The Soviet Origins of Russian Hybrid Warfare

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TARAS KUZIO AND PAUL D'ANIERI, JUN 17 2018

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This chapter analyses the Soviet origins of Russia's use of hybrid warfare, assassinations, information and cyber warfare. Ukraine and Ukrainian nationalism were – and continue to remain – key targets for Soviet and Russian hybrid and information warfare. The EU's weekly *Disinformation Review* documented nearly 1, 000 fake news stories issued in one small period October 2015–July 2016 directed against Ukraine and the three Baltic States.[1] In the decade before the crisis, Russia's hybrid, information and cyber warfare were first used against Ukraine and its neighbours and later against Europe and North America. Putin actively intervened in the 2004 Ukrainian presidential elections, visiting Kiev during the first and second rounds, lending Russian political technologists (Gleb Pavlovsky, Marat Gelman, Igor Shuvalov, Sergei Markov and others) and providing hundreds of millions of dollars in assistance to the Yanukovych campaign. The most egregious example of Russian interference was the poisoning of Viktor Yushchenko and the less well known foiled terrorist attack on his elections headquarters.[2] Andrew Wilson's study of Russia's political technologists' manipulation of the media and election campaigns was published a decade before the 2014 crisis. As Brian Whitmore writes, 'Estonians were getting hacked by Russia long before it was cool. Ukrainians had to deal with Kremlin interference in their elections before it became trendy. Georgia and Moldova had to live with disinformation, fake news, and active measures before these things became fashionable catchphrases. It's a good idea to pay very close attention to what Russia does to its neighbours, because it often foreshadows things Moscow will later try out farther to the West'.[3]

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first is a comparative study of Soviet and Russian hybrid and information warfare. The second and third sections analyse Soviet and Russian approaches to non-linear warfare through goals, tactics and results.

The Soviet Union and Russia Compared

Very active periods of Soviet and Russian hybrid and information warfare have taken place during periods of conservative and nationalist retrenchment, when the USSR was ruled by Leonid Brezhnev, Yury Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko from the mid-1960s to mid-1980s and under President Putin since 2000. Putin was socialised into the Soviet system during the Brezhnev era when he joined the KGB in 1975. Soviet conservatives and Russian nationalists look with nostalgia to the Brezhnev era and denigrate liberal anti-Stalinist reformers Nikita Khrushchev and Gorbachev who ruled before and after. Gorbachev in particular is loathed because he is associated with the disintegration of the USSR. The myth of the Great Patriotic War was created during the Brezhnev era and such a myth required praise of Joseph Stalin as the Soviet leader who built a modern, industrialised Soviet superpower that won the war and with its mighty nuclear arsenal was feared by the West. Promotion of the Great Patriotic War myth has always therefore gone hand in hand with a cult of Stalin (and a concomitant downplaying of his crimes against humanity). Anti-Western xenophobia and Russian great power nationalism, coupled with Putin's anger at the West's alleged unwillingness to respect Russia as a great power, are driving forces underpinning the information warfare against NATO and EU members.[4]

Putin moved twice to the nationalist right during the decade leading up to the 2014 Ukraine-Russia crisis. The 2003

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and 2004 Rose and Orange Revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine respectively influenced Putin's first move to the right. Anton Shekhovtsov believes this also triggered an important change in attitudes among Russian leaders towards working with the extreme right in Europe.[5] By 2007, the year Putin gave his inflammatory speech to the Munich Conference on Security Policy,[6] Russian nationalism was the dominant influence among the majority of Russian leaders and public and United Russia, Putin's party of power, had become a 'nationalist party of Russia'.[7] Marlene Laruelle writes that United Russia has 'become one of the major actors of the nationalist narrative'.[8] Putin's second turn even further to the nationalist right came after his re-election in 2012 when he focused on integrating Ukraine into his Eurasian project, began describing Russians and Ukrainians as 'one people', promoted a conservative values agenda and aligned Russia with anti-EU extreme right and left political forces. Putin believed the Rose and Orange Revolutions and large street protests in Moscow in 2011–2012 were Western conspiracies directed against Russia. The protests came during the midst of what Moscow viewed as the Western orchestrated Arab Spring in Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain. Shekhovtsov argues the colour revolutions, Moscow protests and Arab Spring generated widespread paranoia in the Russian leadership culminating in the need to find international allies. This in turn led to a predilection to Russian cooperation with populist nationalists and neo-fascist groups in Europe and North America.[9]

The Soviet Union was very active in the field of *dezinformatsiya*. Although much of what Russia undertakes is new, the USSR long practiced 'subversion, disinformation and forgery, combined with the use of special forces'. [10] In the 1930s, the Soviet Union's information warfare was highly successful in covering up knowledge in the West of the artificial famine (*Holodomor* [*to murder by famine or terror famine*]) which killed 4–4.5 million people in Ukraine. *New York Times* correspondent Walter Duranty[11] won a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of the USSR and yet he was one of many who deliberately or unwittingly became 'useful idiots'[12] in covering up the *Holodomor*.[13]

The Soviet secret police, the KGB 'had a special department responsible for 'active measures', designed to weaken and undermine the West'.[14] Active measures were treated as different to espionage and counter-intelligence and included written and spoken disinformation, efforts to control the media in foreign countries, the use of foreign communist parties and front organisations controlled by the Communist Party's International department, clandestine radio stations, blackmail and political influence through collaborative elites. The means for the USSR to pursue active measures included forgeries (a well-known example was that of a US military manual and 'secret' diplomatic letters)[15], rumours, insinuations and 'altered facts' and lies – all very similar to today's 'fake news'.

