

# UA: UKRAINE ANALYTICA

Issue 4 (22), 2020



- NON-RUSSIAN VIEWS ON CURRENT RUSSIAN POLITICS



## Russia Non-Russian View on Current Russian Politics

### Editors

Dr. Hanna Shelest  
Dr. Mykola Kapitonenko

### Publisher:

Published by NGO "Promotion of Intercultural Cooperation" (Ukraine), Centre of International Studies (Ukraine), with the financial support of the Representation of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Ukraine and the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation - a Project of the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

**UA: Ukraine Analytica** is the first Ukrainian analytical journal in English on International Relations, Politics and Economics. The journal is aimed for experts, diplomats, academics, students interested in the international relations and Ukraine in particular.

### Contacts:

website: <http://ukraine-analytica.org/>  
e-mail: [Ukraine\\_analytica@ukr.net](mailto:Ukraine_analytica@ukr.net)  
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ukraineanalytica>  
Twitter: [https://twitter.com/UA\\_Analytica](https://twitter.com/UA_Analytica)

The views and opinions expressed in articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of UA: Ukraine Analytica, its editors, Board of Advisers or donors.

ISSN 2518-7481

500 copies

## BOARD OF ADVISERS

**Dr. Dimitar Bechev** (Bulgaria, Director of the European Policy Institute)

**Dr. Iulian Chifu** (Romania, Director of the Conflict Analysis and Early Warning Center)

**Amb., Dr. Sergiy Korsunsky** (Ukraine, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to Japan)

**Dr. Igor Koval** (Ukraine, Odesa City Council)

**Marcel Röthig** (Germany, Director of the Representation of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Ukraine)

**James Nixey** (United Kingdom, Head of the Russia and Eurasia Programme at Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs)

**Dr. Róbert Ondrejcsák** (Slovakia, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Slovak Republic to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)

**Amb., Dr. Oleg Shamshur** (Ukraine, former Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to France)

**Dr. Stephan De Spiegeleire** (The Netherlands, Director Defence Transformation at The Hague Center for Strategic Studies)

**Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze** (Ukraine, Head of the Parliamentary Committee on European Integration)

**Dr. Dimitris Triantaphyllou** (Greece, Director of the Center for International and European Studies, Kadir Has University (Turkey))

**Dr. Asle Toje** (Norway, Research Director at the Norwegian Nobel Institute)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **RUSSIAN DOCTRINE INHERITS SOVIET TRADITIONS OF COORDINATED USE OF DIFFERENT INSTRUMENTS**

*Interview with Dr. Oleksandr Lytvynenko, Director of the National Institute for Strategic Studies* ..... 3

## **RUSSIA'S STRATEGY TOWARDS POST-SOVIET STATES AS IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW DOCTRINE OF LIMITED SOVEREIGNTY (PUTIN DOCTRINE)**

*Ihor Lossovskyi* ..... 8

## **VICTIMISATION OF THE "CRIMEAN SYNDROME"**

*Sergii Glebov*..... 18

## **RUSSIA AND THE DILEMMA OF SEPARATIST TERRITORIES**

*Emil Avdaliani* ..... 28

## **INFORMATION OPERATIONS IN RUSSIA'S FOREIGN POLICY ARSENAL: TARGETING RELATIONS BETWEEN POLAND AND UKRAINE**

*Volodymyr Solovian and Michał Marek* ..... 36

## **INSTRUMENTS OF RUSSIAN HYBRID ACTIONS AGAINST BRITISH AND AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES**

*Oleksandr Kraiev* ..... 45

## **CURRENT RUSSIAN POLICY TOWARD THE MENA REGION**

*Mykola Zamikula* ..... 51

# INSTRUMENTS OF RUSSIAN HYBRID ACTIONS AGAINST BRITISH AND AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES

*Oleksandr Kraiev*

*Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism"*

***The US elections and the Brexit referendum in 2016 marked a peculiar milestone of informational and quasi-political confrontation. Not only the results of the said events were surprising for the general public, but they also revealed specific peculiarities of the capacity of hybrid influence and interference in domestic democratic processes of other countries. Russian state agents conducted a large-scale disinformation campaign aimed at British and US populations in order to influence the results of the vote. Such activities should be viewed in the context of a greater Russian strategy of hybrid meddling in democratic processes of the West. The purpose of this paper is to identify and define the strategies of the Russian hybrid aggression against Western democracies.***

## Introduction

The famous "Gerasimov doctrine", which is essentially a somewhat doctrinised by the Western specialists Russian approach to modern warfare, was first laid down in an article by General Valery Gerasimov in 2013. If we are to put the whole concept of that article into a single sentence, it will go as follows: "The emphasis of the used methods of confrontation is shifting towards the widespread use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian and other non-military measures".<sup>1</sup> Such a shift toward the effective use and capacity building of non-military means of confrontation presupposes a corresponding change in the strategic perspective. It is obvious that the notion of military confrontation as a real-time clash of military potentials of two

sovereign states on the battlefield remains an archaism of the 20th century. In this context, it becomes dangerous to consider the information activities of a country – through government news agencies, funding of independent media agents, or other similar activities – only as its own positioning in the international arena or the process creating a certain image. At present, such actions of the Russian military and political leadership in many cases are genuine acts of aggression that require clear and accurate tracking.

