

UNDERSTANDING AND COUNTERING RUSSIA'S INFORMATION WARFARE

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Abstract

In 2016, the world was shocked to hear that Russia meddled in American politics. The media raised fears of a new kind of information war. But those who have previously observed Russia's behavior know that its use of information as a weapon is not new. Russia has been conducting information operations in Ukraine since the Euromaidan protests. The roots of these operations reach back to the Soviet times. However, the Kremlin has recently adapted and expanded them for contemporary use. Nowadays, Russia spreads misinformation using a large number of tools to various audiences: domestic (in Russia), Russian speakers in Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries, and international. In some cases, Russia's goals are to advance its geopolitical agenda. In other cases, it aims to undermine the liberal order, subvert democracy and polarize Western societies.

This research paper explains the concept of Russia's information warfare, identifies the main narratives and tools used by Russia's information operations in Ukraine and discusses information war within the broader concept of hybrid war. It then looks at how Ukraine responded to Russia's activities through a number of government and non-government initiatives. The paper also discusses the challenges Russia's information poses for the international community and provides a list of feasible recommendations that could help Western countries counter this form of warfare.

Introduction

In 2016, the world was shocked to hear that Russia meddled in American politics. The media raised fears of a new kind of information war. But those who have previously observed Russia's behavior know that its use of information as a weapon is not new. Russia has been conducting information operations in Ukraine since the Euromaidan protests. The roots of these operations reach back to the Soviet times. However, the Kremlin has recently adapted and expanded them for contemporary use. Nowadays, Russia spreads misinformation using a large number of tools to various audiences: domestic (in Russia), Russian speakers in Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries, and international. In some cases, Russia's goals are to advance its geopolitical agenda. In other cases, it aims to undermine the liberal order, subvert democracy and polarize Western societies.

What is Russia's Information War?

Using information as a weapon is not a new concept in Russia. Russia has inherited a long tradition of information warfare from the Soviet Union. Polish analyst Jolanta Darczewska (2014) traced Russian information warfare theory to *spetspropaganda* (special propaganda) which was first taught as a subject in 1942 at the Russian Military Institute of Foreign Languages. However, Edward Lucas and Peter Pomerantsev (2016) pointed out that the roots of *spetspropaganda* extend back to Marxist-Leninist ideology. *Agitprop*, shortened for *agitatsiya* and *propaganda*, was used after the Russian Revolution of 1917. *Agitatsiya* is a form of pep talk that affects people's consciousness and mood with the goal to encourage them to take certain political actions. *Propaganda* is information that is highly selective and deceptive that is used with the goal to persuade the audience and to evoke an emotional rather than a rational response.

During the Cold War, Russia frequently used propaganda and *dezinformatsiya* against the West. *Dezinformatsiya* (disinformation) is the dissemination of deliberately fabricated, incomplete and false information, sometimes combined with elements of truth, to misinform and mislead a target audience. One of the first and most notable examples of what is now known as “fake news” is the Soviet story alleging that the US military created the AIDS virus and released it as a weapon. In 1983, *Patriot*, a pro-Soviet newspaper in India, printed an article with the headline “*AIDS May Invade India: Mystery Disease Caused by US Experiments.*” The article was allegedly based on a letter to the editor from an anonymous US scientist (Dhunjishah 2017). The story received more attention in 1985, when the Soviet weekly *Literaturnaya Gazeta* quoted the article from *Patriot*. By the end of 1985, similar articles were published in 13 countries; by 1986 it reached 50, including many in the West. By July 1987, it had been published over 40 times in the official Soviet press and was reprinted or rebroadcast in 80 countries in over 30 different languages. At that time, it took over two years for the false story to “go viral.” Nowadays, however, it can sometimes take just hours.

The Soviet government has also used “reflexive control” to achieve its goals. This is a form of warfare in which an attack does not destroy the enemy from the outside but leads him to self-destruct through disorganization and disorientation. Practitioners of “reflexive control” seek to find a weak link in the opponent’s “filter” - the concepts, knowledge, ideas and experience that are the basis of its decision-making – and to emphasize and exploit it (Dhunjishah 2017). Furthermore, “active measures” were always part of the KGB’s arsenal of weapons and can be particularly effective now because of the accessibility and reach of modern media. Roy Godson (2017), an Emeritus Professor at Georgetown University and former CIA operative, writes that the term came into use in the 1950s to describe overt and covert techniques for influencing

events and behavior in foreign countries, as well as government action. “Active measures” are used to undermine confidence in foreign leaders and institutions, disrupt relations between nations, and discredit or weaken governmental and non-governmental opponents. According to Cull et al. (2017), “Active Measures may be conducted overtly through officially-sponsored foreign propaganda channels, diplomatic relations, and cultural diplomacy.” As the U.S. State Department wrote back in 1981, it can also be done covertly “through outright and partial forgery of documents, the use of rumours, insinuation, and altered facts, and lies” (Salvo and Andell 2017). The aim is to get all of these elements working in tandem so that they build the illusion of overwhelming evidence behind a given story (Cull et al. 2017).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the old propaganda machine did not disappear. When Putin became president, rebuilding information warfare capabilities received a significant boost. Furthermore, information warfare became a priority as Russia began to increasingly describe itself as a victim of Western soft power and thus in needs to protect itself. In 2012, Putin described Western soft power as “a matrix of tools and methods to reach foreign policy goals without the use of arms but by exerting information and other levels of influence (Putin 2012).” In 2016, the *Doctrine of Information Security of the Russian Federation* articulated the need to protect Russia from a number of foreign countries that are building up their information technology capacities in pursuing military purposes (Doctrine 2016). Russia described itself as a country under attack. The Internet was recognized as a hostile environment. The Doctrine stated that Russia will “maintain a balance between the need for the free flow of information and necessary restrictions to ensure national security.” It meant that the new doctrine may justify restrictions on the freedom of the information sphere of Russians by invoking threats to national security.

Darczewska (2014) noted that *spetspropaganda* was removed from the curriculum at the Russian Military Institute of Foreign Languages in the 1990s but reintroduced after the institute was reorganised in 2000.¹ According to Lucas and Pomerantsev (2016), through these elements with new names but old methods, Russia has continued to deploy fake stories which were created and disseminated with the goal to reinforce the Kremlin's agenda. Even though the methods and the tools relied upon by Russia are similar to those used during the Soviet period, the main messages of the propaganda have changed. They are often tailored to target specific audiences, either internal (inside Russia) or external (the post-Soviet space and the rest of the world) (Babak et al. 2017).