The USSR had long undertaken 'wet actions' (assassinations) against opponents of the Soviet regime. Ukrainian nationalist leader and social democrat Symon Petlura was assassinated by a Soviet agent in Paris only four years after the USSR was founded. The USSR undertook hybrid warfare in pursuit of regime change in Afghanistan, Africa and Central and Latin America. The USSR long deployed Special Forces in developing countries in advance of invasions or to train local forces and national liberation groups.

Modern technology and social media provide Russia with greater opportunities to use hybrid, informational and cyber wars. British domestic intelligence MI5 chief Andrew Parker warned that Russia is using 'a whole range of powers to push its foreign policy in increasingly aggressive ways – involving propaganda, espionage, subversion and cyber-attacks'.[16]

Russia's post-modern approach to information warfare propaganda is different to Soviet messaging because many narratives are broadcast on multiple media to undermine the entire concept of a single truthful narrative. Unlike the USSR, contemporary Russia does not just offer an alternative truth but also deconstructs the very idea of objective reporting. Russia's post-modern approach to information warfare propaganda has been undertaken alongside an increasingly effective use of digital media. Russia has invested large resources in its information and cyber warfare capabilities.

The Soviet Union

Goals

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Soviet hybrid operations had a range of goals, including: (1) infiltrating and undermining national liberation movements and dissident groups within the USSR and discrediting their Western sponsors; (2) dividing and weakening NATO and the EU; (3) fanning opposition to the US military and nuclear presence in Europe; and (4) competing with the US, UK and France for spheres of influence in Latin America and the developing world.

The first and perhaps most urgent goal was to counter the biggest domestic threat to the USSR which came from nationalist movements seeking the independence of their homeland (rather than from democratic dissidents who sought a democratised USSR). The biggest nationalist threat came from Ukrainians and the three Baltic States. From the 1960s to the 1980s, Soviet propaganda and ideological campaigns had attacked Ukrainian and Baltic dissidents and nationalists and émigré diasporas by portraying them as 'Nazi collaborators', 'bourgeois nationalists' and agents of Western and Israeli intelligence agencies. The Polish communist regime, which had fought a brutal war against Ukrainian nationalists in its Southeast from 1944–1947 and ethnically cleansed 150,000 Ukrainians in Akcja 'Wisła' (Operation Vistula), also attacked Ukrainian nationalism.

The Soviets expended huge expense on these ideological campaigns through the KGB-controlled Society for Cultural Relations Abroad which published the free weekly newspaper News from Ukraine/Visti z Ukrayiny. In addition to lauding Soviet achievements and praising Soviet nationalities policies, they published ideological tirades and stories about Ukrainian 'Nazi collaborators' and their ties to Western intelligence services.

The term 'Banderite' (follower of the controversial World War II-era nationalist leader Stepan Bandera), used by the Soviet regime to denote a sadist, murderer and Nazi accomplice, was revived by Putin's regime in its information war against Ukraine. Nearly any supporter of increased Ukrainian autonomy could be denigrated in such a manner: national communists, liberal dissidents, and nationalists in the USSR and Orange and Euromaidan Revolutionaries in Ukraine were and are presented as being in the pay of the West and harbouring 'Nazi' and 'fascist' inclinations. A Nezavisimaya Gazeta Russian journalist writes 'The idea of an independent Ukraine is Russophobic by definition. That is, either Russia and Ukraine are one country, or they are enemies'.[17]

Russian nationalists were never attacked by the Soviet regime because they did not seek an independent state; Alexander Motyl therefore believes it is a myth to call them 'nationalists'.[18] Russian and dissidents and national opposition were therefore different to national democrats and nationalists in Ukraine, the three Baltic States and other non-Russian republics of the USSR. In August 1991, the Russian SFSR did not declare independence from the USSR and the annual 'Russia Day' holiday is based on the June 1990 Russian Declaration of Sovereignty.

Another Soviet goal also resonates today: increasing divisions within Europe and in Trans-Atlantic relations. The Soviet Union promoted 'peace movements' and nuclear disarmament. US intelligence documented Soviet funding of 'peace' groups in Europe[19] to such organisations as CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) in the UK which included many prominent leaders of the Labour Party then and today.[20] In 1986, the Soviet World Peace Council (WPC), a Soviet front organisation, held its congress in Denmark, the first occasion the WPC had held an event in a NATO member. Contemporary Russian strategies have similar goals of furthering divisions in Europe by supporting separatist groups, and anti-EU populist nationalist Brexit-type referendums.[21] NATO was always viewed as a major threat to Soviet security and therefore an important target for all manner of Soviet active measures.

