reprisals from China encourages self-censorship.

As part of its IW campaign, China also funds a network of ‘Confucius Institutes’ that CCP propaganda chief Li Changchun described as “an important part of China’s overseas propaganda setup.”<sup>57</sup> Once these institutes were unmasked as espionage operations, many academic institutions cut ties with them.<sup>58</sup> Despite this, as of April 2020 there were Confucius Institutes and ‘classrooms’ operating in all 30 NATO states, totaling 271 across the Alliance.<sup>59</sup> Many of these institutions have become dependent on Chinese money,<sup>60</sup> and thus remain susceptible to China’s campaign to restrict academic freedom and stifle support for opposition groups throughout the world, often outside the public view: Chinese officials are “able to wield influence behind closed doors, through individuals and institutions embedded on university campuses.”<sup>61</sup>

Aside from coercive economic actions, China has been expanding its economic and diplomatic network around the globe through immense projects like the Belt and

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<sup>56</sup> Tom Blackwell, “Ottawa man says Dragon-boat festival CEO ordered him to remove Falun Gong shirt, citing Chinese sponsorship,” *The National Post*, last updated 18 July 2019, <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/ottawa-man-says-dragon-boat-festival-ceo-ordered-him-to-remove-falun-gong-shirt-citing-chinese-sponsorship>; David Mulroney, *Middle Power, Middle Kingdom: What Canadians Need to Know About China in the 21st Century* (Toronto: Penguin, 2015), 110.

<sup>57</sup> Ethan Epstein, “How China Infiltrated U.S. Classrooms,” POLITICO, Last updated 17 January 2018, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/01/16/how-china-infiltrated-us-classrooms-216327>.

<sup>58</sup> Jonathan Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda: Beijing’s Campaign of Influence and Intimidation in Canada* Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2019, 51.

<sup>59</sup> Hanban, “Confucius Institute/Classroom,” last accessed 21 April 2020, [http://english.hanban.org/node\\_10971.htm](http://english.hanban.org/node_10971.htm).

<sup>60</sup> Canadian Press, “If China orders international students home, some Canadian schools face money trouble: agency,” *Global News*, last updated 8 February 2019, <https://globalnews.ca/news/4937419/canadian-universities-china-students-moodys/>.

<sup>61</sup> Lhadon Tethong, “Inside Job: Beijing’s New Allies in Its War on Tibet,” *Huffpost*, last updated 30 July 2013, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/inside-job-beijings-new-a\\_b\\_3353844](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/inside-job-beijings-new-a_b_3353844).

Road Initiative (BRI).<sup>62</sup> The scale of the Chinese economy provides a powerful financial incentive for the business sectors within NATO states to advocate for Chinese interests. When the Trump administration announced the imposition of tariffs on Chinese goods, China summoned top Wall Street bankers to Beijing for a ‘China-US Financial Roundtable’ on 16 September 2018, as well as a meeting with Chinese Vice-President Wang Qishan.<sup>63</sup> Some critics, including former Trump advisor Steve Bannon condemned these banks and corporations, characterizing them as the “industrial relations department for the regime”<sup>64</sup> in Beijing.

### Media Operations

China’s IW strategy has benefited from its influence on the narrative and perceptions presented through NATO states’ entertainment industries. Producers in Hollywood and elsewhere have been compelled to practice self-censorship and steer clear of any content critical of China, the world’s second-largest market for the film industry.<sup>65</sup> China’s department responsible for censoring foreign media<sup>66</sup> has been able to force changes in movie scripts if they do not portray China in a positive light.<sup>67</sup> Even without

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<sup>62</sup> Charlie Campbell, “China Says It’s Building the New Silk Road. Here Are Five Things to Know Ahead of a Key Summit,” *Time*, 12 May 2017, <https://time.com/4776845/china-xi-jinping-belt-road-initiative-obor/>.

<sup>63</sup> Tom Mitchell, “Beijing summons top Wall Street bankers for tariff talks,” *Financial Times*, 9 September 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/c0034cba-b2ca-11e8-99ca-68cf89602132>.

<sup>64</sup> Real Vision Finance, “Steve Bannon’s Warning On China Trade War (w/ Kyle Bass),” Posted 21 August 2019, <https://youtu.be/qH5QzuzD01A>.

<sup>65</sup> BBC News, “China becomes world’s second-biggest movie market,” Last updated 22 March 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-21891631>; Bloomberg, “China Expected to Become World’s Biggest Movie Market This Year” *Daybreak Asia*, Posted 14 January 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/videos/2020-01-15/china-expected-to-become-world-s-biggest-movie-market-this-year-video>.

<sup>66</sup> The State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television (SAPPRFT).

<sup>67</sup> Richard Berman, “China’s rising threat to Hollywood,” *Politico*, last updated 4 October 2016, <https://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2016/10/china-hollywood-movies-threat-000216/>.

explicit coercion, censorship of any film would translate into immense losses if an audience of 1.3 billion potential moviegoers was prohibited from seeing it.<sup>68</sup>

An instance of this pressure that appeared in the press was the 2012 remake of *Red Dawn*, in which the studio took “the extraordinary step of digitally altering a film to excise bad guys from the Communist nation lest the leadership in Beijing be offended”<sup>69</sup> by painstakingly replacing Chinese flags and propaganda posters with North Korean ones post-production.<sup>70</sup> Another subtle change that was reported was the removal of the Taiwanese flag from the main character’s jacket in the 2020 remake of *Top Gun*.<sup>71</sup>

Chinese interests have directly purchased Hollywood production companies; the CCP-linked firm Dalian Wanda purchased AMC Entertainment and Legendary Entertainment, among others.<sup>72</sup> This gives Beijing tremendous influence over audiences: “when you control the movie experience, you can subtly influence public opinion.”<sup>73</sup>

### **Political Influence**

China has used political influence as a component of its IW campaign against NATO states. Former Canadian Ambassador to China David Mulroney wrote that the regime “has well-developed mechanisms for influencing political opinion in foreign

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<sup>68</sup>James Frazier, “Cut! Hollywood threatened by creeping Chinese censorship,” *The Washington Times*, last updated 27 June 2012, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/jun/27/china-rising-as-big-market-for-big-us-films/>.

<sup>69</sup> Ben Fritz and John Horn, “Reel China: Hollywood tries to stay on China’s good side,” *Los Angeles Times*, last updated 16 March 2011, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/la-et-china-red-dawn-20110316-story.html>.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> CBC News: The National, “China’s growing influence on film industry, posted 29 Nov 2019, <https://youtu.be/Zo6a066N-s8>.

<sup>72</sup> Richard Berman, “China’s rising threat to Hollywood,” *Politico*, last updated 4 October 2016, <https://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2016/10/china-hollywood-movies-threat-000216/>.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*



countries. This frequently involves the use of agents of influence in target countries.”<sup>74</sup> Part of its approach has been the long-term cultivation of non-ethnic Chinese ‘friends of China’ through its external campaign of ‘diplomatic matters’ [*waishi*] for decades.<sup>75</sup> China has exerted lobbying influence by hiring former politicians and diplomats who have privileged inside knowledge and political connections that help facilitate Beijing’s agenda.<sup>76</sup>

Beyond its subtle and more diplomatic IW measures, China carries out active disinformation, espionage and cyber operations in pursuit of its IW approach. It employs a blend of military and security forces,<sup>77</sup> paid trolls<sup>78</sup> known as the ‘50 cent party’ [*wumao*], for the 50 Chinese cents they allegedly receive per social media post<sup>79</sup> and

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<sup>74</sup> David Mulrone, “Shining a Brighter Light on Foreign Influence in Canada,” *MacDonald-Laurier Institute*, October 2019, 2.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 42.