Controlling the information space and influencing an audience inside Russia helps the Kremlin ensure domestic approval of its actions abroad. Putin used the Russian media to great effect in presenting the historical and emotional arguments about why Crimea belongs to Russia in his speech on March 18, 2014. He stated that based on shared history, in the hearts and minds of people, Crimea has always been a part of Russia. Putin used places such as Khersones, the graves of Russian soldiers who fought to bring Crimea back to the Russian Empire and Sevastopol as symbols of Russian military glory (Address 2014). As a result, Russians overwhelmingly supported Putin's attempt to unite Crimea and Russia. According to Levada Centre polling, 87 percent of Russians support the annexation of Crimea (Gudkov 2015, Nardelli et al. 2015).

In the post-Soviet space, the Kremlin actively promotes a message of unifying the "Russian world." The information operations play on historical trauma and nostalgic memories

¹ The institute is now known as the Military Information and Foreign Languages Department of the Military University of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation.

of the greatness of the Soviet era with the goal to increase a sense of grievance of the Russian-speaking population in their country of residence (Lucas and Pomerantsev 2016). For the rest of the world, the Kremlin does not promote Communism anymore or praise Russia. The aim is rather to undermine the liberal order, subvert democracy and polarize Western societies. Lucas and Pomerantsev (2016) note that Russian propaganda nowadays does not have one coherent message; it supports both the far left and far right movements, in order to encourage mistrust towards the system. What Russia has been trying to do is to accelerate the already declining trust in international institutions and the mainstream media.

Why Do We Care About Russia's Information War?

Russia's information operations are much more dangerous today than before. The Cold War was a struggle between two different systems. Those systems were physically divided and their ability to impact each other was limited and could be more easily monitored. Stories issued by one side could be quickly identified and debunked, or censored, by the other. Today, due to the accessibility and the reach of modern media, Russia's information operations became more effective, intense, sophisticated and far reaching. In 2018, the information flow between countries is relatively unrestricted. Also, the way people consume information has changed. Individuals no longer tune into the same nightly news broadcasts, but rather go online, to social media platforms, or to opinion shows instead of news show (Polyakova 2017).

Moreover, there are many more sources for news on television and online, and since in many countries media literacy is no longer a common part of the average school curriculum, few people have critical skills to distinguish propaganda from real news. The disinformation also spreads quickly due to a highly-connected world. Polyakova (2017) writes that many people rely

on their social network on social media to get their news. She argues that once the information or disinformation is posted in such a network, it is usually shared and posted multiple times and such networks work as “disinformation amplifiers” because they spread, reconfirm, and cite a piece of information until its origins are lost. Furthermore, the international community is failing to compete with Russia’s information war. Western countries, for example, do not control media space the same way Russia does and, as a result, have no effective resistance against disinformation activities.

Information as Part of Russia’s Hybrid War

The concept “information war” has gained a lot of attention during the conflict between Ukraine and Russia which started in 2014 with the occupation of Crimea by Russian military forces. Ukraine’s sovereignty was violated using conventional warfare tools, but also hybrid or non-linear ones which included information operations. To better understand the meaning of information war, there is a need to discuss the broader concept of hybrid war.

Since the beginning of the Ukrainian conflict, the term “hybrid warfare” has been widely used in the international security debate. But despite the term’s recent popularity, the idea of using unconventional tools and actors in conflicts is not novel. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg (2015) recently said that “...the first hybrid warfare we know of might be the “Trojan Horse,” so we have seen it before” (Brussels Forum 2015). In order to grasp the characteristics of Russia’s hybrid war in Ukraine, it is necessary to understand properly the theoretical development of the idea. Several concepts have been used in the past to describe the new nature and dynamic of warfare: indirect, asymmetric, hybrid, etc. This section will highlight the major trends pertaining to hybrid warfare theories to help us better understand the war in Ukraine.

In his work *On War* the famous Prussian political thinker Carl von Clausewitz (1976) wrote that “war is merely continuation of policy by other means.” Clausewitz clearly identified that war is just a tool, not an objective, when he said that “War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will.” Moreover, he makes a clear distinction between the aims of various forms of warfare. One objective is to beat the enemy by defeating its army and prevail over its territory. This characterizes direct warfare since the enemy is unable to respond to the attacker’s actions. The objective of another type of war is to achieve the wanted political goals by exhausting the enemy’s forces, but without aiming for a military victory or conquest of territory. This describes indirect warfare.

Friedrich Engels has also contributed to the theory of asymmetric warfare in his book *Defeat of the Piedmontese* (Rácz 2015). Engels disapproved that the Piedmontese uprising insurgents were fighting the Austrian army in a direct, regular way and were defeated. He believed that “a nation that wants to conquer its independence cannot restrict itself to the ordinary method of warfare” and needs to resort to mass uprising and revolutionary guerrilla warfare for success. This idea was later developed by Vladimir Lenin, who backed the idea of an armed coup by the working class as necessary to gain power (Rácz 2015). Lenin also supported the use of propaganda. He believed that properly conducted propaganda can inform and mobilize his own forces and destroy the morale of enemy troops (Rácz 2015).

The term hybrid warfare first emerged during the first decade of the 21st century. One of the earliest academic use of the term was by Nemeth (2002), who defined hybrid warfare as “the contemporary form of guerrilla warfare” that “employs both modern technology and modern mobilization methods.” Nemeth noted that the war in Chechnya was hybrid as it combined elements of regular and irregular warfare in a highly flexible and efficient way. The Chechens

were able to successfully combine parts of Soviet and Western military doctrines with guerilla tactics and the use of technology (Nemeth 2002). Nemeth claimed that hybrid wars will become more and more common and that the Chechen insurgency is a model for hybrid warfare.

McCuen (2008) further developed hybrid war theory by analyzing the wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq. He wrote that contemporary hybrid wars are fought on three fronts. The first is the conventional battleground; the second is the population of the attacked country; the third includes the home population and the international community. Additionally, McCuen argues that in order to be successful hybrid war requires a synchronous win on all the fronts. A failure in any of the three may lead to a failure in the war.

Hoffman (2007) contributed to the development of hybrid war theory by analyzing the 2006 war in Lebanon. He was particularly interested in how and why Hezbollah was able to defeat a well-equipped and highly trained Israeli Defence Forces. Hoffman described the war carried on by Hezbollah as a hybrid war and defined hybrid threat as any "...adversary that simultaneously and adaptively employs a fused mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism, and criminal behaviors in a battle space to obtain their political objectives (Hoffman 2009)."

Russian military thinkers have also studied hybrid war. Gareev (1995) argued that new technologies will have a significant impact on conventional weapons and will lead to the development of totally new forms of weapons. He predicted the wide use of electronic warfare that will have the ability to disrupt enemies' communication and radar systems, and command and control.

In February 2013, over a year before the Ukraine conflict, the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian armed forces, Valery Gerasimov discussed the "conflict of new type" in an article in

a leading Russian military journal (Gerasimov 2013, Gerasimov 2016). Using the Arab Spring as an example, Gerasimov laid out a framework for new generation warfare which included the use of formally non-military measures (political, economic, diplomatic and information/propaganda) and covert military action. He argued that the rules of wars have changed and non-military measures have a much larger and effective role to play in achieving political and strategic goals. In addition, Gerasimov highlighted the importance of covert military measures that include the use of paramilitary and insurgent units. He stressed that the war should also penetrate the information space whenever a real-time coordination of the means and tools used is achievable. He advocated the destruction of the enemies' critical infrastructure by robotized weapons such as drones and the use of the regular military forces only at the later stages of the war.