Tactics

The Soviet secret police conducted assassinations since the mid-1920s which came to be known as 'wet operations'. These targeted opponents and what Moscow deemed to be 'traitors'. Russia's use of poisons and other agents predated the attempted assassinations of Yushchenko and Alexander Litvinenko by more than seven decades.

In 1926, the assassination of Petlyura in Paris was followed by three further assassinations of Ukrainian nationalist leaders: Yevhen Konovalets in Rotterdam in 1939 and Lev Rebet and Bandera in Munich in 1957 and 1959 respectively.[22] The assassination of Rebet was viewed as a trial run for Bandera, using a cyanide poison gun that the KGB had developed which left no traces and simulated a heart attack. Despite the embarrassment produced by

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the defection of KGB assassin Bohdan Stashynskyy in 1961 the USSR continued to undertake 'wet operations' through to the mid-1980s. In 1978, Bulgarian BBC journalist Georgi Markov was murdered in London using ricin poison administered by an umbrella.

In 1981, an attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II, whom the Soviet Union feared was supporting the anti-communist Solidarity movement in Poland, by a far right Turkish nationalist failed. The plot revealed many details of how the USSR used false flag operations to disguise its involvement. The attacker had been unknowingly working on behalf of the Bulgarian secret police and they in turn had been coordinating their actions with the KGB and GRU (Main Intelligence Directorate [Soviet military intelligence]). Soviet archives brought to the West by KGB defector Vasili Mitrokhin showed the extent of the Soviet penetration of Italy and other European countries and how the GRU was behind the attempted assassination of the Pope. GRU 'little green men' Special Forces who invaded the Crimea and mainland Ukraine in February–April 2014 were 'straight from the KGB playbook'.[23]

The USSR supported nationalists, separatists, anarchists and leftist extremists for their political usefulness rather than for ideological reasons. The USSR had forty training bases for such groups with an annual expenditure of $200 million with other training bases in Soviet satellite states Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and the GDR. The USSR and its Eastern European allies, particularly the GDR and Bulgaria, supported terrorist groups in Germany (Red Army Faction), Italy (Red Brigades), France (Corsica), Spain (Basques), Greece (Revolutionary Organisation 17 November), Canada (Front de libération du *Québec*) and the UK (The Official IRA, especially their political wing – the Workers Party[24]). The USSR also backed national liberation movements in Africa and Central and Latin America.[25] The KGB developed airplane hijackings as a tactic, and these grew in the 1970s to become a trademark of Palestinian liberation groups.[26]

The Soviet Union employed extensive *dezinformatsiya*, producing false stories and conspiracy theories. There are estimates the USSR conducted 10, 000 *dezinformatsiya* operations during the Cold War, the most famous of which was that the CIA invented AIDS.[27] Soviet active measures actively fanned anti-Americanism during the 1980s.

Results

The USSR imprisoned and executed Ukrainian nationalists as late as 1987 and its anti-nationalist propaganda declined in intensity only in the late-1980s. The Soviet Union's decades of anti-(Ukrainian) nationalist propaganda had successes and failures. On the success side, the stereotype of the Western Ukrainian nationalist who collaborated with the Nazis and is a Russophobe was established among many in Russia, some in Eastern Ukraine, and even among many in the West. Putin's government has effectively built on this Soviet legacy. In Eastern Ukraine, old stereotypes were enhanced by Russia's information warfare in 2013–2014 and contributed to transforming protests into an insurgency. Russia's information war against Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine since 2013–2014 inflamed public opinion which incited its proxies to ethnically cleanse Georgians and commit human rights abuses in South Ossetia and the Donbas.[28] The UN and international human rights organisations have raised questions of human rights abuses of civilians and prisoners of war.[29] Amnesty International described the summary executions of Ukrainian prisoners as amounting to war crimes.[30]

Despite the successes, Soviet suppression of Ukrainian nationalism did not succeed in undermining Ukrainians' desire for independence in 1991, and that independence, as was recognised at the time, was the crucial factor in dismantling the Soviet Union. Today, civic nationalism remains strong, and popular support for the extreme right in Ukraine is comparatively low by European standards. In large part due to Russia's actions, greater numbers of Ukrainian citizens have re-identified as ethnic Ukrainians increasing their share from 72.7% and 77.8 % in the 1989 Soviet and 2001 Ukrainian censuses respectively to 92% today. The Ukrainian language has become more popular: 'It used to be cool to speak Russian. Now it's cool to speak Ukrainian'.[31] Ukrainian scholar Volodymr Kulyk has outlined the increase in popularity of Ukrainian over Russian language media, film and books since 2014.[32]

Russia

Goals

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The tactics and approaches that Russia carried with it institutionally from the Soviet era were matched with a newfound focus on the importance of what it understands as 'soft power'. Moreover, the role of new technology, beginning with the use of mobile phones and text messaging during the colour revolutions alerted Russian officials to the power of social media. The response has been a concerted effort to develop these weapons for the purposes of the state, and they are now deployed systematically to promote Russia's revival as a great power and to sow dissension within the Western alliance and international organisations. These tools are used by Putin for three goals.