<sup>76</sup> Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “Meet the U.S. Officials Now in China’s Sphere of Influence,” *The Daily Beast*, last updated 21 November 2018, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/meet-the-us-officials-who-now-lobby-for-china>; Jeffrey Lazarus, “Which members of Congress become lobbyists? The ones with the most power. Here’s the data,” *The Washington Post*, last updated 15 January 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/01/15/which-members-of-congress-become-lobbyists-the-ones-with-the-most-power-heres-the-data/>; Sophia Yan, “China accused of secret lobbying campaign in UK against its critics,” *The Telegraph*, last updated 10 May 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/05/10/china-accused-secret-lobbying-campaign-uk-against-critics/>; Terry Glavin, “What Jean Chrétien has done to Canada on the Meng Wanzhou case,” *Maclean’s*, last updated 19 June 2019, <https://www.macleans.ca/politics/ottawa/what-jean-chretien-has-done-to-canada-on-the-meng-wanzhou-case/>.

<sup>77</sup> Roger Faligot, *Chinese Spies: From Chairman Mao to Xi Jinping*, London: Hurst & Company, 2019, 263.

<sup>78</sup> Troll definition from Merriam-Webster dictionary: “to antagonize (others) online by deliberately posting inflammatory, irrelevant, or offensive comments or other disruptive content; to harass, criticize, or antagonize (someone) especially by provocatively disparaging or mocking public statements, postings, or acts,” last accessed 1 May 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/troll>.

<sup>79</sup> David Wertime, “Meet the Chinese Trolls Pumping Out 488 Million Fake Social Media Posts,” *Foreign Policy*, last updated 19 May 2016, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/05/19/meet-the-chinese-internet-trolls-pumping-488-million-posts-harvard-stanford-ucsd-research/>; Gary King, Jennifer Panz and Margaret E. Roberts, *How the Chinese Government Fabricates Social Media Posts for Strategic Distraction, not Engaged Argument*, 9 April 2017, <http://gking.harvard.edu/files/gking/files/50c.pdf?m=1463587807>.

‘patriotic hackers’<sup>80</sup> to intimidate and harass anyone critical of the CCP, and to spread the regime’s propaganda among NATO state audiences.<sup>81</sup>

## **DISRUPTION: HOW RUSSIA CONDUCTS INFORMATION WARFARE**

*“This is why it’s so important for Moscow to do away with truth. If nothing is true, then anything is possible. We are left with the sense that we don’t know what Putin will do next—that he’s unpredictable and thus dangerous. We’re rendered stunned, spun, and flummoxed by the Kremlin’s weaponization of absurdity and unreality.”<sup>82</sup>*

– Peter Pomerantsev

### **Russia’s Overall IW Approach**

Russia’s overall IW approach against NATO could be summarized as a campaign of disruption through ‘sharp power,’ defined by Joseph Nye as the deceptive use of information for hostile purposes.<sup>83</sup> Russia could not realistically expect to win a conventional war against NATO, nor could it wage economic warfare against the Alliance with any prospect of success.<sup>84</sup> Rather, it aims to weaken NATO with its IW

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<sup>80</sup> Nicholas Lyall, “China’s Cyber Militias: China’s cyber power is in the grip of dual trends: pluralism and centralization,” *The Diplomat*, last updated 1 March 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/chinas-cyber-militias/>.

<sup>81</sup> Jonathan Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda: Beijing’s Campaign of Influence and Intimidation in Canada* Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2019.

<sup>82</sup> Peter Pomerantsev, “Russia and the Menace of Unreality - How Vladimir Putin is revolutionizing information warfare” *The Atlantic*, Last updated 9 September 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/09/russia-putin-revolutionizing-information-warfare/379880/>.

<sup>83</sup> Joseph S. Nye, “Jr. Soft Power and Public Diplomacy Revisited,” *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 14 (2019) 7-20.

<sup>84</sup> Unlike Crimea, whose population was largely pro-Russian, Russia could not replicate such a relatively peaceful annexation of a NATO member state. Any such armed attack would be suicidal given the nuclear powers party to such an imagined conflict. It would also be impossible to achieve surprise, as the massive mobilization efforts required to attack a NATO state with a conventional force would be rapidly identified. The Russian economy is dwarfed by the combined economies of NATO states, making a potential economic war devastating for Russia.

capabilities, by seeking to destabilize<sup>85</sup> the domestic politics inside NATO states.<sup>86</sup> Russia seeks to win without fighting for the most part; it has carried out limited actions that have threatened Europe<sup>87</sup> but it has avoided major warfare with NATO.

### **Russia's Strategic Context: Decline and Insecurity**

Russia's strategic context differs from China's situation in several important ways. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Russia has displayed a sense of insecurity relative to its neighbours,<sup>88</sup> and has tried to prevent NATO enlargement. The prospect of Ukraine joining NATO was seen by Putin as an existential threat, which some analysts claim to be the motive for the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the unresolved conflict in Eastern Ukraine.<sup>89</sup>

Russia is not the superpower it was during the Cold War and it has faced serious social and economic problems since the fall of the Soviet Union. Approximately 21 million Russians live in poverty according to official reports,<sup>90</sup> and the average monthly wage for Russians is 42,413 rubles (\$670 USD).<sup>91</sup> Russia's population was shrinking by

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<sup>85</sup> Elizabeth Grimm Arsenault and Joseph Stabile, "Confronting Russia's Role in Transnational White Supremacist Extremism," *Just Security*, last updated 6 February 2020, <https://www.justsecurity.org/68420/confronting-russias-role-in-transnational-white-supremacist-extremism/>.

<sup>86</sup> Keir Giles, *Handbook of Russian Information Warfare*, NATO Defense College, November 2016, 24.

<sup>87</sup> For instance in Georgia, Estonia, and Ukraine.

<sup>88</sup> Ankit Panda, "Russia in Crimea: When States Act out of Insecurity," *The Diplomat*, last updated 15 March 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/03/russia-in-crimea-when-states-act-out-of-insecurity/>.

<sup>89</sup> Hall Gardner, *Crimea, Global Rivalry, and the Vengeance of History*, New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2015, 62.

<sup>90</sup> The Moscow Times, "21M Russians Live in Poverty, Official Data Says," last updated 30 July 2019, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/07/30/21m-russians-live-in-poverty-official-data-says-a66618>.

<sup>91</sup> Pat Evans, "13 mind-blowing facts about Russia's economy," *Market Insider*, last updated 16 April 2019, <https://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/russia-economy-facts-2019-4-1028116037>.

700 people per day, or more than 250,000 per year as of 2018<sup>92</sup> and it is projected to decline precipitously in the next few decades.<sup>93</sup> Its economy has been growing at only half the rate of the global average: Russia's GDP grew only 1.3 percent in 2019 in contrast to the global average of 2.9 percent.<sup>94</sup> It is unlikely that Russia will be able to maintain its current level of defence spending, and thus will see a dramatic decrease in its ability to project military power.