In 2014, the world saw for the first time visible results of a long and strategically planned information campaign conducted by the Russian Federation in preparation for its aggressive actions against Ukraine. The work of Russian media and information outlets in the preparation and implementation

1 V. Gerasimov, *Ценность науки в предвидении (The Value of Science Is in Foresight)*, "Военно-промышленный курьер" ("Military-Industrial Kurier"), 26 February 2013 [<https://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632>].

of Operation “Russian Spring” and the attempted illegal annexation of Crimea in the spring of 2014 was one of the key factors in the initial success of the Russian aggressors, creating an appropriate information basis both for Russian population and for inhabitants of target regions.



***it should be divided into formal measures (open information platforms, forums, state-sponsored media, diplomatic channels of influence) and informal measures (so-called “troll factories”, means of indirect media influence, targeted use of flows of “fake news”***

Achieving the first success in conducting information military operations without any adequate deterrence, the Russian information agents began to expand their scope and potential for lesion. Thus, we observed interference in the referendum on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union in 2016 and in the US presidential elections the same year. Obviously, it would be an exaggeration to say that in both cases Russian influence and Russian hybrid measures played a key role in the final result of these democratic processes, but they can serve as the most evident cases for dissecting and researching Russian hybrid influence and its future potential. After the aforementioned cases, such a policy did continue and could be seen

in the parliamentary elections in the United Kingdom in 2019 and in the presidential election in the United States in 2020.

## **Russian Handbook on Hybrid Warfare: Main Tools**

In the cases of Brexit and the 2016 US presidential election, it is worth starting with the general disposition of Russian potential. First, it should be divided into formal measures (open information platforms, forums, state-sponsored media, diplomatic channels of influence) and informal measures (so-called “troll factories”, means of indirect media influence, targeted use of flows of “fake news”<sup>2</sup>, shady financing of specific political and information instruments, etc.). At the same time, it must be clearly understood that both the formal and informal components of this arsenal are a single system that functioned inextricably to implement a geopolitical course to destabilise leading Western democracies and create an illusion of weakness of their institutions. It should be noted that the unofficial part was conducted under the direct and clear control of the top leadership of the Russian Federation and President Putin himself – such conclusions were reached both by authorities from the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence<sup>3</sup> and by specialists from the Intelligence and Security Committee of the United Kingdom Parliament<sup>4</sup>.

Based on the evidence studied by the US and British specialists, it is possible to outline the following areas of informal influence

- 2 For the purposes of this article, “fake news” shall be defined in accordance with Cambridge dictionary as “false stories that appear to be news, spread on the internet or using other media, usually created to influence political views or as a joke”. Cambridge Dictionary, Fake News, n.d. [<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fake-news>].
- 3 National Intelligence Council, *Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections*, “ICA 2017-01D”, 06 January 2017 [<https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/3719492/Read-the-declassified-report-on-Russian.pdf>].
- 4 Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, *Russia*, “HC 632”, 21 July 2020 [<https://int.nyt.com/data/documenttools/intelligence-and-security-committee-s-russia-report/9c665c08033cab70/full.pdf>].

of Russian agents on the situation with democratic processes:

1. Cyber threats;
2. Information threats (disinformation and decision influence, propaganda);
3. Russian expatriates (viewed mostly as a financial tool).

Also, as an indispensable part of a grand informational geopolitics, each part of this triumvirate has its own role and variety of tasks. Let us consider each of them separately.


## Cyber Threats

Cyber threats encompass a wide variety of tools, mostly exercised by semi-governmental professional hacker networks. Their main targets include critical information infrastructure (such as election databases, political parties' online communication networks, and information agencies), main national security and intelligence agencies, and independent accounts or data of prominent persons. The starkest and, clearly, most influential example is the leakage of information from the Democratic Party convention's email and data sets. According to Mueller investigation, this operation was conducted by representatives of Russian intelligence units operating under the pseudonym "Guccifer 2.0"<sup>5</sup>.

