

Protecting Falsehoods With a Bodyguard of Lies: Putin's Use of Information Warfare

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*In wartime, truth is so precious that she should always be attended
by a bodyguard of lies.*
(Winston Churchill)

*In state-run media, which the vast majority of Russians rely on for news,
the Kremlin no longer distinguishes between analysis and propaganda.*
(Gleb Pavlovsky, Advisor to Russian Presidents
Yeltsin, Putin and Medvedev²)

Russia's use of information warfare to defeat its adversaries has a long history. Lenin was, of course, the master at employing propaganda and agitation (agitprop) to achieve his revolutionary goals (even creating a formal *Department for Agitation and Propaganda*). In the 1970s and 1980s, KGB agents who had defected to the United States revealed that "espionage was a minor consideration of Russian intelligence. Their focus was controlling the message and it often happened through influencing media and political movements in freer societies."³ During the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia continued

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² Gleb Pavlovsky, "Russian Politics Under Putin: The System Will Outlast the Master," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2016, p. 16.

³ Roman Skaskiw, "Nine Lessons of Russian Propaganda," *Small Wars Journal*, 27 March 2016.



to conduct information warfare, albeit with fewer resources.⁴ The ascension of Vladimir Putin heralded a qualitatively different approach to information warfare. As Peter Pomerantsev asserts, “the new Russia doesn’t just deal in the petty disinformation, forgeries, lies, leaks, and cyber-sabotage usually associated with information warfare. It reinvents reality, creating mass hallucinations that then translate into political action.”⁵ In short, Putin has engaged in “the most amazing information warfare blitzkrieg we have ever seen in the history of information warfare.”⁶ Whereas previously information warfare was an adjunct to Russian statecraft, today it is the regime’s governing *modus operandi*.

Information warfare is of course not an end in itself. It is employed in the service of Putin’s two fundamental and intertwined objectives: preserving his regime and enhancing Russia’s status as a great power. During his first term in office, Putin bolstered his domestic legitimacy via an unwritten social contract; he would provide the populace with a rising standard of living in exchange for their political acquiescence. As oil prices quadrupled in the early 2000s, Putin was able to deliver on his promise with annual GDP increasing at 7% per year.⁷ However, the 2008 global financial crisis, which caused oil prices to plunge and Russia’s economy to contract, led to Putin no longer being able to deliver on the aforementioned bargain causing him to search for other means to ensure the

legitimacy of his regime.

Putin increasingly sought legitimacy and prestige through assertive—and well-advertised—moves in the international arena. His aggression outside Russia’s borders not only served to enhance his legitimacy by fostering the domestic narrative of Russia’s international resurgence, but of course also dovetailed with Moscow’s desire to assert actual great power status and reestablish what it regarded as its rightful place in the geopolitical firmament. Putin demanded that not only should Moscow’s interests in the former Soviet space be respected, but also the Kremlin’s perceived broader prerogative in the international arena should be recognized.

This paper examines how and why Russia is extensively employing information warfare to ensure regime survival and in the service of its increasingly aggressive foreign policy goals. A theme throughout is how the West has yet to grasp the full implications of the Russian word *informatsia* and the challenge posed by Putin’s information strategy. We examine the case of the Baltics and Moscow’s assertion of its right to protect citizens abroad to illustrate Russia’s information warfare techniques so the West can perhaps better understand how to respond. First, however, we examine how Putin understands regime preservation and Russia’s great power status and how these concerns find their antecedents in Russian history.

⁴ Timothy L. Thomas, “Deterring Information Warfare: A New Strategic Challenge,” *Parameters*, Vol XXVI, No 4, Winter 1996-97, pp. 81-91; “Definitions for the Discipline of Information Warfare and Strategy,” School of Information Warfare and Strategy, National Defense University, Fort Lesley McNair, Washington, D.C., p. 37.

⁵ Peter Pomerantsev, “Russia and the Menace of Unreality: How Vladimir Putin is Revolutionizing Information Warfare,” *The Atlantic*, September 9, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/09/russia-putin-revolutionizing-information-warfare/379880/>

⁶ Pomerantsev, *The Atlantic*, 9 September 2014.

⁷ Anders Aslund, “Russia After the Financial Crisis, May 2010, at carnegieendowment.org/files/Aslund_Presentation_Slides.ppt; See also, *Trading Economics* at <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/russia/gdp-growth-annual>; Petr Aven, “Russia’s 2000-2007 Economic Success: Pros and Cons,” Alfa-Bank, at <https://piie.com/publications/papers/aven0508.pdf>



Regime Preservation

While Putin sees tangible domestic benefit in assertive policies on the international stage, this should not obscure the fact many of his actions are responses to what he perceives as genuine threats to the stability of his rule. The overthrow of friendly governments is seen to reflect foreign machinations that could target his own rule and sets a threatening precedent that could encourage indigenous opposition within Russia. Indeed, Putin saw events in Ukraine as a threat because they raised the specter of a successful color revolution that could have sparked a contagion by galvanizing indigenous opposition within Russia. In this formulation, events in the Euromaiden—which could have resulted in a genuine liberal democracy on Putin’s doorstep—constituted a dire threat to his rule, raising the specter that the contagion of color revolutions could reach the Kremlin. This “information invasion” had to be repelled. While it is difficult to divine precisely Putin’s thinking, the respected Russian military analyst Pavel Felgengauer observed that, “They killed Saddam. They killed Qaddafi. Now they want to kill Assad. And Putin believes he may be next in line.”⁸

Autocratic Regimes Naturally Fear Coups

Fear of being overthrown is part and parcel of autocratic regimes and Russia is no exception. Apprehension about internal and external threats to the regime are codified in Russian military doctrine and give the Ministry of Defense the mandate to prepare against both types of threat. These concerns are explicitly articulated with varying degrees of alarm in all four Military Doctrines⁹ issued since the collapse of the Soviet Union—even during those early post-Soviet years when the West mistakenly believed Russia would evolve into a democracy.¹⁰ Russia’s 1993 military doctrine—the first since the collapse—refers to “attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of and destabilize the internal political situation in the Russian Federation” as a source of “external military danger.”¹¹ These internal threats include “attempts to overthrow the constitutional system by force or to disrupt the functioning of organs of state power and administration.”¹² To the West, with its tradition of democratic power transitions, these concerns at times seem disingenuous and an excuse for repressive government actions. But they reflect a genuine concern on the part of the Russian political and military leadership, a leadership that is of course fully cognizant that the Bolshevik revolution involved seizure of power through an internal coup

⁸ Greg Walters, “Putin’s New National Guard Strengthens His Grip on Security as Russian Economy Falter,” *Vice News*, 7 April, 2016, at <https://news.vice.com/article/putins-new-national-guard-strengthens-his-grip-on-security-as-russian-economy-falters>. In discussing Putin’s concerns about being overthrown, Felgengauer said, “Of course he’s paranoid. Anyone who’s been sitting in the Kremlin that long will get paranoid.”