Despite these setbacks, Russia persists as the main perceived military threat to NATO, and concerns within the Alliance have grown about a 'resurgent' Russia<sup>95</sup> since its annexation of Crimea.<sup>96</sup> The Russian military remains a modernized conventional force with a large nuclear arsenal. Russia has demonstrated its willingness to project military power outside its borders in Crimea and Syria using what some non-Russian analysts have dubbed 'hybrid warfare.'<sup>97</sup> Perhaps most concerning to NATO are the unconventional capabilities that Russia has used to conduct IW against NATO, as well as in its wars in Eastern Ukraine and Syria. In Crimea, Russian military actions were combined with an aggressive IW campaign that included disinformation from Putin himself. Putin claimed there were no Russian forces in Crimea as the invasion was

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<sup>92</sup> Paul Goble, "Russia's Demographic Decline Accelerates, Increasingly Because of Moscow's Own Policies," Eurasia Daily Monitor, Volume: 15 Issue: 140, 4 October 2018, <https://jamestown.org/program/russias-demographic-decline-accelerates-increasingly-because-of-moscows-own-policies/>.

<sup>93</sup> STRATFOR, "Russia Takes on Its Demographic Decline," last updated 27 March 2019, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/russia-takes-its-demographic-decline>.

<sup>94</sup> Andrew E. Kramer, "Pessimistic Outlook in Russia Slows Investment, and the Economy," *The New York Times*, last updated 18 February 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/18/business/russia-economic-growth.html>.

<sup>95</sup> Lisa Ferdinando, "'Resurgent Russia' Poses Threat to NATO, New Commander Says," *DOD News*, 4 May 2016, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/751800/resurgent-russia-poses-threat-to-nato-new-commander-says/>.

<sup>96</sup> Agnia Grigas, *Beyond Crimea: The New Russian Empire*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016, 10.

<sup>97</sup> Bettina Renz, *Russia's Military Revival*, Cambridge: Polity, 2018, 161.

proceeding, only to admit otherwise weeks later.<sup>98</sup> In *LikeWar*, author P.W. Singer explains that:

The United States and its European allies imposed sanctions and went on their highest military alert since the Cold War, all for something that officially wasn't happening. It was an invasion that wasn't, a major conflict that one side flatly refused to acknowledge it was fighting. Russia had used social media not only to stoke the fires of conflict, but also to create something akin to a "Schrödinger's war": a perception-warping, reality-bending conflict that existed in two simultaneous states. "This, in short, was no traditional military invasion; it was hybrid warfare in which goals were accomplished even before the adversary understood what was going on," former U.S. ambassador to NATO Ivo Daalder explained. His military counterpart, General Philip Breedlove, then supreme allied commander of NATO, called it nothing less than "the most amazing information blitzkrieg we have seen in the history of information warfare."<sup>99</sup>

Russia's strategic goals are not strictly based on raw military and economic power; it seeks the prestige and status of a great power - 'greatpowerness' [*derzhavnost*], an aspiration rooted within Russia's national identity.<sup>100</sup> While some have argued that Russia is seeking a return to its superpower status as the USSR,<sup>101</sup> it may be a question of legitimacy and respect above other factors:

[...] rather than see Putin's Russia as seeking to restore the USSR, it is more accurate to say that the Kremlin would like the outside world, and particularly the West, to treat it as if it were the Soviet Union: a nuclear

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<sup>98</sup> Carl Schrek, "From 'Not Us' To 'Why Hide It?': How Russia Denied Its Crimea Invasion, Then Admitted It," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, last updated 26 February 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/from-not-us-to-why-hide-it-how-russia-denied-its-crimea-invasion-then-admitted-it/29791806.html>; Steven Pifer, "Order from Chaos: Five years after Crimea's illegal annexation, the issue is no closer to resolution," *Brookings Institution*, last updated 18 March 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/03/18/five-years-after-crimeas-illegal-annexation-the-issue-is-no-closer-to-resolution/>.

<sup>99</sup> P.W. Singer and Emerson T. Brooking, *LikeWar: The Weaponization of Social Media*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018, 200.

<sup>100</sup> Bettina Renz and Hanna Smith, *Russia and Hybrid Warfare – Going Beyond the Label*, University of Helsinki Aleksanteri Papers 1/2016, 15.

<sup>101</sup> Michael Rywkin, "Russia: In Quest of Superpower Status," *American Foreign Policy Interests*, 30: 13–21, 2008.

superpower whose interests are as legitimate as any other great power, a country to be respected—and still feared.<sup>102</sup>

75 percent of Russians polled in 2019 said they believed Russia was a superpower according to the Moscow Times.<sup>103</sup> Culturally, Russia has resisted against the West’s ‘democratic fundamentalism’ including its insistence on liberal values.<sup>104</sup>

Beyond these national goals, Putin intends to preserve the kleptocracy<sup>105</sup> that has allowed him and other oligarchs to profit personally from Russia’s extractive institutions,<sup>106</sup> a system that has allowed 110 individuals in Russia, “including Putin’s cronies, [to] control a staggering 35 percent of the country’s wealth.”<sup>107</sup>

### **Russia’s IW Doctrine**

Russia has historic experience with IW, as it was used extensively by the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Its legacy dates back as far as Josef Stalin, who coined the term ‘disinformation’ [*dezinformatsia*] “giving it a French-sounding name and pretending it was a dirty Western practice.”<sup>108</sup> The Soviets also used ‘active measures’ [*aktivnyye meropriatia*] to describe “an array of overt and covert techniques for influencing events

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<sup>102</sup> Angela Stent, *Putin’s World: Russia against the West*, New York: Twelve, 2019, 93.

<sup>103</sup> The Moscow Times, “Russians’ Belief in Country’s Superpower Status Reaches 20-Year High – Poll.” Last updated 17 January 2019, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/01/17/russians-belief-countrys-superpower-status-reaches-20-year-high-poll-a64167>.

<sup>104</sup> Sarah A. Topol, What Does Putin Really Want?, *New York Times Magazine*, 25 June 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/25/magazine/russia-united-states-world-politics.html>.

<sup>105</sup> Anders Åslund, *Russia’s Crony Capitalism: The Path from Market Economy to Kleptocracy*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019.

<sup>106</sup> Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*, London: Profile Books, 2013.

<sup>107</sup> Karen Dawisha, *Putin’s Kleptocracy - Who Owns Russia?*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014, 204.

<sup>108</sup> Ion Mihai Pacepa, *Disinformation: Former Spy Chief Reveals Secret Strategies for Undermining Freedom, Attacking Religion, and Promoting Terrorism*, Washington: WND Books, 2013, 19.

and behavior in, and the actions of, foreign countries.”<sup>109</sup> This concept has been recycled by Putin’s Russia, and it has been greatly enhanced by digital age communications technology.<sup>110</sup> The seven elements of active measures are listed in Figure 2 below, which illustrate a consistent pattern in Russian IW.



**Figure 2 – Seven rules of Russian active measures**

Source: The New York Times, *Operation InfeKtion: How Russia Perfected the Art of War*

Russia’s 21<sup>st</sup> century concept of warfare has been the subject of intense scrutiny and frequent misunderstanding by outside observers. The ‘Gerasimov doctrine’ as it became known outside Russia, entered the security studies vocabulary after a February 2013 article written by Russian General Valery Gerasimov. In the article, he expressed what he believed to be the West’s new way of warfare since the Gulf War,<sup>111</sup> and described a method of warfare that ended up closely resembling the Russian Annexation

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<sup>109</sup> Richard H. Shultz and Roy Godson, *Dezinformatsia – Active Measures in Soviet Strategy*, Washington: Pergamon-Brassey’s, 1984, 2.

<sup>110</sup> The New York Times, “Operation InfeKtion: How Russia Perfected the Art of War,” last accessed 24 April 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/12/opinion/russia-meddling-disinformation-fake-news-elections.html>.