After the outbreak of conflict in Ukraine, Gerasimov's analysis was interpreted as a template for the Russian conduct in Crimea and subsequently in the Donbas. The same year two Russian military scholars, Sergei Chekinov and Sergei Bogdanov (2013), further elaborated on the concept introduced by Gerasimov. They provided a more comprehensive picture of the concept of "new generation war." The authors called the Gulf War "the first war of a new age" and used it as the main example in their argument about this type of warfare. Chekinov and Bogdanov agreed with Gerasimov that asymmetric activities, including information, political and technological ones, are important when dealing with the enemy's military superiority. They also discussed in greater detail than Gerasimov the need to use non-military methods before and during the armed conflict.

One of the most important steps in the theoretical development of the hybrid warfare concept was when NATO decided to adopt the term. NATO openly stated that hybrid war is a new type of warfare in a video posted on the NATO Review website (Hybrid War 2014). The

term was also widely used during the NATO Wales Summit the following September.

Furthermore, the NATO Wales Summit declaration described hybrid warfare as "...a wide range of overt and covert military, paramilitary, and civilian measures employed in a highly integrated design (NATO 2014)."

"Hybrid" was most commonly used when describing Russia's military actions in Ukraine. The fact that NATO adopted the term significantly contributed to its use. When we look at earlier definitions, however, not all adequately describe Russia's warfare in Ukraine. The most important difference is that the term hybrid warfare started primarily with non-state actors fighting states, as we saw in Chechnya, Iraq and Lebanon. Russia's actions in Ukraine is different in that Russia is a state that holds international recognition, is a signatory of international conventions, and has diplomatic ties with many countries. Russia's capabilities and power exceed those of the non-state actors. The hybrid warfare methods that Russia applied in Ukraine are of a completely different nature. Therefore, some scholars including Kofman and Rojansky (2015) and Galeotti (2015a) argued that Russia's methods fall into a domain not yet defined and seriously analyzed by scholars.

Russia's Information War in Action: Ukraine

Agents of Political Influence

Russia's information operations in Ukraine began long before Euromaidan and the conflict in Crimea. However, as Sazonov, Müür and Kopõtin (2017) wrote at that time the operations "were not as massive, aggressive, influential and visible as they are now." They were mainly conducted by pro-Russian political parties and politicians and contributed significantly to disseminating information that influenced the policies of the Ukrainian government and promoted and advanced Russia's goals in Ukraine.

One of the most effective elements of Russia's early information warfare in Ukraine was the establishment of a legal political lobby in the Parliament and the executive branch. This was done before the actual conflict escalated in 2014. The main goal of the lobby was to promote and support pro-Russian political parties and politicians in various jurisdictions during elections. It was not difficult to establish such a lobby since the two countries have had close economic ties and many Ukrainian and Russian companies have had shared economic interests since the Soviet times.

The most active lobbyists were business entities in the energy sector such as *Gazprom* (natural gas importer), *VS Energy* (energy distributor), and *Lukoil* and *TNK* (oil importers). Some of the Russian insiders from these lobby groups gained legitimacy within the government or government-owned companies. For example, in July 2004, in a deal signed by former Ukrainian President Kuchma and his counterpart Russian President Putin, *RosUkrEnergo*, a Ukrainian-Russian natural gas supplier, was created. The Ukrainian interest in *RosUkrEnergo* was represented by Dmytro Firtash, a businessman who funneled money into the campaigns of pro-Russia politicians in Ukraine, including Yanukovich (Myers and Kramer 2016). The same year

Viktor Medvedchuk, a politician with extraordinarily close ties to senior Russian leaders and then the Chief of the Presidential Administration of Ukraine, founded the non-governmental organization “*Russian Club*.” The organization hired several Russian political technologists with close links to Putin to secure Yanukovych’s victory over his main rival, pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko (Kuzio 2004). Even after Yushchenko’s victory in the 2004 presidential elections the presence of individuals that represented Russia’s economic interests did not decrease. For example, in 2007 a vice president of Russian steel giant Evraz, Valeriy Khoroshkovskiy, became Head of the State Customs Service of Ukraine and later the Head of the Security Service of Ukraine.

During the presidency of Yanukovych from 2010 to 2014, the number of Russian insiders aimed to damage Ukraine’s national security and defence increased. Russia began to leverage the existing networks of pro-Russian members of regional and municipal councils in the areas close to the Russian border. These networks had been forming in Ukraine for over a decade. One example of the network is a 2004 Congress, at the height of the Orange Revolution, attended by pro-Russian governors of regional councils (Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kharkiv), Yanukovych, the representatives from the Russian Embassy and the former Mayor of Moscow Yury Luzhkov. The Congress discussed the idea of forming a South-East Ukrainian Autonomous Republic. If this idea were implemented, nine regions would have been granted the status of autonomous republics within Ukraine.

When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014, the members of such networks were organizing and promoting separatist movements. Oleksandr Yefremov, former governor of Luhansk, was helping to create the Luhansk People's Republic (LNR). Some pro-Russian politicians have also started to support minority groups that claimed to have a separate identity. In Zakarpattia - a

multi-ethnic region lying on Ukraine's western border with Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania - leaders of a Rusyn community have for decades attempted to separate their Rusyn nationality from the Ukrainians. In 2014 when the world focused on the Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, they became a target of Russian propaganda aimed at dividing Ukrainian society (Kozloff 2014, Long 2015).

Another area of Russia's influence on the politics of Ukraine was close relations between Ukrainian and Russian left and center-left parties. Since Ukraine's independence in 1991, the Socialist Party of Ukraine and the Communist Party of Ukraine were firmly opposed to Ukraine's association with the European Union and strong supporters of Ukraine's reintegration with Russia in the post-Soviet space (Haran and Belmega 2010). For example, both parties have been showing nostalgia for the Soviet Union by actively supporting Ukraine's membership and active participation in the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Customs Union and the Eurasian Economic Community of the Russian Federation, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. A number of international agreements that support Russia's interests have been ratified by the Parliament of Ukraine thanks to support of deputies from the Socialist Party and the Communist Party of Ukraine. In 2004, both parties voted to ratify an Agreement on the Formation of the Common Economic Space between Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. In 2010, they also voted to ratify an Agreement to extend the lease for the deployment of Russia's Black Sea Fleet in Crimea until 2042 (Harding 2010).