⁹ In October 2003 top military and political officials as well as the press gathered at the Defense Ministry to hear Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov give a 45-minute presentation that was presented as “The Public Part of the Military Doctrine.” I do not view this as an official issuance of a military doctrine document. See, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/russia/doctrine-2003.htm>.

¹⁰ For an overview of the systemic reasons that underlay Russia’s penchant toward autocracy, see the classic, Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, New York, Scribner, 1974; More currently, see Stephen Kotkin, “Russia’s Perpetual Geopolitics: Putin Returns to the Historical Pattern,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2016, pp. 2-9, and Dmitri Simes, “Russia and America: Destined for Conflict?” *The National Interest*, July-August 2016.

¹¹ “The Basic Provisions of the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation,” adopted 2 November 1993, at <http://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/russia-mil-doc.html>.

¹² “Basic Provisions of the Military Doctrine,” 1993.



followed by a war in which foreign forces attempted to overthrow the new regime. This history—a red “colored revolution,” if you like—informs, on a visceral level, the current regime’s concerns over internal and external threats to its survival.¹³

Examining how successive versions of military doctrines have changed is instructive insofar as it illuminates the subtle but unmistakable changes in Moscow’s threat perceptions. In 2000, the twin concern about the danger of external and internal threats to the regime is clearly stated; however, it was not until the 2010 Military Doctrine was issued that explicit mention was made of the danger presented by regime overthrow in Russia’s near abroad and implicitly the threat of contagion that this posed. And both the 2010 and 2014 Military Doctrines list “activities aimed at violent change of the constitutional system of the Russian Federation” as first among the main internal military dangers.¹⁴ Whereas the implication of this threat was implied in the 2010 doctrine, it was made explicit in the 2014 doctrine, which warned against “the activities of information influence on the population, especially young citizens with the goal of undermining the historical, spiritual, and patriotic traditions in the area of defense of the Fatherland.”¹⁵

Russia Believes the West Fosters Color Revolutions

It is of course a staple of Putin’s propaganda that the United States and other Western countries are endeavoring to undermine Russia’s government through fostering color revolutions on its immediate periphery—revolutions that could spread to Russia itself. Inseparable from this fear is that westernizing or liberalizing governments that arise from a color revolution could join NATO and establish Western military bases.¹⁶ In this sense, the ideological and military threat from the West merge, leading to a situation in which Putin’s growing domestic insecurity makes him see foreign actions in a much more sinister light, prompting him to be more proactive and pre-emptive against these perceived threats.

In 2014 these suspicions were articulated in the Ministry of Defense’s main theoretical periodical *Military Thought*. In an article, revealingly titled, “Political Engineering of Color Revolutions: Keeping Them in Check,” the authors discuss trends common to color revolutions, noting that they happen in otherwise stable countries and are foreign inspired—or more precisely as the title suggests, *foreign engineered*:

¹³ Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu expressed concern this past summer about threats to Russia emanating from new conflicts near its border; “Crises similar to Syria can be provoked in any country, including post-Soviet republics in Central Asia and the South Caucasus.” “Shoigu konstatiroval sokhranenie veroyatnosti novykh voennykh konfliktov u granits RF” [Shoigu Noted the Probability of New Military Conflicts near Russia’s Borders], Interfax, 15 July 2016, <http://www.interfax.ru/russia/518681>.

¹⁴ The wording in the 2010 Military Doctrine is slightly different, but retains the same meaning by referring to “attempts to forcefully change the constitutional structure of the Russian Federation.” See, *Voennaia doktrina rossiiskoi federatsii* [Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation], 5 February 2010, section 9.a, at <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/33.html>.

¹⁵ *Voennaia doktrina rossiiskoi federatsii* [Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation], 26 December 2014, section 13a and c, at <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d527556bec8deb3530.pdf>.

¹⁶ Russia is obsessed with NATO enlargement providing a platform for the U.S. (and NATO) to place military infrastructure (*infrostruktura*) close to its borders. See for example, Aleksandr Stepanov, “NATO Exercises Have Begun in Estonia—How This Threatens Russia. Alliance Military Infrastructure is Being Developed on Our Borders,” MK Online, 2 May 2016 <http://www.mk.ru>.



...they started in formally well-off countries ruled by stable regimes either suddenly, triggered by a trifle pretext, or after a relatively brief ‘period of apprehension;’ an immediate favorable response to the flare-up from leading Western countries with expressions of unreserved support for the revolutionary forces and calls, in several instances backed up by threats of use of military force, to the legitimate governments to ease violence.¹⁷

Ascribing blame to the West and claiming that these situations were stable prior to Western meddling has become a common refrain in Russia. The authors express suspicion of these color revolutions, viewing them not as genuine, organic revolutions, but as “attempts at a *coup d’etat* to replace the ruling regime in the guise of a political revolution.”¹⁸ They maintain that color revolutions that have taken place in the countries of the former Soviet Union—Georgia (Rose Revolution, 2003), Ukraine (Orange Revolution, 2004), Kyrgyzstan (Tulip Revolution, 2005) and the brutal suppression of protesters in Uzbekistan (2005)—“did not bring about a change in the existing socioeconomic system” and therefore are not “revolutions in the strict sense of the term.”¹⁹ But the implication is clear, namely that the West is trying “to hem in Russia with neighbors far from friendly to it...an indication that Russia is a target

for forces that have a direct stake in isolating it.”²⁰ The article also articulates Russia’s deep concern about instability that can arise as a result of elections, noting that a classic color Revolution strategy involves a “surprise coup timed for upcoming elections.”²¹