<sup>111</sup> Charles K. Bartles, Getting Gerasimov Right, *Military Review*, January-February 2016, 30.



of Crimea that took place the following year.<sup>112</sup> Even if Russia does not use the terminology of ‘Gerasimov doctrine’ or ‘hybrid warfare,’ it has demonstrated through its actions that it takes a broader view of warfare and uses non-military capabilities extensively in its IW campaigns against its adversaries, including NATO states.

### **Political Interference and Media Operations**

Russia’s social media apparatus came to light in Western media after the revelation of its interference in the 2016 U.S. election, in which it attacked Hillary Clinton’s presidential run while helping Donald Trump win the White House.<sup>113</sup> Rather than cyber attacks on the mechanisms of the elections, which would be difficult, provable, and attributable, Russia has focused on changing the understanding of the voting citizens themselves.<sup>114</sup>

Russia has carefully targeted existing social tensions within NATO states in its efforts to destabilize them and focus their attention on domestic problems. A stellar example was the social media campaign run by the Kremlin-controlled Internet Research Agency (IRA) in St. Petersburg, whose social media disinformation campaign during the 2016 US election has been widely reported.<sup>115</sup> In one particularly egregious example, the IRA encouraged the members of two Facebook pages it had created to stage a protest and

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Robert S. Mueller III, *The Mueller Report: The Final Report of the Special Counsel into Donald Trump, Russia, and Collusion*, New York: Skyhorse, 2019, 30.

<sup>114</sup> Martin Moore, *Democracy Hacked: Political Turmoil and Information Warfare in the Digital Age*, London: Oneworld, 2018, 73.

<sup>115</sup> Adrian Chen, “The Agency,” *The New York Times Magazine*, 2 June 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/07/magazine/the-agency.html>; Simon Shuster and Sandra Ifraimova, “A Former Russian Troll Explains How to Spread Fake News,” *TIME*, last updated 14 March 2018, <https://time.com/5168202/russia-troll-internet-research-agency/>; Neil MacFarquhar, “Inside the Russian Troll Factory: Zombies and a Breakneck Pace,” *The New York Times*, last updated 18 February 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/18/world/europe/russia-troll-factory.html>.



counter-protest in the same place and time.<sup>116</sup> A report of the United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence explained that:

In 2016, Russian operatives associated with the St. Petersburg-based Internet Research Agency (IRA) used social media to conduct an information warfare campaign designed to spread disinformation and societal division in the United States. [...] Masquerading as Americans, these operatives used targeted advertisements, intentionally falsified news articles, self-generated content, and social media platform tools to interact with and attempt to deceive tens of millions of social media users in the United States. This campaign sought to polarize Americans on the basis of societal, ideological, and racial differences, provoked real world events, and was part of a foreign government's covert support of Russia's favored candidate in the U.S. presidential election.<sup>117</sup>

Russia has a sophisticated media apparatus that combines traditional media with social media tools such as troll farms, and bots.<sup>118</sup> Its state-run media outlets Russia Today (RT) and Sputnik reach global audiences including the populations of NATO states. These disinformation tools have been greatly enhanced by savvy use of social media: “RT became the first news organization to surpass one billion views on YouTube in 2013.”<sup>119</sup> These media also reach Russian-speaking populations outside Russia, including inside NATO’s Eastern European member states, “in order to drive wedges

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<sup>116</sup> Claire Allbright, “A Russian Facebook page organized a protest in Texas. A different Russian page launched the counterprotest,” *The Texas Tribune*, last updated 1 November 2017, <https://www.texastribune.org/2017/11/01/russian-facebook-page-organized-protest-texas-different-russian-page-1/>.

<sup>117</sup> United States Senate, *Report of the Select Committee on Intelligence, United States Senate on Russian Active Measures Campaigns and Interference in the 2016 U.S. Election, Volume 2: Russia’s Use of Social Media with Additional Views*, 116<sup>th</sup> Congress 1<sup>st</sup> Session Report 116-XX, last accessed 25 April 2020, [https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Report\\_Volume2.pdf](https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Report_Volume2.pdf), 3.

<sup>118</sup> Martin Moore, *Democracy Hacked: Political Turmoil and Information Warfare in the Digital Age*, London: Oneworld, 2018, 98.

<sup>119</sup> Daisuke Wakabayashi and Nicholas Confessore, “Russia’s Favored Outlet Is an Online News Giant. YouTube Helped.” *The New York Times*, last updated 23 October 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/23/technology/youtube-russia-rt.html>.

between ethnic Russian and Russian-speaking populations and their host governments.”<sup>120</sup>

The New York Times documentary *Operation InfeKtion* explains how the Soviet style of IW has been revived by Putin’s Russia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it has made concerted efforts to spread disinformation on a massive scale.<sup>121</sup> This strategy has capitalized on the elements of society who are pre-disposed to conspiracy theories and extreme ideologies.<sup>122</sup>

By ‘gaslighting’<sup>123</sup> and polluting the information environment with ‘fake news,’ Russia has sought to erode trust and call into question the legitimacy of all media sources and authorities.<sup>124</sup> By spreading disinformation, enhanced by tools like Twitter bots, it has sought to create the perception of a legitimate opposition to established facts. These tactics resemble those used by tobacco companies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These companies sought to present the impression that the ‘science wasn’t settled’ linking smoking to cancer: “doubt is our product since it is the best means of competing with the ‘body of fact’ that exists in the mind of the public.”<sup>125</sup> Notably, Russia used these types of

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<sup>120</sup> Todd C. Helmus et. al., *Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe*, RAND, 2018, 7.

<sup>121</sup> The New York Times, “Operation InfeKtion: How Russia Perfected the Art of War,” last accessed 24 April 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/12/opinion/russia-meddling-disinformation-fake-news-elections.html>.

<sup>122</sup> Eirikur Bergmann, *Conspiracy & Populism: The Politics of Misinformation*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 107.

<sup>123</sup> Gaslighting is defined in Encyclopedia Britannica as “an elaborate and insidious technique of deception and psychological manipulation, usually practiced by a single deceiver, or “gaslighter,” on a single victim over an extended period. Its effect is to gradually undermine the victim’s confidence in his own ability to distinguish truth from falsehood, right from wrong, or reality from appearance, thereby rendering him pathologically dependent on the gaslighter in his thinking or feelings.” In the context of IW this is perpetrated by a government on a target population. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/gaslighting>.

<sup>124</sup> Urve Esilas, “Russia the Gaslighter,” *Center for European Policy Analysis*, last accessed 28 April 2020, <http://infowar.cepa.org/Briefs/Est/Russia-the-gaslighter>.

<sup>125</sup> Cailin O’Connor and James Owen Weatherall, *The Misinformation Age: How False Beliefs Spread*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019, 95.

disinformation tactics after its failed attempt to kill former Russian counter-spy Sergei Skripal in the U.K. with a Novichok nerve agent<sup>126</sup> in 2018:

The Russian state, which viewed Skripal as being a traitor, stood accused of having poisoned him on British soil. While denying any involvement, Russian permanent secretary to the UN, Vasily Nebenzya, suggested that the UK government was itself behind the incident, in an act of ‘black PR,’ designed to ‘tarnish Russia’ – Russian officials maintained that the poison was produced in Britain, and even suggested that the UK was, with the plot, merely trying to get out of the 2018 world football championship in Moscow.<sup>127</sup>

Russia has also exploited the war in Syria, in which it is party to the conflict and the main sponsor of the Assad regime.<sup>128</sup> General Breedlove, formerly NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander for Europe, accused Russia and its Syrian client regime of “indiscriminately bombing Syrian civilians to drive the refugee crisis,” a part of a deliberate strategy to “get them on the road” and “make them a problem for someone else.”<sup>129</sup> The refugee narrative has been used by Russia to destabilize and divide the internal politics of NATO states, by spreading anti-migrant and far-right propaganda to increase the tension and polarization within these societies.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Anushka Asthana, Andrew Roth, Luke Harding and Ewen MacAskill, “Russian spy poisoning: Theresa May issues ultimatum to Moscow,” *The Guardian*, last updated 13 March 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/mar/12/russia-highly-likely-to-be-behind-poisoning-of-spy-says-theresa-may>.