A number of political parties, including Yanukovich's *Party of Regions*, *the Russian Bloc*, and *the Russian Unity Party*, were also promoting Russia's interests in Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv and Crimea. During the winter of 2014, the embattled President Yanukovich together with the regional leaders launched an "Anti-Maidan" in Eastern and Southern Ukraine as a

response to the Euromaidan protests. This was a top-down initiative with protesters sometimes receiving remuneration for their participation (Andreyev 2014). Furthermore, in February 2014, Sergei Aksyonov, the leader of the Russian Unity Party, which previously had only three seats in the regional legislature, was appointed Prime Minister of Crimea by a Crimean parliament under Russian military occupation (Shuster 2014). Since the start of the conflict with Russia, the political influence of pro-Russian lobby groups has decreased. This is due to mutual trade and economic sanctions, an important flight to Russia of pro-Russian politicians from Ukraine and also, most importantly, the occupation of Ukrainian territories by the Russian military.

Diplomatic Cover of Information Operations

Since early 2014, Russia has continuously used its diplomats as a part of information operations against Ukraine. In order to cover Russia's actions, diplomats used techniques of denials, misinformation, and shifting responsibility, among many others. From the start of Russian aggression in Ukraine, Russian diplomats have denied their country's involvement in the conflict. In January 2015, Sergei Lavrov, Foreign Minister of Russia, denied the presence of Russian troops in Ukraine by stating, "I say every time: if you allege this so confidently, present the facts. But nobody can present the facts or doesn't want to. So before demanding from us that we stop doing something, please present proof that we have done it (Snegovaya 2015)." Snegovaya pointed out that such statement follows the KGB toolkit that included the denial of direct involvement and in case the truth comes out insisting that the opponent was at fault. She also noted that the denial of Russia's presence in Ukraine confuses the opponent - in this case, Ukraine and Western countries - and puts them in the position where they need to guess Russia's actual goals. Also, Russian diplomats have denied that their country violated international law and spoke against the necessity to use any legal mechanisms. Acknowledging Russia's

involvement in Ukraine from the start might have forced the international community to respond with more severe punishment. Consequently, the denial gave Russia an advantage over its opponents.

Russian diplomats used a wide variety of distorted information at the multilateral and bilateral international meetings with the goal to present the events in Ukraine in a light favourable to Russia and to accuse the Ukrainian government of human rights violations (e.g., genocide against the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine). They presented the aggression as an internal conflict in Ukrainian society or a civil war. By shifting responsibility to Ukraine, the diplomats attempted to show Russia as a “peacekeeper” and not a party in the conflict. During the tragedy with the Malaysian airplane MH 17, Russian diplomats resorted to shifting all the responsibility from the country they represent to Ukraine in order to cover Russia’s actions.

Russia’s Information Operations in Ukraine

At the end of 2013, Russia launched information operations to discredit Ukraine and the West. These operations deliberately spread false or exaggerated information. Russia’s main goals were to provoke a split in Ukrainian society, to justify the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, to deny involvement in the war in Eastern Ukraine and perhaps to increase Putin’s popularity ratings among Russians.

Russia’s information operations against Ukraine played an influential part during the annexation of Crimea and as well as the beginning of armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine in 2014. The execution of the operations was not difficult due to low quality and limited independence of journalism in Ukraine. Kofman and Rojansky (2015) pointed out that after its independence, Ukraine did not contest the information space in Russian language programming and allowed Russian media to dominate it. Furthermore, the majority of Ukraine’s mainstream media –

national periodicals, information agencies, and TV channels – have remained under the control of oligarchs and often pro-Russian politicians (Gryvniak 2017).

Dmytro Firtash, a businessman who funneled money into the campaigns of pro-Russia politicians in Ukraine and Serhiy Lyovochkin, a former head of Yanukovich's presidential administration, control Inter, one of the most-watched TV channels in Ukraine. Rinat Akhmetov, Ukraine's richest oligarch and a close friend of ex-president Yanukovich, owns a group of national and regional media, including *TRK Ukrayina (Ukraine) TV Channel*, a few smaller TV stations, the national daily *Segodnya (Today)*, and several local media outlets. During the presidency of Yanukovich, some oligarchs used the channels for their personal gains and to promote Russia's interests in Ukraine. Nevertheless, before 2013 Russian information operations were not as visible, significant and influential. From the start of the conflict in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, they were distributed via a larger number of channels including traditional radio and television broadcasting, satellite television, the Internet and social media.

Russia's annexation of Crimea was achieved with active media and information operations. The primary audiences of these operations were the general public in Russia and the Crimean population. During the Euromaidan protests that began in November 2013, Russia focused on gaining control of the press at home. It has been controlling and silencing independent media outlets for years. In December 2014, Putin ordered to restructure the state-owned but historically independent *RIA Novosti* and merge it with *RT*. The Kremlin installed as editor in chief Dmitry Kiselyov, a TV anchor famous for saying gay people's hearts should be incinerated and that Russia can turn the US into "radioactive ash." A tighter grip on the media allowed Russia to shape views of the events in Ukraine. It is important to note that most of Eastern Ukraine and Crimea watched Russian television. The Russian media covered the events in Kyiv for the

Russian public warning them of the dangers of closer ties with the European Union. However, when the government of Yanukovich collapsed in 2014, the rhetoric of the Russian media on the events in Ukraine became more severe. According to Kofman et al. (2017), during the operation to annex Crimea Russia's information campaign focused on three goals: discrediting the new government in Ukraine, emphasizing the grave danger to Russians in Ukraine, and ensuring the display of broad support for Crimea's "return home" to the safety of Russia.

In Donbas, Russia conducted the same information operations it earlier carried out in Crimea. However, more extreme measures were also used to counter the pro-Ukrainian information sphere. In order to stop the circulation of alternative news about the occupied territories, journalists, activists, and bloggers critical of the rebels or suspected of pro-Ukraine loyalty were either arrested or kidnapped or went missing (Melchior 2014, Eristavi 2017). Later on, the authorities in the Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) and Donetsk People's Republic (DNR), with the help of Russia, started a complete change of the information and media space. They turned it into a so-called "information ghetto" in which it was nearly impossible to get true coverage of events or even hear or see an alternative perspective on pressing issues. Since 2014, all national Ukrainian TV and radio channels have been banned in LNR, DNR and Crimea. Sazonov et al. (2017) wrote that it made it very difficult for people that live in those regions to get information from any sources other than the separatists' or Russian channels. At the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting organized by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2016, the First Deputy Minister of Information Policy of Ukraine Emine Dzhaparova reported that occupying "authorities" disabled Ukrainian TV channels and blocked access to more than 113 Ukrainian news websites in Eastern Ukraine and 60 in Crimea (MIP 2016).