Information Warfare Bolstered to Counter Western Threats

The so-called color revolutions led to a reinvigoration of Russian information warfare capabilities to counter both external and internal threats to the regime and culminated in the (largely successful) disinformation campaign waged during the 2014 Crimea invasion. Russia initially denied involvement in Crimea, claiming that masked soldiers in unmarked green army uniforms carrying Russian military weapons were not Russian. While this was eventually exposed as false, the narrative worked long enough to create uncertainty and buy time for Russia to execute its plan. We emphasize that although there was renewed vigor, the success of Russia’s information campaign in Crimea was sown long before in a years-long effort to shape the narrative on that Peninsula. As the Polish political analyst Jolanta Darczewska observed, the 2014 “anti-Ukrainian information battles which had been seen for many years entered a tough phase of information warfare” that year.²² According to Darczewska, information warfare

¹⁷ A.N. Belsky, O.V. Klimenko, “Political Engineering of Color Revolutions: Keeping Them in Check,” *Military Thought*, Vol. 23, no. 3, 2014, p. 20.

¹⁸ Belsky, Klimenko, p. 24.

¹⁹ Belsky, Klimenko, p. 24.

²⁰ Belsky, Klimenko, p. 21.

²¹ Belsky, Klimenko, p. 22.

²² Jolanta Darczewska, *The Anatomy of Russian Information Warfare: the Crimean Operation, A Case Study*, (Warsaw, Poland: Osrodek Studiow Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia, May 2014), p. 6.



was “aimed primarily at destabilising the situation in Ukraine and placing pressure on its government and citizens to adopt solutions...so that Ukraine could be controlled by Russia and remain within its sphere of influence.”²³ Russia doubled down on Ukraine because it could not allow Ukraine to become integrated into Western political and economic institutions.²⁴ Russia’s action in Ukraine amounted to “a Kremlin containment effort to prevent Ukrainians from achieving a democratically accountable government that would place Ukraine in the European community of nations and threaten Russia’s corrupt system.”²⁵

At the same time, with upcoming Parliamentary elections in September 2016, the Kremlin was concerned about pro-Western elements in Russia and the need to counter the West’s information campaign. Not surprisingly then, Russia has taken measures to control the internet as it constitutes an important pathway by which potentially destabilizing information can be transmitted. Alexander Bastrykin, Head of the Russian Federation Investigations Committee, recently published an alarming article in which he blamed the U.S. for conducting an information warfare campaign aimed at destabilizing Russia, and he outlines strategies for reducing

Russia’s vulnerability to color revolutions. While Bastrykin no doubt fears U.S. interference and color revolutions, he also appears to be seeking justification for imposing greater control over the internet. He recommends erecting barriers to the internet and public places with access to the worldwide web. He asserts that U.S. information warfare has “led to the emergence of pro-Western opposition forces inside Russia spreading sectarian and political extremism inside our country.”²⁶ Significantly, Bastrykin maintains that it is “particularly urgent” for Russia to erect barriers because of “forthcoming elections” and the possible risk of “forces destabilizing the political situation.” Bastrykin even argues that interethnic conflicts of the 1990s in Georgia-Abkhazia, Ossetia-Ingushetia, and Transdnier were caused by Western information warfare: “what was happening at the moment was recognized as local conflicts. However, now it is already completely obvious that all these clashes were part of the initial, concealed stage of an information war.”²⁷ He points to an increase in the U.S. federal budget in support of “so-called development of the institutions of democracy in countries bordering Russia and even in the Central Asian states” adding that “the true meaning of these funds becomes obvious from the name of an expenditure called ‘countering Russian

²³ Darczewska, *Anatomy of Russian Information Warfare*, p. 6.

²⁴ Russia asserted its perceived right to meddle in the affairs of other countries numerous times, and Ukraine—viewed as *malaya Rossiya*, little Russia—though spared Russian invasion during the 2004 Orange Revolution was not immune once Russia became economically and militarily stronger by 2014. On “little Russia,” see James Sherr, *Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion: Russia’s Influence Abroad* (London, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2013), p. 57. Interestingly, Ukraine’s second President after the Soviet collapse, Leonid Kuchma, tried to separate his country and create a sovereign nation going so far as to publish a book entitled *Ukraine is Not Russia*. See, Leonid Kuchma, *Ukraina—ne Rossiia* (Moscow, Vremya, 2003).

²⁵ Christopher Walker, “The New Containment: Undermining Democracy,” *World Affairs* (May-June 2015), p. 43.

²⁶ Aleksandr Bastrykin, “Pora postavit’ deistvennyi zaslon informatsionnoi voine” [It’s time to Put Up an Effective Barrier to the Information War], *Kommersant Vlast’* Online, 18 April 2016, at <http://www.kommersant.ru/gallery/2961578>. Bastrykin’s accusations about Western information warfare are echoed throughout the Russian government and media. See for example Defense Minister Shoigu’s comments on Russian news channel *Rossiya 24* where he accuses the West of waging a “harsh and uncompromising information war against Russia,” 27 April 2016, and Anastasia Bazenkova, “Russia’s Top Cop Wants Internet Censorship to Fight U.S. ‘Info War,’” *Moscow Times Online*, 18 April 2016, at <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/russias-top-cop-wants-internet-censorship-to-fight-us-info-war-52573>.