<sup>127</sup> United States Senate, *Report of the Select Committee on Intelligence, United States Senate on Russian Active Measures Campaigns and Interference in the 2016 U.S. Election, Volume 2: Russia’s Use of Social Media with Additional Views*, 116<sup>th</sup> Congress 1<sup>st</sup> Session Report 116-XX, last accessed 25 April 2020, [https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Report\\_Volume2.pdf](https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Report_Volume2.pdf), 3.

<sup>128</sup> Robin Yassin-Kassab and Leila Al-Shami, *Burning Country: Syrians in Revolution and War* (New Edition), London: Pluto Press, 2018, 200.

<sup>129</sup> Lizzie Dearden, “Russia and Syria ‘weaponising’ refugee crisis to destabilise Europe, Nato commander claims,” 3 March 2016, *The Independent*, last updated 3 March 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/russia-and-syria-weaponising-refugee-crisis-to-destabilise-europe-nato-commander-claims-a6909241.html>.

<sup>130</sup> Todd C. Helmus et. al., *Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe*, RAND, 2018, 20.

Russia has supported and co-opted extremist groups within NATO states that include neo-Nazis, biker gangs and other far-right groups: “Russia’s intelligence services co-opt fringe radicals and angry young men to try to undermine Western democracies from within.”<sup>131</sup> Russia has actively cultivated neo-Nazism within NATO states as part of its broader aims of sowing discord and destabilizing the West.<sup>132</sup>

### **Economic Means – the Leverage of ‘Red Gas’**

While Russia does not have the level of economic and manufacturing power wielded by China, it has leverage through its energy sector due to Europe’s dependence on Russian natural gas. Some have argued that Russia used its ‘energy weapon’ – a politically motivated supply disruption<sup>133</sup> – against Ukraine and its European neighbours, causing gas crises between 2006 and 2009.<sup>134</sup> The threat of energy supply disruption may provide some leverage to Russia over European states that depend on it. However, any such disruption would be short-sighted as Russia’s economy relies heavily on energy exports, and European nations are its main customers.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Michael Carpenter, “Russia Is Co-opting Angry Young Men,” *The Atlantic*, last updated 29 August 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/08/russia-is-co-opting-angry-young-men/568741/>.

<sup>132</sup> Elizabeth Grimm Arsenault and Joseph Stabile, “Confronting Russia’s Role in Transnational White Supremacist Extremism,” *Just Security*, last updated 6 February 2020, <https://www.justsecurity.org/68420/confronting-russias-role-in-transnational-white-supremacist-extremism/>.

<sup>133</sup> Per Högselius, *Red Gas: Russia and the Origins of European Energy Dependence*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, 221.

<sup>134</sup> Reuters, “Timeline: Gas crises between Russia and Ukraine,” *World News*, last updated 11 January 2009, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-ukraine-gas-timeline-sb-idUSTRE50A1A720090111>.

<sup>135</sup> Agnia Grigas, *The New Geopolitics of Natural Gas*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017, 102.

## CONTRASTING IW STRATEGIES OF CHINA AND RUSSIA

### Commonality

The political regimes of China and Russia share a common resentment for the West that has been explicitly stated by both their presidents. Vladimir Putin described the collapse of the Soviet Union as “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe” of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>136</sup> while Xi Jinping’s nationalist narrative makes heavy reference to the so-called “century of humiliation at the hands of foreigners,”<sup>137</sup> when a historically weak imperial China was forced to accept foreign interference.

Relations between the two states have greatly improved under the regimes of Xi and Putin:

The nature of the relationship was raised in 2011 to a “comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership,” and has been characterized by numerous leadership summits, institutions established for high-level communications and frequent agreements for further cooperation. The relationship became even closer in 2012, the year in which Vladimir Putin resumed the Russian presidency and Xi Jinping took over the reins of the CCP in China (becoming president in 2013). The two men have reportedly developed a close personal bond. Again, Western sanctions against Russia in 2014 marked a dramatic acceleration in Russia’s turn toward China.<sup>138</sup>

China and Russia have a similar approach to warfare, as evidenced by their respective doctrines and IW approaches against NATO. China’s ‘unrestricted warfare’ and ‘three warfares’ share central concepts with Russia’s so-called ‘hybrid warfare’: they have an understanding of warfare that is much more broad and nuanced than the

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<sup>136</sup> BBC, “Putin deplors collapse of USSR,” last updated 25 April 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4480745.stm>.

<sup>137</sup> David Mulrone, *Middle Power, Middle Kingdom: What Canadians Need to Know About China in the 21st Century* (Toronto: Penguin, 2015), 47.

<sup>138</sup> Paul J. Bolt and Sharyl L. Cross, *China, Russia, and Twenty-First Century Global Geopolitics*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018, 42.

traditional binary concept of war and peace. They also encompass non-military elements of national power and generally emphasize the contest over public opinion as a central component of their strategy.

China and Russia both have political systems that concentrate power in their governments, and they share a fundamental objective: the survival of their respective regimes, which correlates to the continued prosperity of their oligarchs. Both nations' IW approaches combine domestic repression with overseas influence, as they recognize these threats to their regimes are interconnected.<sup>139</sup>

Both China and Russia use a comprehensive approach to IW, using their state-run media, political operatives, military and security forces, and paid trolls to project their narratives. Both have also used 'identity politics' to attack those who criticize their regimes and IW efforts: China frequently accuses its critics of 'racism,'<sup>140</sup> while any mention of Russian malfeasance is dismissed by Moscow as 'Russophobia.'<sup>141</sup>

## Divergence

While Chinese and Russian IW methods share similarities, they also diverge according to their respective strategic contexts, interests, and capabilities. China takes a