The first goal is to pay the West back for its interference in domestic affairs in Russia and in Russia's 'zone of privileged interests'. If the West can interfere in the 2012 Russian presidential elections and foment regime change during the Euromaidan, Russia believes it can intervene in US and European elections.[33] Because Ukraine is seen as inextricably linked with Russia (see chapter three), Russian leaders do not believe the West has the same right to interfere in Ukraine as Moscow does. The problem is not with regime change in principle, as Foreign Minister Lavrov showed in 2008 when he proposed to US Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice that Russia withdraw its forces from Georgia in exchange for the removal of President Mikhail Saaakshvili.[34]

Russian efforts to influence the 2016 US presidential election[35] have drawn by far the most attention of Russia's efforts to shape elections in other countries, but there were also prominent efforts to shape the 2017 election in France as well as others. The details of these efforts and of their impact are still being uncovered, so rather than dig into this episode in detail, we simply note that it comprises an important example of Russia's broader strategy.

A second goal is to use information and cyber warfare to undermine the world order which was created after 1991 and which, Putin believes, was meant to keep Russia down and weak. This means challenging the norms on which US hegemony relies, and in particular promoting the idea of a multipolar world guided by traditional norms of non-interference as preferable to a world led by the West and promoting universal values of human rights and liberal democracy. Charap and Colton argue that the EU's belief in the 'inherent superiority of its systems and structures' led it to act 'as if Russia did not exist'.[36] The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Customs Union and Eurasian Union were presented by Putin as a Eurasian alternative to the EU for post-Soviet states. Russia continues a long-standing Soviet objective of seeking to replace NATO with a pan-European security organisation led by the OSCE where it would hold a veto.

Exploiting internal crises in the EU, such as the migration crisis and backing anti-EU populist nationalists, provides Russia with opportunities to weaken the EU. 'Conservative values' messaging on threats to national sovereignty, globalisation, same sex marriage, migration, and Islam has appeal among European and US populist nationalist voters.[37] Russian politicians and media have been enthusiastic about Brexit and British intelligence believes Russia was involved in the collapse of the voter registration website in the run-up to the UK's referendum on EU membership. An extensive investigation found suspicious Russian hacking that may have assisted the Brexit vote.[38] Growing evidence of Russian interference in the 2016 US elections and Brexit referendum have led the UK government to open its own investigation.

Russia's efforts to promote separatist movements in the West are in tension with its own determination to prevent Chechen independence and to integrate the post-Soviet region, but so far the contradiction has not appeared to be a problem. Russia has supported a range of separatist movements in the UK and elsewhere who have been invited to congresses in Moscow organised by the government-backed Anti-Globalisation movement in September 2015 and August 2016.[39] Russian social media and media outlets backed Scotland's independence in the September 2014 referendum. Since then former SNP (Scottish National Party) leader and First Minister of Scotland Alex Salmon has launched a chat show (with much controversy) on *Russia Today*.[40] Russian servers stepped in to support the illegal September 2017 Catalan referendum on independence after the Spanish authorities closed local servers counting the votes.[41]

Russia has supported anti-EU political forces in international organisations through manipulation of the media and the provision of financial 'loans'. In March 2015, *Rodina* (Motherland), a nationalist party loyal to Putin, organised a meeting of 150 representatives of European populist nationalist and neo-Nazi parties, such as the British National Party, at the 'International Russian Conservative Forum' who 'railed against Freemasons, LGBT people, and "Zionist

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puppet filth"'.[42] In the European Parliament, extreme right and left parties routinely support Russia's annexation of the Crimea, oppose Western sanctions and send 'observers' to elections in the Crimea and DNR and LNR.

France and Germany have been key targets of Russia's information and cyber warfare. Marine Le Pen received an $11.7 million 'loan' from Russia at the end of 2014. In France's 2017 elections, a senior French intelligence official was cited as saying, 'It is clear that Russia is sympathetic to Le Pen in the elections'.[43] The Front National (FN) never hid this and FN strategist Bertrand Dutheil de la Rochère speaking of Putin and Le Pen said, 'We share a similar vision of the world'.[44]

Russia's information and cyber warfare targeted the campaign of Emmanuel Macron because the other three leading candidates (populist nationalist Marine Le Pen, Gaullist François Fillon, and Trotskyist Jean-Luc Melenchon) had issued pro-Russian statements blaming Ukraine and the West for the crisis, called for the recognition of Russia's annexation of the Crimea and supported the dropping of sanctions. Russia undertook a range of 'active measures' against Macron during the election campaign that included the opening of 70,000 Facebook accounts and tens of thousands of 'bots' to spread anti-Macron content through social media. Thousands of emails were hacked from Macron election campaign servers and dumped on the Internet two days before the second round.[45]

Tactics

The continuity between Soviet KGB and Russian FSB (Federal Security Service)/GRU special operations was vividly seen in the first half of the 1990s, two decades before the 2014 crisis.[46] They rely on a wide array of Russian government agencies, sometimes working in close coordination, sometimes separately, with the Presidential administration in central control.[47]

The series of Russian interventions beginning in the early 1990s facilitated tactical continuity from the Soviet era to the post-Soviet era. In Georgia, former Soviet intelligence officers provided support to Abkhaz separatists in Georgia who were on the verge of being defeated. A ceasefire was called, Russian proxies were re-armed by Russia and provided with Russian FSB and GRU advisers. The proxies then re-launched the war, winning territory and forcing Georgia to accept the freezing of separatist control. When Russian proxies prove too weak to win, Russian regular army forces have been used repeatedly, as in Moldova's Trans-Dniestr in 1992, Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 1992 and 2008, and Ukraine's Donbas in 2014–2015.[48] In Azerbaijan, Russian proxies were not required because Armenian paramilitary forces supplied with Russian arms defeated the Azeri forces.