²⁷ Bastrykin, 18 April 2016.



aggression through public diplomacy and foreign assistance programs and creating resilience in European governments.” He adds that the funds are supposedly for education, promotion of civil society and “other outwardly noble goals,” but have become “kindling for anti-Russian sentiments in states adjacent to our country.”²⁸ By way of example, he blames these presumably Western opposition forces for recently shattering the peace between the people of Armenia and Azerbaijan and creating “yet another hotbed of war on Russia’s border.”²⁹

Russia Seeks to Restore its Rightful Position as a Great Power

Russia not only seeks to shore up its vulnerability to domestic threats and threatening developments along its periphery, but seeks to re-establish its great power status. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia no longer viewed itself as a superpower, but maintaining great power status was deemed important. President Medvedev declared in 2008 in the aftermath of Russia’s war with Georgia that a great power naturally has a “zone of privileged interests.” As Mark Kramer observed, “Moscow has

made it abundantly clear that the Commonwealth of Independent States is a Russian sphere of influence where the role of other great powers must be minimized.”³⁰ When asked whether this sphere of influence was limited to the border states around Russia, Medvedev emphatically replied, “it is the border region, but not only.”³¹

Deeply embedded in Russian thinking about great power status is the belief that Russia, which occupies one-seventh of the world’s landmass, is a great civilization with tremendous cultural achievements and a quasi-messianic mission to link the East and West. Putin avowed in his 2007 Munich speech that “Russia is a country with a history that spans more than a thousand years and has practically always used the privilege to carry out an independent foreign policy.” He put the West on notice that “we are not going to change this tradition today.”³²

Russia believes that since the Soviet collapse, the West has ignored Russia’s “rightful place in international affairs and views Russia not as a great power, but as a “normal power”³³ or “regional power.”³⁴ These distinctions are important because Russia views the world through the prism of great power

²⁸ Bastrykin, 18 April 2016.

²⁹ Bastrykin’s article received considerable attention on social media. Dmitry Gudkov, a member of the State Duma and a vocal opponent of Vladimir Putin, called Bastrykin’s proposal to “to put up an effective barrier to this information war” as tantamount to “introducing totalitarianism.” <https://www.facebook.com/dgudkov/posts/1111731238868315>

³⁰ Mark Kramer, “Russian Policy Toward the Commonwealth of Independent States Recent Trends and Future Prospects,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 55, no. 6, November/December 2008, pp. 3–19.

³¹ Andrew E. Kramer, “Russia Claims Its Sphere of Influence in the World,” *The New York Times*, 31 August 2008.

³² Putin’s Prepared Remarks at 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy, 10 February 2007, at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2007/02/12/AR2007021200555_pf.html

³³ Sergei Lavrov, “Russia’s Foreign Policy: Historical Background,” The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 3 March 2016, at http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2124391. See also, Mikhail Zygar, *All the Kremlin’s Men: Inside the Court of Vladimir Putin* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2016), p. 19. Zygar holds that Bush did not view Russia as “a superpower like the United States or China, but a normal prosperous nation” [emphasis added].

³⁴ Scott Wilson, “Obama Dismisses Russia as ‘Regional Power’ Acting out of Weakness,” *The Washington Post*, 25 March 2014, at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obama-dismisses-russia-as-regional-power-acting-out-of-weakness/2014/03/25/1e5a678e-b439-11e3-b899-20667de76985_story.html.



politics and for Russia, a great power: 1) conducts an independent foreign policy; 2) has a recognized sphere of influence; 3) provides for its own defense by not relying on others; and 4) limits foreign intervention in its internal politics.³⁵ Russia sought treatment as an equal to the U.S. sitting across the table negotiating arms treaties and jointly deciding on other aspects of the world order as befitting great powers. Instead, it concluded the West is actively working to “turn it into little more than a regional power of limited capabilities.”³⁶

By failing to appreciate how important great power status was to Russia’s conception of itself and thus ultimately its domestic stability, Western policy makers paid insufficient heed to Russia’s need to at least be seen as having a major say in important international matters.³⁷ While Western policymakers understandably invested significant time and energy in the 1990s and 2000s encouraging Russia to embrace democratic institutions and free markets to heal the political and economic wounds wrought by 70 years of communism, far too little attention was paid to salving the psychological wounds inflicted by the loss of empire and understanding the extent

to which this loss affected the collective Russian psyche. Western policy makers acted as though once the oppressive Soviet governing apparatus was dismantled and replaced with democracy, a concomitant change would occur in Russia’s foreign policy.³⁸ For a while this illusion took hold, as post-Soviet Russia was so badly weakened in the aftermath of the Soviet Union’s collapse that Moscow did not have the means to assert what it regarded as its foreign policy prerogatives. What the West did not understand was that despite Yeltsin and Gorbachev’s commitments to erecting democratic institutions, both viewed Russia as a great power with interests that should be respected. Russia’s jettisoning the oppressive Soviet domestic structures and replacing them with the building blocks of liberal democracy, did not equate to a liberal foreign policy.³⁹

Trafficking in Foreign Policy Assertiveness to Bolster Domestic Legitimacy

Putin clearly believes that fostering a domestic narrative of a strong and assertive foreign policy that stands up to the West is important to bolstering the

³⁵ I want to thank Dmitry Suslov, National Research University Higher School of Economics, for sharing his deep understanding of the nuances in Russian thinking about what it means to be a great power; Private discussion, NATO Defense College, 1 June 2016.

³⁶ A.L. Khryapin, D.A. Kalinkin, V.V. Matvichuk, “Strategic Deterrence Against the U.S. Global ABM System and Prompt Global Strike Capabilities,” *Military Thought*, Vol. 24, no. 1, 2015, p. 1.

³⁷ See chapter three in James Sherr, *Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion: Russia’s Influence Abroad*, London, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2013. Sherr offers an insightful explanation of the great power perception gap and brilliantly elucidates developments in Russia’s relationship with the West in the Post-Soviet era.

³⁸ Keir Giles argues that Russian experts in the West were not surprised by Russia’s assertive foreign policy. Writing about Russia’s successful intervention in Ukraine and Syria, he states, “the capabilities it employed to do so surprised the West, despite being well advertised in advance and their development described in detail by the Russia-watching community in Western nations.” See, Keir Giles, *Russia’s ‘New’ Tools for Confronting the West: Continuity and Innovation in Moscow’s Exercise of Power*, Chatham House, March 2016, at <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/research/2016-03-21-russias-new-tools-giles.pdf>. See also, Steven J. Main, “‘You Cannot Generate Ideas by Orders’: The Continuing Importance of Studying Soviet Military History—G. S. Isserson and Russia’s Current Geo-Political Stance,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 2016, Vol. 29, No. 1, 48–72.