Main Narratives of Russia's Information Operations

Russian information operations have successfully disseminated many anti-Ukrainian and anti-Western narratives since 2013. By playing on those destructive narratives, Russia was able to considerably disorganize Ukrainian society in the early stages of aggression. Sazonov et al. (2017) pointed out that in its information operations Russia used Soviet history narratives, particularly around the Second World War and the tropes of Stepan Bandera, Nazism, and Fascism (Yuhas 2014). The Soviet period was presented as a “glorious” time praising Joseph Stalin whose popularity among Russians has significantly increased since Vladimir Putin became President (Sazonov et al. 2017).

One of the first narratives related to Crimea was the statement that Russia was not involved. From the start of the aggression, Russia has repeatedly denied a military presence in the conflict, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. In February 2014, seemingly professional soldiers in Russia-style combat uniforms, with Russian weapons in trucks with Russian license plates but without identifying insignia, appeared in Crimea. Ukrainians called them “little green men.” When Putin was asked about these soldiers during a press conference on March 4, 2014, he denied that they were Russian, calling them “local self-defence units (President of Russia 2014)”. In 2015, two Russian military counterintelligence officers, Aleksandr Aleksandrov and Yevgenyi Yerofeyev, were caught in Eastern Ukraine. Aleksandrov admitted he was a Russian soldier who was sent to Eastern Ukraine on active duty with Russian special forces to help separatists fighting Kyiv. The Kremlin, however, described the two men as former Russian soldiers who left the military before they were captured (Tsvetkova 2015). Moreover, Russia claimed that it was not a party to the Minsk Agreements and that these agreements only concerned two sides that were part of the conflict. Russia also claimed that its

responsibility to influence the parties of the conflict was exactly the same as France or Germany's responsibility to influence Kyiv.

Zavadski (2014) mentioned another narrative used by Russia against the Ukrainian state and army, the Euromaidan protesters, and the West. It was related to Nazism and Fascism. The Ukrainian army and its volunteer units were compared to Einsatzgruppen, paramilitary death squads of Nazi Germany that were responsible for mass killings of Jews, primarily by shooting, during the Second World War. Moreover, Ukraine was described as a puppet of Western countries and NATO. At the same time, when Western governments supported the Ukrainian government, they were accused of actively supporting Nazi sympathizers. Even though in 2013 and 2014 there were far right nationalists among the protesters, the interim government and the volunteer battalions, their role was not as significant as Russia was claiming. The Russian information operations notably exaggerated the contribution of *Pravyi Sektor*, *Azov*, *Aidar*, *Svoboda* and other radical organizations. Russian authorities then falsely convicted Maidan supporters of being *Pravyi Sektor* "terrorists," the most prominent case being that of Crimean filmmaker Oleg Sentsov (Coynash 2017).

Another narrative frequently used by Russian propaganda was about the conditions of the Ukrainian armed forces. For instance, the Russian media outlet *Komsomolskaya Pravda* reported that because of inhumane conditions in the army, the Ukrainian soldiers announced a hunger strike, which was a fabrication (V Ukrainskoy 2014). Sazonov et al. (2017) wrote that the Russian media outlets depicted the Ukrainian army as the one ruled by violence, chaos, hunger, and illnesses and Ukrainian soldiers as criminals, drug addicts, and alcoholics who tortured and killed civilians especially women, children and the elderly. In addition, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*

published stories about a significant number of Ukrainian soldiers deserting from the Ukrainian army to the Russian one (Akimova 2015). None of these stories were true.

There were also narratives related to Crimea. “Crimea is better off in Russia than in Ukraine” was frequently mentioned by Russia. For Putin, the annexation of Crimea is of symbolic importance. Gessen (2014) wrote that most Russians believe the Crimea is theirs and Putin has acted on his belief. By bringing the peninsula back to Russia, Putin posed himself as a great historical figure aimed to unite the so-called *Russkiy mir* (Russian World) and oversee Russia’s rebirth as a great power.

Russia also created a narrative about the humanitarian catastrophe in the Donbas region. This narrative served as a cover for the delivery of Russian weapons to the region under the pretense of delivering humanitarian aid. In August 2014, the Foreign Ministry of Russia reported that it was going to organize a humanitarian mission to Ukraine. By 2016, over 50 convoys, including 100 trucks each, entered Ukraine delivering humanitarian aid that was reportedly weapons for illegal military troops and Russia soldiers (Lucas and Pomerantsev 2016).

One of the most confusing narratives of Russia’s information operations was related to the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 on July 17, 2014. When the plane was shot down in Eastern Ukraine, the first reports indicated that it was done by Russian-backed separatists using a Russian-made anti-aircraft missile launcher near the town of Torez. The separatist leader, Igor Girkin, wrote on social media that his group had downed a plane near Torez (Ukraine Separatist 2014). When the reports about a missing civilian plane started to appear, Girkin deleted his post. In the coming weeks, Russian media disseminated a number of competing narratives about the crash. First, RT reported that the plane was downed by the Ukrainian Army (Ukrainian Buk 2014). Later, RT cited a report claiming that it was an Israeli missile fired from a Ukrainian

aircraft (Israeli-Made 2015). Another claim was that the Ukrainian military shot the plane by mistake assuming that it was Putin’s aircraft (Istochnik 2014).

Many other narratives generated by Russian propaganda penetrated the media when the conflict in Ukraine began. Some of the most common ones are presented in the table below.

Main Narratives of Russia’s Information Operations During the Conflict In Ukraine

Euromaidan-specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The West organized Euromaidan • Most Euromaidan protesters are violent Russophobes and ultra-nationalists • The new government of Ukraine is illegitimate; Ukraine needs a new government • Signing the association agreement would not benefit Ukraine; the European Union does not need Ukraine • Hundreds of thousands of Russian Ukrainians fled from Ukraine to Russia because they fear for their life
Crimea-specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Crimean Peninsula historically belonged to Russia • The transfer of Crimea to Russia by Khrushchev in 1954 was a mistake • All Russian-speaking Crimeans have been oppressed by the Ukrainian government for years • All Russian-speaking Crimeans are under threat from the Ukrainian ultra-nationalists • “Little green men” are not part of the Russian Armed Forces • The referendum in Crimea was an initiative of the Crimean people, not Russia • Crimea is better off in Russia than in Ukraine
Donbas-specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia is not involved in the events in Donbas • Ukraine violates the Minsk Agreements • A Ukrainian fighter jet was trying to shoot down Putin’s plane when it mistakenly hit MH17 in the same airspace. • The humanitarian catastrophe in Donbas prompts Russia to deliver aid to the region
Narratives targeting Ukraine as a state	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukraine is a failed state • Ukraine is a country of chaos, beggars, and radicals • Ukraine cannot survive without Russian subsidies and protection
Narratives targeting the Government of Ukraine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Ukrainian government is a puppet of the United States and other foreign powers • Ukrainian government officials are ultra-nationalists. • The Ukrainian government supports Nazi sympathizers
Narratives targeting the Ukrainian Army	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukrainian soldiers are criminals, drug addicts, and alcoholics • The Ukrainian Army is like Einsatzgruppen, an execution squad of Nazi Germany • Ukrainian soldiers torture and kill civilians, especially women, children and the elderly
Narratives targeting Western countries and NATO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NATO fights in Ukraine • The West is an enemy that wants to destroy Russia • The West does not need Ukraine
Russia-specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia is the center of the Slavic/Orthodox world • Russia is responsible for protecting the Russian diaspora and the so-called <i>Russkiy mir</i> (Russian World) everywhere • The Soviet era was glorious • Western countries are afraid of Russia’s rising power • Russia is a rescuer, a liberator, and a peacekeeper.