Russia's promotion of proxies in contested regions within its neighbours' borders in its neighbours has foreshadowed its tactics in Ukraine, bolstered by the Russian view that Ukraine itself is an artificial construct. Russian proposals to divide Ukrainian territory and for Russia to annex its Russian-speaking regions have been long-term staples of Russian nationalist dissident thought in the USSR and among contemporary nationalist circles in Russia.[49] Alexander Solzhenitsyn's 'Rebuilding Russia' published in 1990 and his appeal issued a year later during Ukraine's referendum on independence both called into question Ukrainian control over Eastern and Southern Ukraine.[50]

In Ukraine's 2004 presidential elections, the strategy of Russian political technologists was to promote 'directed chaos'[51] when a variety of Soviet-style active measures were undertaken by Russian political technologists against Yushchenko. This included registering 'technical' candidates supporting Yushchenko who were Russophobes and extremists, circulation of forged leaflets, publication of critical books and pamphlets, propaganda accusing him of being a 'fascist' and an American stooge, conducting terrorist attacks which were blamed on his team, and having fake nationalists dressed in SS-style black uniforms parading up and down Kiev in support of his candidacy.[52] All of these were intended to bolster the notion that Yushchenko was an extreme anti-Russian nationalist, and even a neo-Nazi. In other words, many of the strategies pursued in 2014 were already being pursued a decade earlier in Ukraine at a time when Ukraine was not on the radar of NATO and EU enlargement. 'We've been told that we're safe and we shouldn't make Russia angry (by joining NATO)', Poroshenko told the Ukrainian parliament, 'But Russia attacked Ukraine – which was outside all blocs – and has killed more than 10,000 of our citizens'.[53] Indeed, if 'directed chaos' was Russia's aim in Ukraine in 2004, Galeotti believes that Russia's aim in the Donbas is 'uncontrolled, weaponised chaos'.[54]

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In September 2006 and July 2009, four Russian diplomats were expelled from Georgia and two from Ukraine respectively for espionage. Russia's reaction in both cases far surpassed its typical response after the expulsion of Russian spies from Europe and North America. Following the expulsion from Ukraine, President Medvedev sent an open letter to Yushchenko with a long list of demands to change its domestic and foreign policies.[55] Medvedev's open letter not only laid out foreign policy demands, such as Ukraine not seeking NATO membership, but also demands over Ukrainian nationality policies; for example, ending the Ukrainian official view of the *Holodomor* as a famine directed against Ukraine that should be treated as a genocide. Russia's information war continues to disparage Ukraine's official views of the *Holodomor*.[56] Ukrainian and Russian nation-building policies have been diametrically opposite with the former condemning Stalinism and the latter promoting a cult of Stalin.[57]

'Wet operations' by intelligence agents, Russian proxies and organised crime working on behalf of the Russian government have continued into the present day with the assassinations of Chechen leaders and FSB defectors abroad. Russian intelligence conducts assassinations and terrorist campaigns inside Ukraine[58] and assassinations and attempted coups d'état abroad.

There are close parallels between the attempted poisoning of Yushchenko in 2004 and that of former KGB agent Alexander Litvinenko in London in 2006, with the dioxin and radioactive polonium used in their poisoning produced in Russian laboratories inherited from the USSR and run since 1991 by the Russian secret services. The Ukrainian authorities accused Russia of being behind the poisoning of Yushchenko but it remains unclear exactly who carried out the attack and whether the intention was to murder or incapacitate him. An extensive British government enquiry into the assassination of Litvinenko blamed the murder on Russian authorities, and the investigation concluded that Putin 'probably' approved his murder.[59] Since 2014, Russian intelligence services have conducted a targeted series of assassinations in the West and Ukraine. US intelligence ties fourteen assassinations abroad (outside Ukraine) to Russia.[60]

In 2017, targeted assassinations increased inside Ukraine. In March, Russian exile Denis Voronenkov, who had fled Russia into exile in Ukraine and was a key witness in the criminal case against former President Yanukovych, was murdered in Central Kiev. In March and June, Colonel Maksym Shapoval, commander of Ukraine's military intelligence and Special Forces, was murdered in a car bomb in Kiev. Colonel Oleksandr Kharaberyush, also Ukrainian military intelligence, was assassinated in Mariupol and Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) Colonel Yuriy Voznyy was killed and three others wounded in a car bomb in the village of Illinivka, near the anti-terrorist operation ATO front line. In June, Chechen exile Adam Osmayev, who had led a battalion fighting Russian forces in Chechnya, was seriously wounded in an attack by a Chechen organised crime leader from St. Petersburg posing as a journalist for *Le Monde*. In October 2017, a second attempt assassinated his wife Amina and wounded him while they were driving a car in Kiev. Four months later, Timur Mahauri, a Chechen with Georgian citizenship and a volunteer fighter in the Chechen battalion of Sheykh Mansur, was killed in a car bomb in Central Kiev.