³⁹ Even today, Mikhail Gorbachev continues to champion the Russia-is-a-great-power view he presented at the United Nations nearly 30 years ago. He avidly supports Putin’s foreign policy goals including Moscow’s seizure of Crimea. See, Neil MacFarquhar, “In Putin’s Russia, Gorbachev is Both Reviled and Revered,” *International New York Times*, 2 June 2016, and Mikhail Gorbachev’s speech to the 43rd U.N. General Assembly Session, 7 December 1988, from CNN Cold War at http://astro.temple.edu/~rimmerma/gorbachev_speech_to_UN.htm. See also,



legitimacy of his regime. Gleb Pavlovsky, an insider with first-hand knowledge of the inner workings of the Russian system and who advised three Russian Presidents from 1996-2011, flatly asserts that “When controlled emergencies could not be ginned up inside the country, foreign adventures sufficed: first Ukraine, then Syria...”⁴⁰ The temptation to use foreign adventures to bolster legitimacy is likely to increase as Russia’s faltering economy means that Putin will be unable to deliver on his social contract with the Russian people. The growing stridency – almost to the point of hysteria – of Russian propaganda vis-a-vis NATO, and the West more generally, lays bare the extent to which Putin relies on manipulating the domestic perception of foreign threats to his political advantage. This approach has been largely successful, nowhere more so than in Putin’s most popular and dramatic foreign policy stroke. As Dennis Volkov, a leading Russian commentator, wrote, Russia’s “takeover of Crimea combined with the great-power rhetoric has allowed the Russian authorities to reverse the long trend of falling popular support.”⁴¹ Given the nearly universal belief in Russia that Crimea belonged to Russia, domestic support for Putin’s seizure of Crimea hardly needed to be manufactured. However, Putin did need to use

information warfare to convince both domestic and international audiences (as well as those in Crimea) that Russia was compelled to take over Crimea in response to both Western machinations and calls for help from the inhabitants of Crimea.

How Russia Conceives of Information Warfare

In the Russian formulation, information warfare—also referred to as information operations—is “an across-the-board employment of information in whatever form to enable the user to achieve his goals on and off the battlefield.”⁴² On the battlefield, the military seeks to gain “information superiority over adversary forces.”⁴³ Used more broadly, “information warfare (or operations) is [the] conscious employment of information to enable the user to achieve his political, economic, military, or any other goals.”⁴⁴ And it is all-encompassing, calculated to gain the support of the target population on the battlefield, at home and in the international community.⁴⁵ To be effective, information warfare “must be conducted **constantly**, in peacetime, in the period of threats... and in wartime.”⁴⁶ Further, it must be done “by committing all available forces and software and

⁴⁰ Gleb Pavlovsky, “Russian Politics Under Putin: The System Will Outlast the Master,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2016, p. 16.

⁴¹ Denis Volkov, *Supporting a War That Isn't: Russian Public Opinion and the Ukraine Conflict*, Carnegie Moscow Center, 9 September 2015, <http://carnegie.ru/commentary/?fa=61236>.

⁴² Kh .I. Sayfetdinov, “Information Operations on the Battlefield,” *Military Thought*, Vol. 23, no. 3, 2014, p. 72. This article equates information warfare and information operations. Others view information warfare as operating on a strategic level and information operations as tactical. The 2011 *Russian Federation Armed Forces' Information Space Activities Concept* does not define information operations at all, but only information war as “the confrontation between two or more states in the information space with the purpose of inflicting damage to information systems, processes and resources, critical and other structures, undermining the political, economic and social systems, a massive psychological manipulation of the population to destabilize the state and society, as well as coercion of the state to take decisions for the benefit of the opposing force.” Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, <http://eng.mil.ru/en/science/publications/more.htm?id=10845074@cmsArticle>

⁴³ Sayfetdinov, p. 72.

⁴⁴ Sayfetdinov, p. 72.

⁴⁵ *Internet Trolling as a Tool of Hybrid Warfare: The Case of Latvia*, NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, undated, p.7, at <http://www.stratcomcoe.org/internet-trolling-hybrid-warfare-tool-case-latvia-0>.

⁴⁶ Sayfetdinov, p. 74, bold in original text.



hardware potentialities to impact the opponent's information capabilities and protect our own against similar actions by the opponent."⁴⁷

The Chief of the Russian General Staff, General Valery Gerasimov, underscored the importance of information warfare for future wars in his 2013 article on "The Value of Science in Prediction" or what is increasingly being called the "Gerasimov Doctrine." According to Gerasimov, "the very 'rules of war' have changed." Gerasimov did not provide a new view of warfare or the operational environment, but rather emphasizes the increasing "role of nonmilitary means of achieving political and strategic goals [which] has grown, and in some cases, they have exceeded the use of force in their effectiveness."⁴⁸ A chart accompanying Gerasimov's article on the "Role of Nonmilitary Methods in the Resolution of Interstate Conflict" depicts non-military elements outweighing military factors by a roughly 4:1 ratio. Bringing to bear all elements of state power to achieve strategic objectives is not new, but there is a new emphasis on non-military means to prepare the battlespace before, during and after the commencement of military operations. Information operations are presented as integral to all six main phases of conflict development—the only non-military measure spanning the entire spectrum of Gerasimov's basic stages of conflict.⁴⁹

It would be difficult to over emphasize the significance

of Gerasimov's words; they are an explicit statement by the senior Russian military officer that we are entering a new era of warfare in which combining the commanding heights of information is in many scenarios the key to victory. Gerasimov's thinking was heavily influenced by the Arab Spring and the color revolutions where tremendous change occurred as a result of social and political movements, not military actions. "We have seen a tendency toward blurring the lines between the states of war and peace. Wars are no longer declared... the so-called color revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East have shown that a prosperous state, in a matter of months or even days, can be transformed into a web of chaos, a humanitarian catastrophe and into civil war."⁵⁰

As a retired KGB agent, Putin's keen appreciation for the critical importance of controlling and using information manifested itself early in his tenure as President. In 2000, relatives of the 118 sailors who had perished in the Kursk nuclear submarine beneath the Barents Sea blamed Putin for inaction and the military for wasting time seeking assistance from abroad. Rather than publicly faulting the Russian military for the disaster (where the blame clearly laid), Putin did not question his or the military's competence, but rather lambasted the media for its "coverage of the incident, asserting three times that the public had been 'lied to' by reporters and media owners."⁵¹ The Kursk disaster revealed the limits to Putin's tolerance for a free press and his readiness to

⁴⁷ Sayfedinov, p. 74.