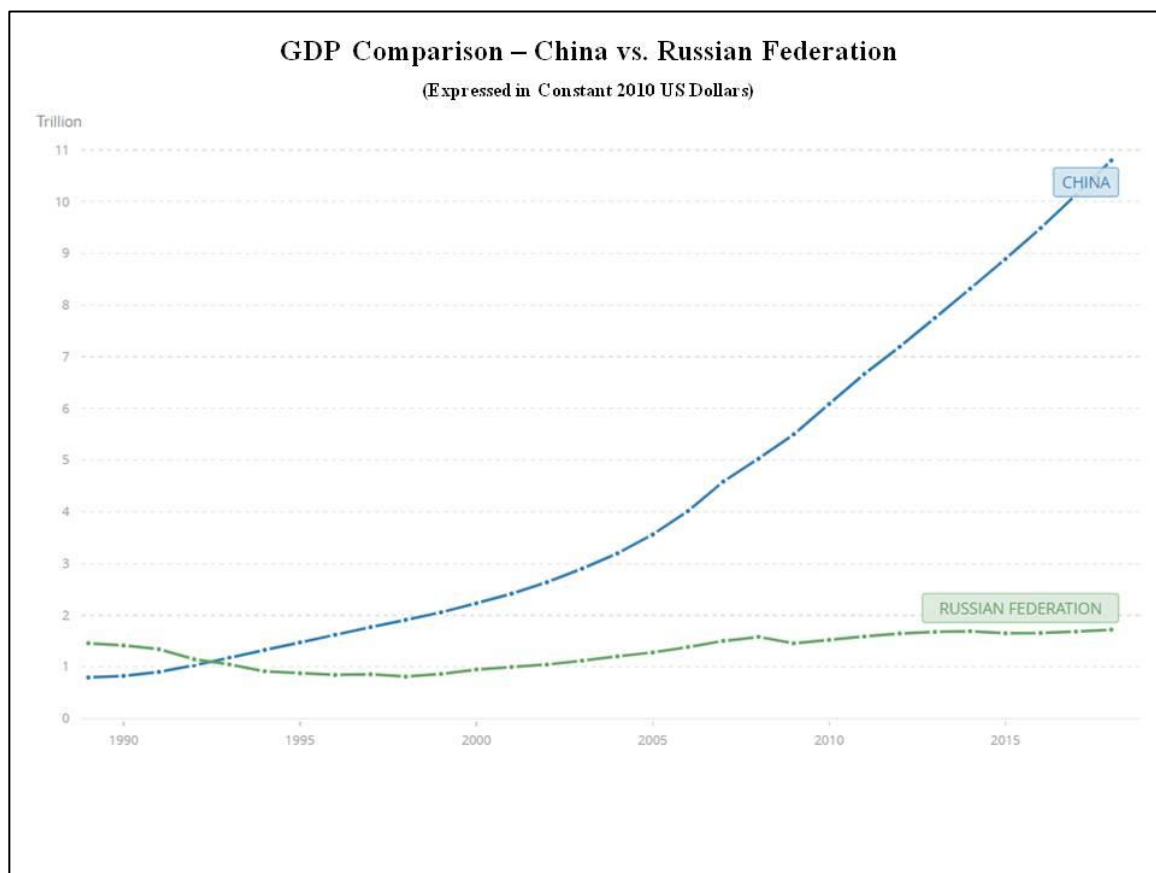
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<sup>139</sup> Kate C. Langdon and Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Putin's Totalitarian Democracy- Ideology, Myth, and Violence in the Twenty-First Century*, Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2020, 24; Nicholas Lyall, "China's Cyber Militias: China's cyber power is in the grip of dual trends: pluralism and centralization," *The Diplomat*, last updated 1 March 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/chinas-cyber-militias/>.

<sup>140</sup> Thomas Brown, "China: Exploiting False Accusations of Racism," *Quillette*, last updated 12 March 2020, <https://quillette.com/2020/03/12/china-exploiting-false-accusations-of-racism/>.

<sup>141</sup> Paula Chertok, "Russophobia: How Russia Exploits Western Values For Its Propaganda," *StopFake*, last updated 22 May 2018, <https://www.stopfake.org/en/russophobia-how-russia-exploits-western-values-for-its-propaganda/>; DFRLab, "#PutinAtWar: How Russia Weaponized 'Russophobia'," *Medium*, last updated 14 February 2018, <https://medium.com/dfrlab/putinatwar-how-russia-weaponized-russophobia-40a3723d26d4>.

more subtle and decentralized approach, using its superior economy<sup>142</sup> and vast diaspora<sup>143</sup> to manoeuvre for advantage in the international system. It seeks to manipulate NATO states into accepting the CCP's agenda using the 'third face' of power.



**Figure 3 – GDP Comparison of China and the Russian Federation from 1989 to 2018**

Source: World Bank national accounts data and OECD National Accounts data files<sup>144</sup>

Russia is more brazen in its approach, and is mainly focused on disrupting NATO states using 'sharp power' in pursuit of its geopolitical objectives. Unlike the Russian government, China is "interested in a stable – but pliant and fragmented – EU and the

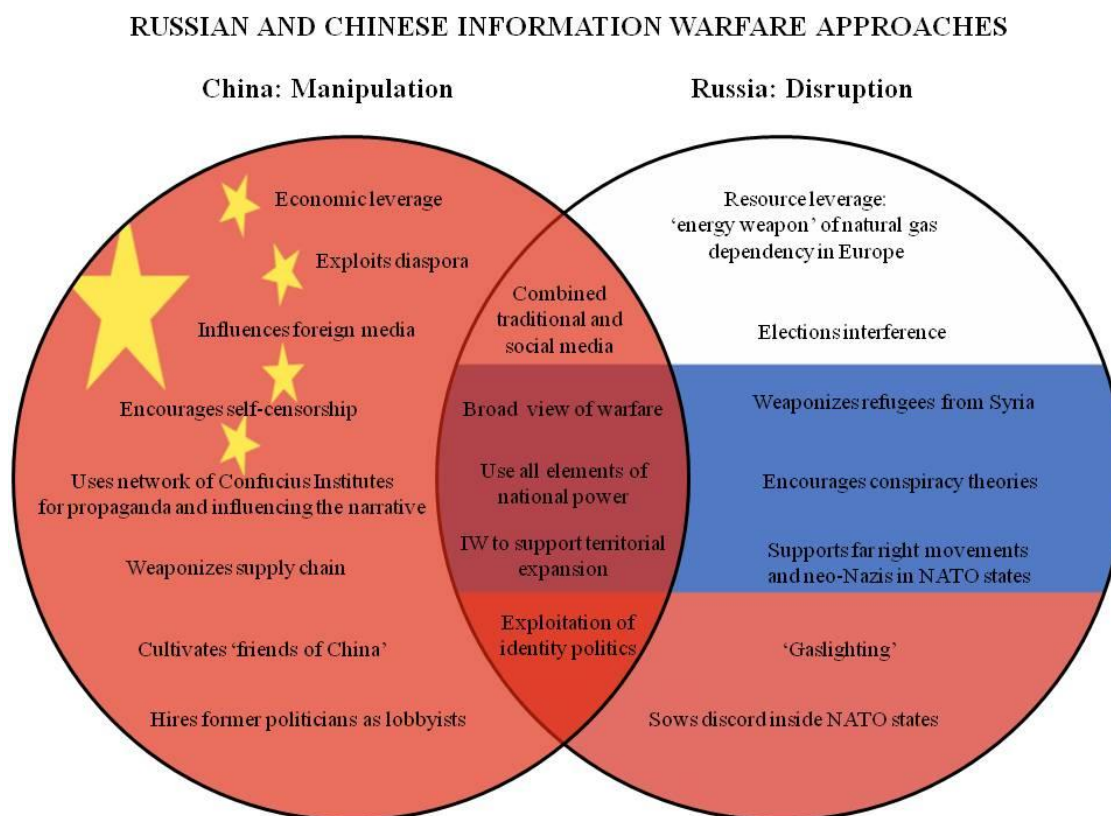
<sup>142</sup> See Figure 3 for a comparison of the GDP growth in China and Russia between 1989 and 2018.

<sup>143</sup> Russia also seeks to exploit its diaspora, but it is much smaller, concentrated in Eastern Europe, and not organized on the scale of China's 'United Front.'

<sup>144</sup> The World Bank, "GDP (constant 2010 US\$) - China, Russian Federation," World Bank national accounts data, and OECD National Accounts data files, last accessed 2 May 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD?end=2018&locations=CN-RU&start=1989&view=chart>.



large and integrated European single market that underpins it.”<sup>145</sup> The major commonalities and divergent themes in the Chinese and Russian IW approaches are summarized in Figure 4 below.