Hybrid warfare in the Donbas is an 'offshoot of political technology' where 'information warfare' plays a central role.[61] 'Lies are part of the coin of the intelligence operative, and facts are fungible'. Such operations come naturally to Putin who spent 'a great deal of time in his professional life bending the truth, manipulating facts, and playing with fictions'.[62] Propaganda espoused by Russia's media, spin-doctors and political technologists is often believed by Russian leaders and public because, 'In place of politics, there is performance art. Instead of debate, there is spectacle. In lieu of issues, there is *dramaturgia*. And in place of reality, there is fantasy'.[63] Peter Pomerantsev writes, 'For what is Russia's policy in Ukraine if not a war on reality?'. Russian trolls on the Internet, Twitter, Facebook and fake websites promote pre-determined narratives and crowd out legitimate debate.[64]

Central to hybrid warfare are 'denial, disinformation and deception'. Invasions are conducted with stealth, deniability and confusion with the blurring the truth about the presence of forces, their objectives, combat readiness and numbers. This is not new as the USSR always denied it was behind terrorist groups active in Europe and used a false flag operation to blame Turkish nationalists for the assassination attempt on the Pope.

When asked about 'little green men' in the Crimea, Putin sardonically replied, 'There are many military uniforms. You can find them in any shop'. A month later he admitted the 'little green men' were Russian troops. Putin's repeated

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denials of Russian troops in the Donbas have been replicated in news stories broadcast and printed by Russian, Crimean and DNR-LNR media, as have reports of clearly staged Ukrainian 'terrorist attacks' that have been supposedly foiled.[65] 'Humanitarian convoys' transport much needed goods for the civilian population living in the DNR and LNR but they also conceal military equipment for Russian proxy forces. Fridan Vekouah, a Ukrainian undercover agent working in the depots receiving Russian humanitarian convoys was telephoned and told: 'Ok, you will get humanitarian goods, but it is not all humanitarian' and, 'You will take your part, and the military will take their part'.[66]

In the Russian military encyclopaedia, *maskirovka* is defined as 'a complexity of measures, directed to mislead the enemy regarding the presence and disposition of forces, military objectives, combat readiness and operations'.[67] Pomerantsev describes this virtual Russian world as one where, 'Life is just one glittering masquerade, where every role and any position or belief is mutable' and where fiction and reality are interchangeable.[68] Russian forces which invaded Ukraine in early 2015 were transported from as far away as the Buryat autonomous republic on the Mongolian border. A wounded tank driver, Dorji Batomunkuev from the Russian fifth tank brigade in Ulan-Ude, sensed they were being sent to Ukraine to fight. He recounted to the independent newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*[69] how before invading Ukraine they had painted over their tanks' markings and plates and took off arm patches and chevrons, leaving their civilian passports, military service cards and mobile telephones at the military base and training range.

Oscar Jonsson and Robert Seely describe Russian hybrid warfare as 'full spectrum conflict' where military and non-military factors are placed under one command and directed to a single strategic goal. These factors include information warfare, Special Forces, intelligence services, economic threats, political influence and 'traditional subversion'.[70] Bret Perry divides Russian hybrid warfare in Ukraine into five stages[71]: (1) *Political subversion* – seizing of state buildings, sabotage, assassinations, terrorism, propaganda and insertion of agents. (2) *Proxy* – consolidation of continuous areas, arrival of volunteers, creation of 'self-defence militias', destruction of government infra-structures and beginning of recruitment of local proxies. (3) *Intervention*: threats and preparations for invasion, destruction of government security forces, provision of logistics and support, and disruption by cyber-attacks. (4) *Coercive Deterrence (Strategic Coercion)* – shows of force by the larger neighbour, nuclear posturing and hints and threats of escalation to pressure the country under attack to capitulate. The massing of Russian troops on the border has been used in Georgia and Eastern Ukraine as a deterrent against an attack on its proxy forces as they represent a security guarantee to Russian proxy-controlled regions. They are also meant to deter the West from supplying arms to Ukraine by reinforcing the argument that whatever the West sends, Russia can send far more. (5) *Escalation* – from camouflaged hybrid warfare to intervention which is the least preferred outcome as it is easily detected. It is preferable to break the opponent's will to resist without launching a full attack.[72] Outright interventions and invasions, as in Georgia in August 2008 and Ukraine in August 2014 and February 2015, are called upon, 'When more subtle forms of violence – subversion and diplomacy – is insufficient for Russia, to reach its political goal…'[73] The goal of hybrid warfare is to achieve the goals without overt involvement.