⁴⁸ Valery Gerasimov, "Tsennost' nauki v predvidenii" [The Value of Science in Prediction], *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kuryer*, no. 8, 27 February 2013, at <http://vpk-news.ru/print/articles/14632>.

⁴⁹ Gerasimov, 27 February 2013.

⁵⁰ Gerasimov, 27 February 2013.

⁵¹ Mikhail Zygar, *All the Kremlin's Men: Inside the Court of Vladimir Putin* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2016), p. 27.



suppress and control it. After Sergei Dorenko, host of a prime-time news show *Vremya*, aired part of Putin's meeting with relatives of the Kursk victims and accused Putin of lying, his show was cancelled effectively ending his career as a TV journalist.⁵²

The Kursk incident also crystalized for Putin the importance of controlling the public narrative. He voiced the “need to implement our own information policy.”⁵³ In this context, it is not surprising that upon coming to power, Putin quickly seized control of Russian television and its largest media outlets.⁵⁴ Almost 90% of Russians obtain their news from state-controlled television with only 30% relying on alternative information sources.⁵⁵ Putin understood that “TV is the only force that can unify and rule and bind” a country covering eleven time zones. “It's the central mechanism of a new type of authoritarianism.”⁵⁶

Indeed a hallmark of Putin's tenure has been the steady increase in the sophisticated use of, and control over, information as a means of achieving his objectives. In addition to controlling or having influence over nearly all major media outlets—television, newspapers, radio and the two most popular social media platforms, *Vkontakte* and *Odnoklassniki*—the

Russian government has invested heavily in having its information warriors obtain the language skills to enable them to engage targets in their own language. Keir Giles observes that “Russia has built up a highly-developed information warfare arsenal that NATO and EU are currently unable to compete with.”⁵⁷ And as Pomerantsev and Weiss note, “if previous authoritarian regimes were three parts violence and one part propaganda,” “this one is virtually all propaganda and relatively little violence.”⁵⁸

Informatsiya on Steroids

The Kremlin's successful use of information operations in Crimea and the Donbass awakened the West to the centrality of Putin's use of information warfare. Putin sees information operations as central to his efforts to undermine Western institutions and alliances and achieve the twin goals of breaking apart NATO and discrediting liberal alternatives to his autocratic rule. The relentless bombardment of Russian propaganda led an overwhelming majority of Russians to believe the 2013-14 Euromaidan protests in Ukraine that led to the ouster of President Viktor Yanukovich was not a popular uprising, but a result of Western and U.S.-led instigation.⁵⁹ Russian disinformation also

⁵² Zygar, *Kremlin's Men*, p. 28.

⁵³ Zygar, *Kremlin's Men*, p. 28.

⁵⁴ Peter Pomerantsev, *Nothing Is True and Everything Is Possible* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2014), p. 6; Denis Volkov, “Why Russians Stopped Loving America. The West's Squandered Opportunities and Moscow's Propaganda Powerhouse,” *Vedomosti* (translated by Meduza), 25 April 2016, at <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2016/04/25/opinion-why-russians-stopped-loving-america>.

⁵⁵ Volkov, “Why Russians Stopped Loving America.”

⁵⁶ Pomerantsev, *Nothing Is True*, p. 5.

⁵⁷ Giles, “Russia's Hybrid Warfare: A Success in Propaganda,” p. 1-2. On increased funding to media operations abroad, see “Biudzheth pomozhet ‘Pervomu’ I VG-TRK” [Budget Will Help Channel One and VGTRK], *Kommersant.ru*, 30 June 2015, at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2757814>.

⁵⁸ Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss, *The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money*, Institute of Modern Russia, New York, 2014; See also, Keir Giles, “Russia's Hybrid Warfare: A Success in Propaganda,” Security Policy Working Paper, No. 1, Federal Academy for Security Policy, 18 February 2015, p. 2, at https://www.baks.bund.de/sites/baks010/files/working_paper_security_policy_1_2015.pdf.

⁵⁹ Denis Volkov, “Supporting a War That Isn't: Russian Public Opinion and the Ukraine Conflict,” Carnegie Moscow Center, 9 September 2015, <http://carnegie.ru/commentary/?fa=61236>.



caused confusion in the West regarding the extent of Moscow's direct involvement in Crimea, leading to uncertainty and delay in formulating an effective response. "Instead of discussing possible responses, NATO or EU members would get bogged down in arguments over what is really happening." And, "by the time a degree of clarity is achieved, it might be too late or at least much more difficult to neutralize or track down the perpetrators."⁶⁰

Engaging in information warfare requires not only the ability to shape, develop and project messages, but controlling one's own information space to ensure foreign media and domestic opposition are denied a communications platform. Putin is well aware that information warfare is something that both sides can practice. Indeed since the Russian seizure of Crimea and its Donbas incursion, the Russian government has passed numerous pieces of legislation aimed at tightening state control over the media and the internet. These include the 2014 Personal Data Law requiring internet companies to store data on Russian citizens—all for the unstated purpose of making the information accessible to the FSB;⁶¹ an anti-piracy law implemented in May 2015 extending 2013 legislation on films, videos and other web material, resulting in the Moscow City Court issuing a permanent ban on twelve websites for copyright violations in October 2015; extremism laws that came into force in August 2014 and May

2015 that increased the prison terms for operators of media and increased fines for media or publishing material that sought to justify terrorist or extremist activity; the 2014 law restricting share of foreign ownership of Russian media outlets to a maximum of 20 per cent;⁶² And the "right-to-be-forgotten" law enacted in January 2016 that essentially requires search engines to remove material that individuals deem offensive.⁶³

These laws reflect recognition on the part of the Russian government that successful information operations require control not only over the message but the full spectrum of media over which the message is transmitted. Russian information warriors well understand that with the digital revolution permitting rapid dissemination of information across all mediums, Russia's messaging must be pervasive, rapid and voluminous. Thus, operations rely not only on traditional media with a modern, up-to-date look, but also on an army of commentators—referred to as trolls—who scour the internet to respond quickly to criticisms of Russia and counterpunch with the spread of disinformation. Russian cyber warriors also employ worldwide web robots or computer programs, known as bots, which automatically send out information at rates faster than a human can. RT (formerly known as *Russia Today*), a Russian television network with outlets across the globe, issues a tweet every two minutes,

⁶⁰ Nicu Popescu, "Hybrid Tactics: Russia and the West," European Union Institute for Security Studies, No. 46, October 2015, p. 2, at http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Alert_46_Hybrid_Russia.pdf.