**Figure 4 – Chinese and Russian IW Approaches: Commonality and Divergence**

Source: author

## Measuring Effectiveness

It is extremely difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of an IW strategy. Even if it were possible to isolate the IW campaign from innumerable other variables, a study would need a level of precision that is unattainable considering the scale and complexity

<sup>145</sup> Thomas Wright and Thorsten Benner, “China’s relations with U.S. allies and partners in Europe,” *The Brookings Institution*, last updated 5 April 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/chinas-relations-with-u-s-allies-and-partners-in-europe/>.



of the cognitive domain. A comparison of an IW strategy's objectives with the outcomes may provide at best a correlation of factors, but not proof of causation. When considering the Chinese and Russian objectives and IW approaches against NATO, as described above, both nations have had some success but have perhaps fallen short of their desired end states. China's relative power has continued to grow and it has had some success in its IW campaign against NATO states; certain member states have tacitly accepted Beijing's increasing influence by joining Chinese initiatives like the BRI<sup>146</sup> and the Asian Infrastructure Development Bank.<sup>147</sup> Russia had some disruptive effects on NATO's societies, reaching millions of Americans between 2014 and the 2016 U.S. election,<sup>148</sup> and in sending thousands of tweets during the UK's 'Brexit' referendum.<sup>149</sup>

Both China and Russia have thus far been able to hold onto their respective unlawful territorial gains in Ukraine and in the South China Sea despite international condemnation. Their actions, however, have come at the cost of negative global media coverage and increasingly negative attitudes toward China and Russia in NATO states.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> The Economist, "Not so silky: Italy's plan to join China's Belt and Road Initiative ruffles feathers," *The Economist*, 23 March 2019, 45-46.

<sup>147</sup> Canada, "Backgrounder: Canada Joins the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank," *Department of Finance Canada*, last modified 24 March 2017, [https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/news/2017/03/backgrounder\\_canadajoinstheasianinfrastructureinvestmentbank.html](https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/news/2017/03/backgrounder_canadajoinstheasianinfrastructureinvestmentbank.html).

<sup>148</sup> Robert S. Mueller III, *The Mueller Report: The Final Report of the Special Counsel into Donald Trump, Russia, and Collusion*, New York: Skyhorse, 2019, 37.

<sup>149</sup> Joe Parkinson and Georgi Kantchev, "Document: Russia Uses Rigged Polls, Fake News to Sway Foreign Elections," *The Wall Street Journal*, last updated 23 March 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-does-russia-meddle-in-elections-look-at-bulgaria-1490282352>; Alexi Mostrous, Mark Bridge, and Katie Gibbons, "Russia used Twitter bots and trolls 'to disrupt' Brexit vote," *The Sunday Times*, last updated 15 November 2017, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/russia-used-web-posts-to-disrupt-brexit-vote-h9nv5zg6c>.

<sup>150</sup> Clark Letterman, "Image of Putin, Russia Suffers Internationally - At same time, Russia seen as gaining influence on world stage," *Pew Research Center*, last updated 6 December 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2018/12/06/image-of-putin-russia-suffers-internationally/>; Gallup Polls, "Russia," last accessed 26 April 2020, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1642/russia.aspx>; Laura Silver, Kat Devlin and Christine Huang, "Attitudes toward China," *Pew Research Center*, last updated 5 December 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/12/05/attitudes-toward-china-2019/>.

Of course, it is too early to determine with any certainty the long-term impacts of their respective IW approaches against NATO.

## **HOW NATO STATES CAN FIGHT IN THE INFORMATION DOMAIN**

### **Alliance Measures**

NATO should seek to improve its collective understanding of the IW threats it faces in order to devise an effective counter-IW strategy. This strategy should combine a range of defensive and offensive measures, nested within its wider defence strategy of ‘deterrence, defence and dialogue.’<sup>151</sup> NATO should develop a common front that deters adversaries from attempting IW against the Alliance, defend its member states against IW, and apply its combined resources to contest aggression in the information domain. It should also put additional emphasis on the institutions dedicated to understanding and sharing best practices between the military and civilian security professionals within NATO and partner nations. These include established centers of excellence (CoE), such as the StratCom CoE and the Hybrid War CoE, and organizations like EUvsDisinfo which collaborate together to combat disinformation.<sup>152</sup>

History has shown that when confronted, regimes that carry out IW campaigns can be deterred. For instance, when the U.S. ‘named and shamed’ the USSR for its disinformation operations, it led to a public apology from Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet

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<sup>151</sup> NATO, *The Secretary General’s Annual Report 2019*, last accessed 2 May 2020, [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/3/pdf\\_publications/sgar19-en.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/3/pdf_publications/sgar19-en.pdf).

<sup>152</sup> EUvsDisinfo, “To Challenge Russia’s Ongoing Disinformation Campaigns: The Story Of EUvsDisinfo”, last updated 22 April 2020, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/to-challenge-russias-ongoing-disinformation-campaigns-the-story-of-euvsdisinfo/>.

Premier at the time.<sup>153</sup> If NATO adopts a unified approach to reprimand regimes that conduct IW against the Alliance, it could prove to be a very effective countermeasure.

The combined GDP of NATO states amounts to nearly half the world's economy,<sup>154</sup> and thus the Alliance has enormous economic power that it should use to support its counter-IW strategy. Nations who engage in IW against NATO could be deterred by coordinated sanctions that threaten to economically isolate them. NATO should demonstrate political resolve by applying tariffs to offending authoritarian nations. It should concurrently apply economic policies that encourage trade with nations who do not conduct IW activities against NATO, and who meet minimum standards of democracy and respect for the rules-based international order.<sup>155</sup> Many have urged NATO states to prevent foreign business interests linked to authoritarian regimes, such as Huawei, from operating inside their borders.<sup>156</sup> Legal measures that personally target the officials of regimes that violate human rights, such as the 'Magnitsky laws' in the U.S.,

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<sup>153</sup> PBS, "The Long History of Russian Disinformation Targeting the U.S.," last updated 21 November 2018, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/the-long-history-of-russian-disinformation-targeting-the-u-s>.

<sup>154</sup> Jeff Desjardins, "The \$80 Trillion World Economy in One Chart," *Visual Capitalist*, last updated 10 October 2018, <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/80-trillion-world-economy-one-chart/>.

<sup>155</sup> Matthew Fisher, "China does not have to be Canada's only partner in Asia," *Global News*, last updated 7 October 2019, <https://globalnews.ca/news/5990102/canada-foreign-policy-china-asia/>.

<sup>156</sup> Mike Blanchfield, "Iran connection emerges as Canada's envoy briefs China on Huawei arrest," *The National Post*, 7 December 2018, <https://nationalpost.com/pmnn/news-pmn/canada-news-pmn/canadas-envoy-to-beijing-briefs-china-on-arrest-of-huawei-executive-freeland>; TVO, "A Fractured Canada-China Relationship," *The Agenda with Steve Paikin*, posted 4 December 2019, <https://youtu.be/QcE3Sg-G6PE>; Adrienne Arseneault, "Susan Rice's warning to Canada: Don't let Huawei work on your 5G networks," *CBC News: The National*, last updated 4 November 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/susan-rice-huawei-canada-trump-impeachment-election-1.5346263>.