Several mistakes made by Ukraine's political leadership after the Euromaidan that significantly contributed to the success of Russia's narratives. Kofman et al. (2017) wrote that the first mistake happened when the Verkhovna Rada, the Ukrainian Parliament, pursued its nationalist agenda. On February 23, 2014, it repealed the law that had given the Russian language official status and protection. The vote was strongly criticized by the former Foreign Minister of Poland and a supporter of the Euromaidan who said that the new government should instead "signal very eloquently to the ethnic minorities in Ukraine that they are welcome in Ukraine; that they are going to be part of the new Ukraine (Kofman et al. 2017)." Even though the change to the law was not signed, the legislative process in the Verkhovna Rada caused a lot of damage and played favourably into the Russian narratives. The Russian speakers in Ukraine saw it as the indication of an anti-Russian agenda (Kofman et al. 2017).

The second error, as Kofman et al. (2017) mentioned, had happened when Ihor Mosiychuk, a member of the Radical Party of Ukraine, publicly threatened to bring paramilitary fighters to Crimea. Russian media used his statement to create a narrative that Ukrainian government officials are ultra-nationalists those Russian speakers that live in Crimea are in danger. While Mosiychuk did not, per se, speak for the government, the inability of the government to control post-Euromaidan parties confirmed the need for Russian help in Crimea (Kofman et al. 2017).

Main Tools of Information Operations

Russia has used a wide range of media channels to conduct its information operations at home, in Ukraine and globally. Among them are public and private TV channels in Russia, pro-Russian TV channels in Ukraine, and social media. The Russian public and private TV channels under Russian political control played an important role in disseminating pro-Kremlin messages in Ukraine. Among them were *Perviy Kanal (Channel One)*, *Rossiya 1 (Russia 1)*, *Rossiya 24*

(*Russia 24*), *NTV*, *Channel 5*, *LifeNews*, *TNT*, and *Zvezda (Star)* (Crisis 2018). Since the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas, however, the reach of Russian channels in Ukraine has decreased dramatically. According to a 2015 study by Internews, only 8 percent of Ukrainians watched Russian TV channels, down from 27 percent in 2014 (Ukraïntsi 2015). Most of these channels are currently banned on Ukrainian cable television but can still be viewed via the Internet or by satellite. Russia's information war also generated new media outlets such as *Novosti Donetskoy Narodnoy Respubliki (News of Donetsk People's Republic)* and *Novorossiya* in the occupied territories in Eastern Ukraine. These channels spread disinformation about Ukraine and its armed forces (Bittner 2016, Losh 2017).

Russian spread disinformation far beyond Ukraine. It also targeted the Russian-speaking population in the former Soviet states (e.g., Latvia). Media outlets such as *RT* and *Sputnik International* are the most known globally. Chivvis (2017) showed that these media outlets do not use the same established journalistic practices the West does regarding truth and factual evidence. Western social networks such as *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *YouTube* and Russian services such as *LiveJournal*, *Odnoklassniki (Classmates)* and *VKontakte (InContact)* have played a considerable role in the Kremlin's dissemination of disinformation. Russian disinformation had a strong presence on *Odnoklassniki* and *VKontakte*. On these networks, propaganda spreads through various pro-Russian thematic groups and communities with the help of professional Internet trolls. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reported that there were many fake accounts on *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *LiveJournal*, and *VKontakte* maintained by Russian propagandists (Volchek and Sindelar 2015). It was also reported that Russia employed a number of professional Internet trolls, bots and ran fake news farms (Volchek and Sindelar 2015). Chen (2015) wrote about a building in St. Petersburg that is home to the Internet Research Agency, a Russian troll factory.

Commented [DA1]: Your source is not from 2014, but 2015, and is all about the huge decrease. As for how to use a Ukrainian source, see the entry in the bibliography.

People that work there are paid to troll new websites with pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian comments. A former paid Russian Internet troll disclosed that the trolls are on duty 24 hours a day, in 12-hour shifts, and each has a daily quota of 135 posted comments of at least 200 characters (Volchek and Sindelar 2015).

Yandex, the fourth largest online search tool in the world, was also used by the Kremlin in its information operations. A number of reports alleged that the Russian special and intelligence services use *Yandex* to “manipulate the collective and individual consciousness of Ukrainian citizens” (Sukhankin 2017). This is conducted through the implementation search tools and mechanisms that aim to prioritize anti-Ukrainian and anti-Western online content to *Yandex*’s Ukrainian-based users (Sukhankin 2017).

As stated by Sazonov et al. (2017), information operations were also conducted in the “real world.” According to media experts and several officials from the Ministry of Information Policy of Ukraine, in Donbas, Russia also spread disinformation through the loudspeakers (Sazonov et al. 2017). Before the referendum in Crimea, billboards with false information were installed and printed materials were actively distributed. Russia has also involved religious institutions in their information operations. MacKay (2018) wrote that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate actively supported Russia’s actions in Ukraine and spoke publicly against the Ukrainian government. He also mentioned that based on the conclusion of the Security Services of Ukraine (SBU), in Donbas, clerics and religious buildings of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate were used by the Russian intelligence services to carry out intelligence operations against Ukraine.

Ukraine's Response to Russia's Information Operations

Government Initiatives

At the beginning of Russia's information war, the Ukrainian authorities were not sure how to react but later began to develop a response. Due to a lack of resources and structural challenges in the field of media, it was difficult to have a strong undivided position against Russia's unified message. The reason behind this is that the Ukrainian media landscape is structurally different from the Russian one. The media in Russia is loyal to the Kremlin, while Ukrainian media outlets are loyal to political clans and oligarchs including Petro Poroshenko (*Channel 5*), Ihor Kolomoisky's (*I+I*), and Davyd Zhvaniya (*TVi*). Their competing interests allowed for competition that did not exist in Russia and led to an open coverage of the events (Ukraine 2016).