Galeotti divides the implementers of hybrid warfare into four groups: (1) *'Polite people'*– *Spetsnaz* (including paratroopers and Marines and therefore closer to US Rangers than Delta Force) and conventional forces provide covert training, mobilise locals, and support and lead Russian proxies. Galeotti points out this tradition goes back as far as the role played by Stalin's secret police, the NKVD, in the Spanish Civil War. Similarly, in the 1940s, the NKVD had created fake UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army) units, which committed massacres of villagers and stole food to turn the local population against the Ukrainian nationalist underground. From the 1920s through to the 1980s, the Soviet secret police had created fake underground organisations in the USSR which gave their support to émigré groups in order to gather intelligence on the Russian and Ukrainian diasporas, infiltrate their political groups and lure their agents back to the homeland where they could be arrested and if possible turned. Myron Matviyeko, head of the émigré Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists' (OUN-B) Security Service (SB) was captured in 1951 after parachuting into Ukraine and rather than face execution agreed to work with the Soviet secret police, pretending he was running a nationalist underground through to 1960. In the Donbas, the GRU oversee Russian forces and Russian proxies while the FSB keep everybody in line. (2)*'Impolite people'* – self-defence militias and organised crime gangsters who were used in the early 1990s in the Trans-Dniestr, Abkhazia and South Ossetia are being used in a similar fashion in the Crimea and Donbas, two areas with traditionally high levels of criminality.[74] Local proxies,

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Galeotti points out, are used as political cover, as cannon fodder in skirmishes and battles, for disruption and as muscle. Russian proxies in the Donbas include a 'mix of regular Russian units, and ad hoc collection of nationalists and adventurers'.

A major group drawn upon by the Russian authorities in the Donbas have been Cossacks who have a tradition going back to the Tsarist Empire of acting as the state's vigilantes. Another group have been Chechens supplied by the autonomous republic's pro-Russian President Ramzan Kadyrov.[75] (3) *Intelligence* – the GRU have been the most assiduous in developing contacts with the international criminal network Galeotti describes as the *Crimintern*, a play on the *Comintern*, the Communist International active 1919–1943.[76] In September 2014, Estonian security service officer Eston Kohver, who was investigating cigarette smuggling, was kidnapped by Russian intelligence agents in a direct snub to the US, coming only two days after President Obama's visit to that country. The FSB permitted the smuggling to take place in return for the criminals being ready to provide favours in return. Cigarette smuggling is just one of many avenues weaponised by Russia.[77] (4) *Civilians* – information warriors and hackers, pro-Putin oligarchs, and domestic and international bankers infiltrate targets in various ways. Billions of dollars of capital have been exported to Western Europe, Cyprus and offshore tax havens earning the UK's capital city the nickname 'Londongrad'. This huge amount of capital purchases real estate, buys places in private schools for the children of oligarchs and corrupt state officials, and hires legions of investment bankers, lawyers, consultants and accountants. Former KGB officer Alexander Lebedev is the owner of the UK's *The Independent*, *Independent on Sunday* and *London Evening Standard* newspapers. The goal is to gain entry and begin shaping the interests and views of the target country's elite.

As events played out in the Donbas, there were clear stages to the escalation of combat. From 1 March to 24 May 2014, agitation and propaganda (i.e. information warfare) was followed by the seizure of state institutions in what Philip A. Karber describes as the transition from protests to terrorism.[78] This is an important juncture as the crisis could not have escalated from protests into an armed insurgency without external backing from Russian intelligence and Special Forces. Gerard Toal writes that the transition from anti-Maidan protests to armed revolt was only made possible by Russian 'armed provocations' in collaboration with oligarchs, veterans, pro-Russian movements and organised crime.[79] Mass anti-Ukrainian propaganda on Russian TV and social media helped transform public protests in the Donbas against the ousting of Yanukovych into an armed rebellion whose militias were then strengthened by Russian Special Forces. Nationalist volunteers were recruited by Russian intelligence services and by Russian TV propaganda. Russian intelligence officers had also been financing and training anti-Maidan ('anti-fascist') vigilantes in Kharkiv and elsewhere in Eastern Ukraine. Many of these vigilantes moved to join Russian proxies in the Donbas after the failed attempt to create a Kharkiv People's Republic.[80]

Between 25 May and 30 June 2014, the crisis escalated into an armed insurgency. In July, artillery in Russia pounded Ukraine and the following month, with its proxy forces on the verge of defeat, Russian forces invaded Ukraine. What made Ukraine different from the frozen conflicts in Moldova and Georgia was that Kiev could have defeated Russian proxy forces.[81] Since the signing of the Minsk 1 accords in September 2014, Russia is conducting a full-blown proxy war against Ukraine. Russia's 'Chechenisation' of its proxy war required the building of a 'large and better equipped fighting force than many of the countries represented around this table'. [82] In January 2015, the US Mission to the OSCE stated:

The separatist movement at this point is a de facto extension of the Russian military and an instrument of Russian national power. The Russian military has put in place a robust command structure in Eastern Ukraine, ranging from Russian General Staff officers overseeing operations down to junior officers. Russian personnel conduct communications, intelligence gathering, direct military operations, and help correct artillery fire. Separatist fighters have publicly acknowledged that they are operating under instructions from Moscow.[83]