Among the most notorious "players" in the field of Russian cyber threats is the Internet Research Agency (*Агентство интернет-исследований*), also known as "Kremlin trolls" or "troll farms". Set up in 2013, this organisation – located in several equipped offices throughout Russia, mostly

in the vicinity of St. Petersburg – is directly connected to the high Russian executive power and, as numerous sources suggest, controlled strategically by the closest circle of the Russian president<sup>6</sup>. Along with their main line of work as hackers and cyber specialists, the "trolls" also conduct high-profile, strategically planned information campaigns throughout popular social media platforms in order to create an appropriate and convincing information narrative.

---



***A separate important task of cyber specialists in the Russian intelligence was the creation of a so-called "complex landscape" – a situation in which the response to certain aggressive actions slows down or becomes impossible due to the difficulty of determining the source of the threat***

---

Although such a narrative can be called a "pro-Russian", that is low-level messaging – too obvious for an experienced Web user to rely on. Instead, more sophisticated approaches were deployed. If direct support for the ideas of the "Russian World" (*Русский мир*) is not really effective, then the attempt to show the weakness of leadership in a country, the ineffectiveness of democratic institutions, or the lack of social justice is much more impactful. Such reports find a strong response from society, and on both sides of the political spectrum. Basic topics of resentment and anti-establishment moods are multicultural and multifaceted, which makes them adaptable to any social reality.

---

5 US Department of Justice, *Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election*, Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller, III, March 2019 [<https://www.justice.gov/storage/report.pdf>].

6 C. A. Bail, B. Guay, E. Maloney, et al., *Assessing the Russian Internet Research Agency's Impact on the Political Attitudes and Behaviors of American Twitter Users in Late 2017*, "Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences", vol. 117, no. 1, pp. 243-250, January 2020 [<https://www.pnas.org/content/117/1/243>].

A separate important task of cyber specialists in the Russian intelligence was the creation of a so-called “complex landscape” – a situation in which the response to certain aggressive actions slows down or becomes impossible due to the difficulty of determining the source of the threat, areas of responsibility for certain threats, and the creation of real physical barriers to any response. With the help of targeted hacker attacks, modern encryption methods, and multiple information contact points, Russian cyber experts created an operational platform for the work of their own information sources, to which the opposite side found it difficult to respond. As it is specified in the report of the Intelligence and Security Committee of the Parliament of the United Kingdom on Russia, “there are a number of agencies and organisations across the Intelligence Community which have a role in countering the Russian cyber threat, and it was not immediately apparent how these various agencies and organisations are co-ordinated and indeed complement each other”<sup>7</sup>.


## Information Threats

The narratives in the field of cyber threats are virtually identical to those in the field of information threats. As noted in the previous section, the key information narratives of the Russian media include weakness of democratic regimes, the inability of their institutions and elected representatives to ensure the interests of citizens and their security. The main difference is that at this stage of the deployment of hybrid aggression, the potential and values of the formal and

informal dimensions are commensurate and form a single synergistic structure.

Russian media outlets position themselves as an “alternative” to traditional Western media, thus trying to become an opposition to the main information narratives. This position allows them to maintain the image of anti-establishment, which in turn helps to attract a large and diverse support base. The use of the already classic means of spreading fakes, constant emotional pressure, and conciseness of the main message helps to keep the audience’s attention for a long time and occupy their own niche in the general media pool.

---



***Russian media outlets position themselves as an “alternative” to traditional Western media, thus trying to become an opposition to the main information narratives***

---

It is important to note that Russia’s state media receive full and fairly large funding for their activities. For example, the well-known information channel RT is a brand of *TV-Novosti (TV-News)*, which was included in the list of organisations of strategic importance for the Russian economy<sup>8</sup>. During 2014-2016, RT funding was about USD 236-400 million per year<sup>9</sup>. A multimillion audience, a large staff, and strong funding from the centre allow media outlets such as RT to become the de facto

---

7 Ibid., n4, p.6.

8 *The Governmental Commission on Sustainable Development of the Russian Economy Approved a List of Core Organisations of Strategic Importance*, “Vladimir Putin official website”, 25 December 2008 [<http://archive.premier.gov.ru/eng/events/messages/2883/>].

9 See for details: *Russia in ‘Information War’ with West to Win Hearts and Minds*, “BBC”, 15 September 2015 [<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34248178>]; *Russia Cuts State Spending on RT News Network*, “Moscow Times”, 30 January 2016 [<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/looking-west-russia-beefs-up-spending-on-global-media-giants/507692.html>].



speaker for the Russian government, while at the same time being in a semi-official position and maintaining their own status of “opposition media” that will support the mood of anti-establishment.

Another important instrument of the Russian propaganda media is creating fake news concerning a wide range of topics. These fakes are naturally embedded into information narrative of such media outlets alongside proven information. Such manipulation creates an aura of trust in information from these media as a whole and at the same time provides for better dissemination and adaptation of fake news in the given society.