In March 2014, the Ukrainian government banned Russian federal broadcasters from Ukrainian television. Several months later, it also banned some Russian films and television programs and placed travel bans on Russian journalists (Zhukov 2017). The Government of Ukraine also fought Russia's information operations by banning cable operators in Ukraine from broadcasting 77 out of 82 Russian channels, and the Internet service providers from giving access to approximately 20 websites, including the *Yandex* search engine, *Mail.ru* and the social networks *Vkontakte* and *Odnoklassniki*. The ban also extended on information technology programs and anti-virus software such as *Kaspersky* and *Doctor Web* that had been undermining information and cyber security in Ukraine (Sukhankin 2017). Furthermore, in 2017, the Ukrainian government passed the law that prohibited the import into Ukraine of any printed products that contain anti-Ukrainian content (Babak et al. 2017). However, it caused a debate among Ukrainians. The first impromptu survey conducted by *the Ukrainian Independent*

Information Agency (UNIAN) shows that 23 percent out of 15 thousand responders support the government's decision, while 65 percent oppose it (Yanchenko 2017). Another survey by *Voice of America* showed the opposite picture – 86 percent were in favor and 14 percent were against (Yanchenko 2017). The international community did not support the ban. Harlem Désir, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, has raised concerns noting that the ban may endanger free access to information online (OSCE 2018). Some concerns about the ban were also expressed by Human Right Watch, Reporters Without Borders, and The Council of Europe (Yanchenko 2017). On the one hand, the banned Russian websites, channels, software and books are tools of Russia's information operations and pose a threat to the national security of Ukraine. On the other hand, the ban places Ukraine on the list of 30 countries that control the Internet with the help of prohibitions including North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Cuba and Russia. Micek and Olukotun (2017) wrote that “blocking access to popular internet sites and services in a country interferes with people's human right to freedom of expression, which protects access to information, and the right to develop and hold an opinion. The blocking also impedes a host of other rights, including association.”

In 2014, the Government of Ukraine established the Ministry of Information, a separate ministry to combat Russian information war. The mandate of the Ministry of Information is to develop information policy that will help ensure information security in the country, to promote freedom of speech, to draft laws regarding information space, and to assist with professional development of public media and press services (About Ministry 2018). In 2015, the Ministry launched a new initiative called “*Information Troops*” to spread government-approved content on social media (Babak et al. 2017).

Non-Government Initiatives

One of the most successful responses to Russia's information war in Ukraine is *StopFake*, an online myth-busting resource overseen by teachers and students of the journalism department at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (Kramer 2017). Their principal goal is to disprove fake news and manipulations related to Ukraine. *StopFake* monitors the Russian, Ukrainian and European media in search of potentially false information. If they find a piece that turns out to be false, *StopFake* will post a refutation report on their website. Lucas and Pomerantsev (2016) wrote that *StopFake* has already analyzed, fact-checked and debunked more than 500 fake stories from the media. The resource also has a *YouTube* channel where it posts weekly video roundups of fake news in Russian. This is done with the purpose to reach Russian-speaking audiences. *StopFake* also offers training on fighting anti-democratic propaganda and disinformation, fact checking and information verification. It is important to mention that *StopFake* journalists have been fighting on the front lines against "fake news" before much of the world realized the dangers of disinformation.

Euromaidan Press is another non-government initiative. It is an English language news website that produces pro-Ukrainian content, including opinion pieces by Ukrainian government officials and academics. It was created in 2014 to disseminate news about Euromaidan, but later extended its activities with a focus on events in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. Its main goal is to combat Kremlin disinformation about Ukraine with the focus on an international audience.

The Washington-based *International Research and Exchange Board (IREX)*, a global not-for-profit organization, worked on promoting media literacy by providing courses in central and eastern Ukraine, including in conflict or near-conflict zones. *IREX* developed and delivered a "Media Literacy Curriculum" that included practical tools targeted at different types of people so

that the next time they have an emotional reaction to a piece of news, they take a step back and analyze it (Lucas and Pomerantsev 2016). Since March 2016, the organisation has trained 15,000 people in critical thinking, source evaluation and emotional manipulation. As a result, *IREX* measured a 29 percent increase in participants who double check the news they consume (Jankowicz 2017).

Were Russia's Information Operations Successful?

Were Russia's Information Operations Successful?

Snegovaya (2015) wrote that Russian information operations were effective at the early stages of combat operations because they “provided cover for rapid military actions.” However, the success of the operations varied at later stages of the conflict. Galeotti (2015) compared Russia's success in Crimea and the Donbas region. He pointed out that the element of uncertainty present in the annexation of Crimea added doubt into both Kyiv and NATO actions. This gave Russia an opportunity to assume strategic positions on the peninsula. However, it did not work the same way in the Donbas region because Russia largely overestimated the support it would receive there (Snegovaya 2015). Referendums on “independence” were organized in both regions and in both cases, the results were in favour of separatism. In Crimea, the authorities claimed, implausibly, that 97 percent of the population voted for secession from Ukraine with an 83 percent turnout (Rácz 2015). Based on these results, Crimea joined Russia. In Eastern Ukraine, however, information operations were not as effective. Although the Russia-backed separatists were able to oust the government from some regions, they were not able to control the population as well as they did in Crimea. The Kyiv International Institute of Sociology conducted a survey in Southern and Eastern regions of Ukraine in April 2014 (Opinions 2014). The survey question asked the respondents if they supported the idea that the region should split

from Ukraine and join Russia. The combined result of “rather no” and “certainly, no, I don’t” answers was 67.2 percent. Galeotti (2015) also pointed out that the political disorder in Kyiv helped the Kremlin in the Crimean operations, but during the Donbas operations the government of Ukraine was more capable of playing against Russia.

As to Russia’s domestic audience, the poll data collected by the Levada Center since the first protests in Kiev in November 2013 showed that Russians were not as aggressive on Ukraine as outsiders might think (Volkov 2014). According to the most recent polls, 64 percent of respondents believe that Russia would benefit from having good relations with Ukraine as an independent state (Volkov 2014). However, Russia’s skillful information operations persuaded them that the Euromaidan protesters in Ukraine were fascists, and that ultra-nationalist post-Euromaidan government in Kyiv oppressed Russian-speakers who needed Russia’s help. According to Levada Centre polling, 87 percent of Russians support the annexation of Crimea (Gudkov 2015, Nardelli et al. 2015). Volkov (2014) wrote that Russians were also nearly unanimous (95 – 96 percent) in denying their country’s responsibility for anything that had been happening in Ukraine including the ongoing conflict in the Donbas region, breaches of the Minsk Agreements, and the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17. They believed that the U.S should be blamed for what has happened (Volkov 2014).

How Can Western Governments Defend Against Russia's Information War?

Having looked at the main features of Russia's information war and the tools and methods Russia used in Ukraine, it is important to ask how the West can defend against Russia's information war. Designing a response to this question presents a number of challenges.

First, democracies cannot use the same tactics Russia uses. Salome Samadashvili (2015) writes that the West cannot and should not respond to Russia in kind. The Kremlin restricts the freedom of the information sphere and access to information of Russians under the rubric of threats to national security. The Kremlin also dictates themes to all Russian media. Western countries cannot resort to such restrictions and, as a result, can never be as effective as Russia in controlling the information space.