⁶¹ *Media Environment Guide—Russia*, BBC Monitoring, 6 November 2015, p. 12.

⁶² BBC Monitoring, p. 13.

⁶³ BBC Monitoring, p. 12 and add other sources.



which are then shared—often hundreds of times. Analysis of roughly 33,000 tweets from three news outlets revealed that RT’s retweets come “from relatively few followers” and the pattern is such that bots probably disseminate them.⁶⁴ Taking a page from the old agitprop playbook, RT exalts the “objectivity” of its reporting and accuses others of bias and lacking objectivity. In fact, the Kremlin has “complete control over the truth.”⁶⁵ RT’s managing editor acknowledged “there is no such thing as objective reporting,” suggesting that the Russian “point of view” is the Kremlin’s point of view. The “purge of Russia’s information space...[has] helped the authorities shape public opinion as it suited them.”⁶⁶ Moreover, the quality of the Kremlin’s propaganda is sophisticated and urbane, not boorish and uncultured as in Soviet days.⁶⁷ But, like the Soviet days, the propaganda is aimed at mobilizing all of society, and affecting the economic, political and social spheres.⁶⁸ It is not about selling an idea or model of the best form of governance. Rather it is about destroying objective truth. The mendacity is smooth and the dividing line between truth and fiction remain unclear.

Destroy the Truth

Russia fabricates stories and distorts information without regard to verifiable facts. It weaponizes information to sow discord and spread doubt, rather than advance a position or cause.⁶⁹ For instance, soon after signing a ceasefire in Syria, the Russian military bombed five Syrian medical facilities in Syria. During this devastating operation that killed civilians and much-needed medical staff, “their ministry of foreign affairs tweeted about humanitarian aid shipments.”⁷⁰ The dissonance between reality and fiction are captured in the title of Peter Pomerantsev’s book, *Nothing is True And Everything is Possible*. When you check the propaganda “to see whether there really are fascists taking over Ukraine or whether there are children being crucified, you find it’s all untrue, and the women who said they saw it all are actually hired extras dressed up as ‘eye-witnesses.’”⁷¹ The Kremlin has created a world of spin, where truth is negotiable; in this world where a popular uprising in Ukraine becomes a fascist coup and Russia’s propping up a Syrian dictator becomes an antiterrorist operation,⁷² the realm of the possible has been expanded.

⁶⁴ “Tweegtanda,” *The Economist*, 10 September 2016, p. 45.

⁶⁵ Peter Pomerantsev, *Nothing Is True and Everything Is Possible*, New York, Public Affairs, 2014, 47.

⁶⁶ Volkov, 25 April 2016.

⁶⁷ RT has been in France for only 18 months and already has 2.5 million unique visitors per month. It plans on launching a 24-hour news channel in 2017. See, Theo Caubel, Philippine David, Corentin Dionet, “RT France, Sputnik: Ten Things To Know About Russian Media in France,” *Rue 89*, 2 January 2017, at <http://rue89.nouvelobs.com/2017/01/02/dix-choses-a-savoir-les-medias-russes-france-266008>

⁶⁸ Andrew Monaghan, Russian State Mobilization Moving the Country on to a War Footing, Chatham House, May 2016, p. 6, at <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/research/2016-05-20-russian-state-mobilization-monaghan-2.pdf>

⁶⁹ Ben Nimmo describes Russia’s weaponization of information as an offensive weapon that uses tactics intended to dismiss, distort, distract, and dismay. See, *Anatomy of an info-war: How Russia’s Propaganda Machine Works, and How Counter It*, Central European Policy Institute, 19 May 2015.

⁷⁰ Roman Skaskiw, “Nine Lessons of Russian Propaganda,” *Small Wars Journal*, 27 March 2016, p. 3.

⁷¹ Pomerantsev, *Nothing is True*, 231.

⁷² Brian Whitmore, The Morning Vertical, 11 August 2016, at <http://www.rferl.org/content/the-morning-vertical-august-11-2016/27914678.html>.



Russian Information Warfare in the Baltics: A Case for Concern?

The large Russian-speaking populations in the Baltics make the Baltics vulnerable to Russian information warfare. For example, while it is well known that Estonia was occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940, Russian media maintains that Estonia joined the Soviet Union voluntarily.⁷³ And in 2015, the Russian Prosecutor General's Office announced plans to assess the legitimacy of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania's independence.⁷⁴ A recent article in *Vesti Segodnya*, a Russian daily newspaper published in Latvia, with the self-serving title "Russia is No Threat," states that "public trust in the government is very low in Latvia...Latvians are openly saying that it is time to change the political elite."⁷⁵ In support, this Russian publication conveniently offers statistics on the Latgale region of Latvia, a region that borders Russia and has a large ethnic Russian population. Pro-Russian nationalist groups in Latgale argue that this region is under cultural threat partly because about 100,000 people speak Latgalian "and nobody is punished for speaking it."⁷⁶ These groups have called on Moscow to revise the Baltic borders in a "preventive occupation." Online appeals have been made calling for establishment of a "Latgalian People's Republic," what analysts characterize as "a Latvian

version of the Donetsk People's Republic supported by Russia in Ukraine."⁷⁷ Vladimir Linderman, head of the Latvian branch of Russia's National Bolshevik Party, asserts that they are only seeking 'autonomy' not independence or a Russian land grab.⁷⁸ Typical of Russian information operations, the messages can be mixed, but they all point to greater Kremlin influence.

Many argue that Russia would not risk NATO invoking Article V by invading one or more of the Baltic countries because the Baltics do not have the same shared history as "little Russia."⁷⁹ But Russia believes that as a great power, it has the right to meddle in countries of the Former Soviet Union, the area it condescendingly refers to as the near abroad (*blizhnee zarubezhe*). Because the European Union and NATO are Putin's primary targets, the Baltics, which joined NATO and the EU in 2004, could be their Achilles heel. Putin believes he must stop the spread of Western institutions and "supplant them with his own model of governance."⁸⁰ James Sherr has asserted that "for 20 years, the Russian Federation has officially—not privately, informally or covertly, but officially—equated its own security with the limited sovereignty of its neighbors."⁸¹

⁷³ Pomerantsev and Weiss, *The Menace of Unreality*, p. 25.