Canada and other nations<sup>157</sup> should also be pursued to the fullest extent possible by all NATO states.<sup>158</sup>

### **National Measures**

At the national level, NATO states should adopt a whole-of-nation<sup>159</sup> approach to counteract IW threats given the ubiquitous nature of hostile IW. They should seek to increase their national resilience to disinformation, as Sweden's Civil Contingencies Agency has recommended,<sup>160</sup> reducing the effectiveness of adversary IW activities by developing a 'herd immunity' to disinformation and manipulation. Such strategies should be non-partisan and focused on protecting the nations' democratic institutions. Governments, civil society, the news industry, technology companies, educational institutions, and the public at large all have a part to play in the resistance against IW.<sup>161</sup>

Democracies must balance their constitutional protections of the press and free speech with the measures necessary to counteract hostile propaganda. The solutions to the problem are not necessarily government-led, and civil society associations are often more effective in this domain.<sup>162</sup> There have been some successful approaches taken in recent

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<sup>157</sup> Ewelina U. Ochab, "The Magnitsky Law Is Taking Over The European Union," *Forbes*, last updated 10 December 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2018/12/10/the-magnitsky-law-is-taking-over-the-european-union/#152f1ef11eca>.

<sup>158</sup> Leo Housakos and Thanh Hai Ngo, "We must invoke Magnitsky sanctions against China," *Maclean's*, last modified 10 December 2019, <https://www.macleans.ca/opinion/we-must-invoke-magnitsky-sanctions-against-china/>.

<sup>159</sup> Brett Doyle, "Lessons on Collaboration from Recent Conflicts: The Whole-of-Nation and Whole-of-Government Approaches in Action," *InterAgency Journal* Vol. 10, No. 1, 2019, 106.

<sup>160</sup> James Pamment et al, "Countering Information Influence Activities: The State of the Art," version 1.4, 1 July 2018, Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, <https://www.msb.se/RibData/Filer/pdf/28697.pdf>.

<sup>161</sup> Darrell M. West, "How to combat fake news and disinformation," *The Brookings Institute*, 18 December 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/how-to-combat-fake-news-and-disinformation/>

<sup>162</sup> Richard Stengel, *Information Wars: How We Lost the Global Battle Against Disinformation*, New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2019, 13.

years to tackle this dilemma, like the *Stop Fake*<sup>163</sup> fact-checking organization and television programs in Eastern Europe that mock Russian fake news in an entertaining format<sup>164</sup> help to raise public awareness of IW.

In order to counter the manipulation IW strategy, China's use of political, economic and educational tools must be thoroughly understood and communicated to the public. Governments at all levels should strive for more transparency in their institutions, so lobbyists and financiers can be scrutinized, limiting the opportunities for invisible IW interference.

States should ultimately strive to address the underlying issues that create social tensions and to mitigate the vulnerabilities that are exploited by hostile IW. When there are legitimate grievances in a society, they must be addressed for the long-term protection from IW. Further, nations should cautiously avoid over-simplifying the threat of foreign IW, as there are often domestic actors within NATO states who also use disinformation tactics to achieve their aims.<sup>165</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Some argue that liberal democracies are fundamentally disadvantaged when fighting IW, because they lack the strong centralized control over the instruments of national power wielded by authoritarian regimes like China and Russia. While authoritarians are largely unaccountable to their populations due to the lack of democratic

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<sup>163</sup> StopFake, "About Us," last accessed 27 April 2020, <https://www.stopfake.org/en/about-us/>.

<sup>164</sup> The New York Times, "Operation InfeKtion: How Russia Perfected the Art of War," last accessed 24 April 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/12/opinion/russia-meddling-disinformation-fake-news-elections.html>.

<sup>165</sup> Seva Gunitsky, Democracies Can't Blame Putin for Their Disinformation Problem, *Foreign Policy*, 21 April 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/21/democracies-disinformation-russia-china-homegrown/>.

fairness, political leaders in democracies are subject to a continuous electoral cycle; this pressures them into constantly considering the effects of their actions on the next elections.

Authoritarian regimes have their own disadvantages however: they are inherently fragile and can fall suddenly in unforeseen ways.<sup>166</sup> These regimes face a persistent threat of revolt as “historically, no autocratic regimes have survived for more than 74 years, because of the decay of their ideology and the corruption of the ruling elites.”<sup>167</sup> Conversely, democracies have the advantage of moral high ground and credibility earned through transparency and fairness. As General H.R. McMaster argues:

The “Western liberal” qualities that the Chinese see as weaknesses are actually strengths. The free exchange of information and ideas is an extraordinary competitive advantage, a great engine of innovation and prosperity. [...] Freedom of the press and freedom of expression, combined with robust application of the rule of law, have exposed China’s predatory business tactics in country after country—and shown China to be an untrustworthy partner. Diversity and tolerance in free and open societies can be unruly, but they reflect our most basic human aspirations—and they make practical sense too.<sup>168</sup>

The mishandling of the COVID-19 outbreak by China in late 2019 and early 2020,<sup>169</sup> and the subsequent global disinformation campaign that both China and Russia

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<sup>166</sup> For instance, the fall of the USSR and the 2011 ‘Arab Spring’ caught most analysts by surprise.

<sup>167</sup> Michael Forsythe, “Q. and A.: Minxin Pei on the Future of Communist Rule in China,” *The New York Times*, last updated 29 February 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/01/world/asia/china-pei-minxin-communist-party.html>.

<sup>168</sup> H. R. McMaster, “How China Sees the World, and how we should see China,” *The Atlantic*, May 2020 Issue, last accessed 27 April 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/05/mcmaster-china-strategy/609088/>.

<sup>169</sup> Laurie Garrett, “How China’s Incompetence Endangered the World,” *Foreign Policy*, last updated 15 February 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/02/15/coronavirus-xi-jinping-chinas-incompetence-endangered-the-world/>; Julia Belluz, “China hid the severity of its coronavirus outbreak and muzzled whistleblowers — because it can,” *VOX*, last updated 10 February 2020, <https://www.vox.com/2020/2/10/21124881/coronavirus-outbreak-china-li-wenliang-world-health-organization>.

have launched have been widely reported in international news.<sup>170</sup> Some have argued that the COVID-19 pandemic may prove to be the ‘Chernobyl moment’<sup>171</sup> that could signal the end of these regimes, as a result of the public fury at the deaths caused by their incompetence and abuses.<sup>172</sup>

Russian and Chinese IW campaigns against NATO, though their approaches and strategic goals diverge in some ways, present a threat that cannot be tolerated by NATO’s member states. The status quo of Russian disruption and Chinese manipulation must be better understood so that a coherent, united response from the Alliance can deter, defend and fight back in the information domain. This is an opportunity to win without fighting; the alternative is to lose without adapting.

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<sup>170</sup> Simon Van Dorpe, Mark Scott and Laurens Cerulus, “China put pressure on EU to soften coronavirus disinformation report,” *Politico*, last updated 25 April 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/25/china-put-pressure-on-eu-to-soften-coronavirus-disinformation-report-207797>; Betsy Woodruff Swan, “State report: Russian, Chinese and Iranian disinformation narratives echo one another,” *Politico*, last updated 21 April 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/21/russia-china-iran-disinformation-coronavirus-state-department-193107>.

<sup>171</sup> Amanda Connolly, “Scheer, MacKay, O’Toole add names to open letter condemning China’s coronavirus response” *Global News*, last updated 16 April 2020, <https://globalnews.ca/news/6826157/china-coronavirus-coverup-letter-mps/>.

<sup>172</sup> Huileng Tan, “China’s Xi faces his ‘greatest political challenge’ with coronavirus outbreak, says analyst,” *CNBC*, last updated 29 January 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/01/29/coronavirus-chinas-xi-is-facing-his-greatest-political-challenge.html>.

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