Second, it is more difficult today to control and counter Russia's narratives and win the argument against Russia than it was before. The report titled *Russian World-Views* (2017) by the Canadian Security Intelligence Services (CSIS) stated that during the Cold War, it was sufficient to win the argument in the limited information space. Today, the media and information environment is profoundly fractured and includes many different chambers with different dynamics. It is impossible to reach all the audiences within the country using the mainstream media only. As a result, it is necessary to communicate in different ways with different audiences using various tools.

Third, the Kremlin's approach is based on searching out and exploiting the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of a country. Among them are the flaws in the political system, administration, economy and society. These weaknesses are of the country's own makings and are usually difficult to fix. Furthermore, Rácz (2015) points out that many activities Russia performs under

its information operations are not openly illegal, which makes punishing them and defending against them complicated.

Russia's information operations are an international problem but, as Hill (2017) argues, they cannot be addressed by international institutions alone. Countering Russia requires specific to each country efforts because Russia's information operations are modified according to the country's distinct historical heritage, location, political situation, and vulnerabilities. Russia skillfully tailors the content and narrative of its operations to match each country. Nonetheless, a society with good governance should be highly resistant to such actions.

Recommendations for Western Governments

- Officially acknowledge the existence and impact of information operations and recognize the treat they entail

The first step the West can take is to acknowledge officially how substantial Russia's information warfare operations are and what danger they present to domestic democratic processes. Milo and Klingová (2016) argue that recognition by state authorities and international institutions is very important for raising awareness among decision makers and the general public of the dangers that the information war presents.

- Invest in research of information war and its techniques.

Due to the rapid changes of information space, including social media, methods and tools of information war also change rapidly. That is why information war needs to be continuously studied and analysed to identify patterns, trends, content and audience. Such analysis could help develop countermeasures (Milo and Klingová 2016).

- Understand why the country in general or specific groups of the population have been targeted

To win the war with Russia, the countries need to look at their own internal problems and think seriously about why Russia's propaganda resonates with so many people in the first place and what can be done to change that. National authorities must also ask themselves why they have been targeted, what their vulnerabilities are and how they can mitigate them.

- Promote media literacy

Western countries could establish media literacy courses with the focus on critical reading and analysis skills for digital age at schools and universities. Similar courses could be created as professional development for adults in the workplace. Training like this, *IREX*, has a proven track record in Ukraine (Jankowicz 2017). Sweden is also resistant to Russian influence in part because of its media education program which begins in childhood (Löfgren 2017). Furthermore, in June 2018, Sweden distributed nearly 5 million copies of an updated version of a Cold War-era pamphlet to its citizens. The pamphlet warns about the dangers of terrorist attacks, cyber threats, climate-change fuelled weather and disinformation (Ayed 2018). The governments could also launch public information campaigns that would immediately convey the concepts of media literacy to a mass audience (Helmus et al. 2018).

- Deconstruct disinformation

Western governments could support non-government organizations that are able to investigate Russia's information campaigns and myth-bust for significant audiences who are receptive to

fact-based arguments. *StopFake*, an online myth-busting resource in Ukraine, is an excellent example of such an organization.

- Establish partnerships with large technology companies (Facebook, Twitter, Google, etc.)

Western governments could work closely with large technology companies to help them direct efforts against the activity of bots, trolls, and fake accounts. The governments should also encourage such companies to police their platforms more aggressively for malicious state-sponsored content and work with news organizations to promote verified and fact-checked content on their platforms (Giles 2017). The governments should also encourage such companies to work with third parties that can help flag fake news and counter disinformation.

- Make Russian-language media more attractive in post-Soviet countries

Russian speakers in post-Soviet countries tune into Kremlin-controlled television because it is usually more entertaining than the one available in their countries of residence (e.g., the Baltic countries). There is a need to create new Russian-language entertainment programming.

- Develop a strategy to address historical trauma

One of the most effective Kremlin's narratives exploits the heroic legacy of the Second World War. CSIS, in its Russian World Views report (2017), states that Russia "employs false syllogisms, such as "Stalin fought the Nazis, therefore everyone who fought Stalin is a Nazi," and then link these to the present: "Everyone who opposes Russia now is a fascist". They propose that a working group of media experts, sociologists, psychologists and historians develop a strategy for dealing with historical trauma.

- Win back the trust of the Russian minority

In countries with a large Russian speaking population, the Kremlin's goal is to inflate the divide between ethnic and linguistic population (Russian World-Views 2017). According to a study by the Latvian Defence Academy, 41.3 percent of Russian Latvians believe that their rights are "violated on such a scale, that Russian intervention is necessary and justified (Russian World-Views 2017). The governments could make more effort to understand the concerns of the Russian minority. Furthermore, it could promote social and political movements that can unite across ethnic divides (Russian World-Views 2017).

- Do not treat information war as an issue that should be addressed by an international approach only

There is an international aspect to the issue of information warfare, but a defensive strategy should be led by domestic agencies. The international agencies should feed in but not lead. The governments could establish or identify agencies with the responsibility to lead the national response to Russia's information operations. Also, the countries need to adopt a mentality of vigilance because Russia's information operations are permanently adapting to each country's context by trial and error. Sahin (2017) believes that strategic foresight is important when dealing with Russia's information operations.

- Do not restrict Russian media outlets and Internet sites that spread misinformation

Western governments should not follow Ukraine's example of restricting access to Russian media outlets and Internet sites for their citizens. If Western governments try to impose such restriction, they would be infringing on the human right to freedom of speech and expression and, as a result, would no longer be acting as democracies.

- Campaign to stop Western advertisers from financing propaganda channels that carry spread disinformation and hate speech

A campaign may be needed to stop Western companies from advertising on Russian channels that spread disinformation, use hate speech, and encourage violence (Lucas and Pomerantsev 2016).

Conclusion

Russian information operations resemble Soviet elements of *spetspropaganda* and active measure used during the Cold War. However, the advances in technology have opened new opportunities for Russia's activities and enabled Russia to spread, as Paul and Matthews (2016) argued, "high-volume, multichannel, rapid, continuous and repetitive propaganda." Ukraine was the Kremlin's testing ground for future information operations. Darchewska (2014) correctly noted that "the Crimean operation has served as an occasion for Russia to demonstrate to the entire world the capabilities and the potential of information warfare." Russia will continue to adapt and evolve its techniques and will strike again. It will continue to implement its strategy of undermining Western democracies. Instead of playing catch-up, the Western governments need to work together with their citizens and journalists to develop new and effective countermeasures against the Kremlin's activities. In some cases, non-government groups are better positioned to fight disinformation. In other cases, the governments need to analyze and address fault lines and vulnerabilities in their societal realm which Russia continuously exploits. Lucas and Pomerantsev (2016) wrote that the solutions will not be the same in every country but Western governments have to ensure that their citizens have access to accurate information because "without better information, democracy will quickly become difficult – if not impossible."

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