⁷⁴ "Russia Examines 1991 Recognition of Baltic Independence," 30 June 2015, BBC, at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33325842>.

⁷⁵ Abik Elkin, "Russia is No Threat. Astounding Results of Poll on Public Sentiments in Our Country," *Vesti Segodnya* [News Today], 29 June 2016.

⁷⁶ Elkin, 29 June 2016.

⁷⁷ Andrew Higgins, "Latvian Region Has a Distinct Identity, and Allure for Russia," *The New York Times*, 20 May 2015, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/21/world/europe/latvian-region-has-distinct-identity-and-allure-for-russia.html>

⁷⁸ Higgins, 20 May 2015.

⁷⁹ Doug Bandow, "Why on Earth Would Russia Attack the Baltics?" *National Interest (Online)*, 7 February 2016.

⁸⁰ Putin's war on the West," *The Economist*, 14 February 2015.

⁸¹ Brian Whitmore, "Fighting the Long War," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 16 June 2015, at <http://www.rferl.org/a/fighting-the-long-war/27075499.html>



Protection of Russian Citizens Can Serve as a Pretext for Intervention

Russian military doctrine and foreign policy concept lay out Russia's right to protect citizens abroad, a claim Russia could use as a pretext to intervene in a country's internal affairs to achieve its aims. Both the 2010 and 2014 Military Doctrines state that "the Russian Federation considers it legitimate to utilize the Armed Forces and other troops in order to... ensure the protection of its citizens located beyond the borders of the Russian Federation."⁸² Roughly 25% of Estonia and Latvia's and 6% of Lithuania's population are ethnic Russian.⁸³ Ominously, Russia's Human Rights Ombudsman, Tatiana Moskalkova, has made clear that "Protection of Russians' rights and freedoms in the Baltic states... will be needed."⁸⁴ If Russia determines that violating one of the Baltic countries' territorial integrity was in its interests, it would not roll in with tanks, but would move stealthily employing the same playbook used in Ukraine. This approach is evident in the hacked emails of Vladislav Surkov, Putin's point man in Ukraine. The emails revealed a "Civil Initiative" plan to mobilize protests in Kharkiv and have the citizens

"rise up." Though the plan ultimately failed, it called for the promulgation of fake claims that Ukrainian nationalists were conducting "bloody attacks" on Russian speakers.⁸⁵ This would provide the pretext for Russia to move in to protect ethnic Russians. The country would be divided and another "frozen conflict" would exist which well suits Moscow's interests.

To use protection of Russian citizens in other countries as a pretext for meddling and projecting its influence beyond its own borders, Russia attempts to issue passports to Russian minorities, thereby creating more Russian citizens requiring protection. Issuance of passports is seen as step toward building allegiance toward Russia. This in turn strengthens Moscow's influence in these nations. Russia will grant citizenship to people of Russian descent regardless of where they live or whether they have citizenship status elsewhere. This is not new as Russian diplomats handed out passports to ethnic Russians in Estonia in the early 1990s⁸⁶ and subsequently to ethnic Russians in all three Baltic nations.⁸⁷ But, today Moscow uses more sophisticated, tailored messages to convince ethnic Russians living in other nations to

⁸² Voennaia doktrina rossiiskoi federatsii [Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation], 5 February 2010, section III.20 and III.26, at <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/33.html>; Voennaia doktrina rossiiskoi federatsii (Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation), 26 December 2014, section III.22 and III.31, at <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d527556bec8deb3530.pdf>. See also, Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 28 June 2000, III.4, <http://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm>

⁸³ Voennaia doktrina rossiiskoi federatsii [Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation], 5 February 2010, section III.20 and III.26, at <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/33.html>; Voennaia doktrina rossiiskoi federatsii (Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation), 26 December 2014, section III.22 and III.31, at <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d527556bec8deb3530.pdf>. See also, Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 28 June 2000, III.4, <http://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm>

⁸⁴ *The World Factbook*, Central Intelligence Agency, at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/xx.html>

⁸⁵ "Protection of Russian Citizens' Rights Abroad Important Area of Work, Open Source, Interfax, 22 April 2016.

⁸⁶ Maxim Tucker, "Hackers Leak Putin Plan to Carve Up Ukraine," *The Times*, 3 November 2016, at, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/hackers-leak-putin-plan-to-carve-up-ukraine-hxw7zvbcb>

⁸⁷ Unlike South Ossetia where 90% of inhabitants had obtained Russian passports by 2008, polls in recent years have shown that a small minority of ethnic Russians in Estonia has sought Russian passports. This has not stopped Russia campaigning, however, to issue more passports. I thank Mark Kramer for our discussion on this topic.

⁸⁷ Tony Selhorst, "Russia's Perception Warfare," *Militare Spectator*, no. 4, 2016, p.153.



adopt Russian citizenship. In Ukraine, since at least 2008, Russian messaging aimed at ethnic Russians argued that taking Russian citizenship would come with economic benefits, such as pensions. In Estonia, adopting Russian citizenship was encouraged by an appeal to ideological reasoning rather than pocketbooks. The emphasis was on creating a Russian world (*russkii mir*), and maintaining values and language as part of that Russian culture. Lithuania is more resistant to ideological appeals and in response Russian TV runs movies and shows that appeal to nationalistic feelings.⁸⁸

Conclusion

It would be difficult to overestimate the centrality and ubiquity of information warfare in the current conduct of Russian statecraft. As Putin aggressively pursues Russia's geopolitical revival, his reliance on information warfare will only increase, as he moves from success to success. While Western policymakers have come to a belated recognition of the challenge posed by Russian information warfare, the sheer scope and ambition animating its employment is insufficiently appreciated. Nor has there been even the beginnings of a coherent, unified response from Western capitals. Unless current trends are reversed, Putin is well on his way to at least partly reversing the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century" and riding this achievement to enduring domestic popularity and the resultant regime legitimacy it will afford.

⁸⁸ Personal discussions with colleagues at NDC, May-June 2016.