### **Russian Expatriates**

The role of Russian expats in the overall strategy is often that of ideological and resource basis for implementing the next steps.

It should be noted that mainly the problem of Russian expats, and especially the financial elite, is singled out as a component of the threat by British MPs and intelligence officers. In the case of Russian interference in the democratic processes of the United States, it is more a matter of systematic visits by Russian agents of influence and establishing contacts on the ground, rather than using the potential of the diaspora or expats.

In the case of the United Kingdom, the main problem with Russian expats concerns the financial influence of Russian oligarchs, who once found political and tax haven in London. Over the past 30 years, they have become a

real tool of political influence, which from time to time can play a destructive role in British politics, supporting one or another key party. The latest such scandal took place during the rule of the current prime minister, Boris Johnson, and concerned illegal sources of funding<sup>10</sup> (it should be noted that the case did not become prominent in public life and no official charges were brought forward). The same influence was noticed during the Brexit referendum and the subsequent political turmoil<sup>11</sup>.

The main influence of the shady Russian oligarchs – both in the United Kingdom and in the United States – is as follows:

- Financing marginalised political campaigns in order to promote a destabilising informational agenda;
- Supporting pro-Russian politicians and legislature;
- Forming a pool of “alternative media” in order to create an information flow for Russian narratives;
- Performing negotiations with prominent politicians behind the scenes, de facto on behalf of Russian government officials.

This position allows them to have a point of impact and purposeful influence on specific issues of Russian geopolitics. Unlike official diplomatic and economic channels of communication, the work of Russian expats allows most of the strategy and activities of the Russian information agents to be left outside the public eye. In addition, given their political and financial weight, as well as the fact that they have lived in the country for many years, Russian expats are gradually able to form a network of lobbyists, which also becomes a separate and partly important means of influence.

---

10 14 Ministers in Boris Johnson's Government Received Funding from Donors Linked to Russia, “Business Insider”, 23 July 2020 [<https://www.businessinsider.com/russia-report-donors-boris-johnson-conservative-party-2020-7>].

11 Ibid., n4, pp. 15-18.

## Conclusions: New Systematisation of Non-Military Means of Warfare

It would be an exaggeration to say that hybrid warfare is solely a feature and characteristic of the early 21st century military conflicts. Even the most superficial analysis of the classics of military conflict theory shows that the use of information and other non-military means was recognised as one of the key components of confrontation between two sides for a very long time. Victory over the enemy with minimal loss of personnel, minimal strain on your own economy, and minimal destruction of conquered territories was considered a more outstanding achievement than a large-scale and bloody victory on the battlefield.



***The actions of the Russian Federation in 2016 and 2019 to influence democratic processes in the United States and the United Kingdom have shown the real ability of such measures to both damage the system of government in general and create a negative public response***

At present, we have a manifestation of the developed subject matter of information warfare and the question of the priority of non-military methods of confrontation as a basis for not only avoiding a direct clash but also preparing for a possible development of such a clash. At the same time, the development of informational, digital, and financial means at the present stage allows to separate information aggression and information confrontation from the general pool of hybrid means of warfare into a distinct, completely self-sufficient

set of measures to influence the enemy – conditional or real.

The actions of the Russian Federation in 2016 and 2019 to influence democratic processes in the United States and the United Kingdom have shown the real ability of such measures to both damage the system of government in general and create a negative public response that will be a long-term destructive element for internal stability.

According to Antony Oberschall, social mobilisation is impossible in organisations that consist of separated and lonely people. It is possible only as a result of the involvement of associations of people who are already well organised and ready to work together<sup>12</sup>. The creation of such a divided society will make it weak and unable to respond to the challenges and crises of today. It is obvious that this is the effect that the Kremlin is trying to achieve by using the tools and methods of information aggression described in the article. The collapse of the institutions of Western democracy can indeed be used as a key to undermining the stability of societies, which in the face of escalating global confrontation – the basis of which should be sought in the aggressive actions of the Russian Federation in Ukraine since 2014 – will become an important tool of Russian geopolitics.

*Oleksandr Kraiev is an expert researcher on North America and the United Kingdom in the Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism". He is an international relations columnist for several Ukrainian and international media outlets. He is also a PhD candidate at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. Key academic and professional spheres of interest: the UK and US foreign and domestic policy, the Irish border dispute, hybrid warfare, and modern conflicts.*

12 See more on the issue in: A. Oberschall, *Social Movements: Ideologies, Interest and Identities*, Routledge: London 2017.



UA: UKRAINE  
ANALYTICA

Issue 4 (22), 2020

ISSN 2518-7481