Russia's 'full spectrum conflict' strategy in the Donbas of funding and supplying proxy forces is little different to what Moscow had earlier pursued in Moldova and Georgia 'when armed groups were manipulated, armed, and if need be, led by agencies of the Russian state until they achieved their ends'.[84] The end state is partition with the breakaway region controlled by Russia, the outcome frozen in time and the country unable to pursue membership in NATO and the EU.[85] In Moldova and Georgia, Russia's proxy forces defeated the country's armed forces leading to a conflict

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frozen by Russian 'peacekeepers'. With neither side defeated in the Donbas and the war on-going, it cannot be defined as a frozen conflict. US special envoy to the Ukraine peace talks Kurt Volker said, 'This is not a frozen conflict, this is a hot war…'.[86] Galeotti points out that it is, 'Russian artillery and armour, albeit largely based over the border, that represents the real force keeping the Donbas contested, not mercenaries and militias'.[87]

Russia has returned to the Soviet practice of fomenting terrorism and national liberation struggles abroad. The Russian Imperial Movement, with links to Igor Girkin (aka 'Strelkov') and paramilitaries fighting for Russian proxies in the Donbas,[88] is training neo-Nazi groups from Central and Western Europe.[89] Russia uses its Embassy in the Czech capital of Prague as a centre for information warfare and espionage throughout Central Europe.[90] In the Balkans, Russia has sought to stop Serbia from joining the EU. Russia attempted to halt Montenegro from joining NATO through a coup attempt and assassination plot against Montenegrin Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic. Russia's GRU provided US dollars, sophisticated encrypted mobile telephones, a large arsenal of weapons, and training.[91] The plot brought together nationalist Serbs and Russian Cossacks who had fought for Russian proxies in the Donbas. Cossack General Viktor Zaplatin, a Russian citizen, told a rally in Montenegro, 'The Orthodox world is one world. Here we see Serbs, Montenegrins, Russians, and Belarusians'. Aleksandr Borodai, former editor of Russian nationalist newspaper *Zavtra* and 'Prime Minister' of the DNR in 2014, sent greetings. Twenty Serbs and Russians were arrested by Montenegro which issued an international warrant for a further two Russians and three Serbs. One of the Serbs sought by Montenegro, Nemanja Ristic, was photographed next to Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov during his 12 December 2016 visit to Belgrade. Serbia arrested Ristic and another Serbian nationalist Predrag Bogicevic for their involvement in the Russian-backed coup. Montenegro accused GRU officers at large Eduard Shishmakov and Vladimir Popov of being the main instigators of the failed coup d'état.[92]

When social media was born it was portrayed as the means by which ordinary citizens could hold their corrupt and unaccountable leaders to account. Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution was billed as the first 'Internet revolution'. Twitter, Facebook and other forms of social media became central to mass protests in Iran, the 'Arab Spring', Russian mass protests and the Euromaidan Revolution. Authoritarian regimes fought back by imposing controls on the Internet and turning social media around to work towards achieving their strategic objectives by using trolls and unleashing bots to flood social media with false and biased information. LinkedIn, a networking website, has become a recruiting ground and source of intelligence for Russia's hybrid war.[93] Social media that were used to undermine states a decade ago are today being used by states to undermine their critics. In Russia, the long Soviet tradition of 'agitation and propaganda' is being empowered by social media. Simon Jenkins writes, 'The 1990s theses that the Internet would turn the world into one vast lovable, liberal community has never looked less likely than today'.[94]

One element of Russia's information warfare has been the extensive publishing and disseminating of *dezinformatsiya*. The EU's External Action Service began publishing a weekly *Disinformation Review* in 2016 to keep abreast of the large volume of disinformation originating in Russia.[95] *Russia Today*, or RT, Russia's flagship propaganda outlet was originally created as the Kremlin's soft power tool to promote a positive image of Russia abroad but evolved into an instrument to counter international channels, such as CNN and the BBC. An example is that of a highly realistic counterfeit article apparently from *The Guardian* featuring provocative comments attributed to the head of Britain's MI6 intelligence service about using colour revolutions against Russia. The article was reprinted in the Russian media and elsewhere in the world.[96]

Russia has manipulated European and US public opinion by giving its backing to political forces, civic groups and media outlets that sow discord by promoting right-wing causes. In 2016, the Russian media widely disseminated a false story that a 13-year-old Russian-German girl had been kidnapped and raped by Muslim migrants, triggering protests in Germany. A high-level diplomatic spat broke out between German officials and Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov, who publicly fanned the false story. Russia's aim was apparently to increase the popularity of the anti-EU extreme right Alternative for Germany.

As the EU's weekly *Disinformation Review* emphasises, some of Russia's most notorious information war has been directed at Ukraine:

Ukraine is a frequently occurring target in pro-Kremlin disinformation. Some of the more astonishing allegations were

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even brought to us by the TV channel owned by Russia's Ministry of Defence. Through the years we have seen some truly outrageous claims about Ukraine, from the ludicrous – for example the claim that the Ukrainian army have zombies fighting within their ranks – to the utterly offensive – most infamously the false claim that Ukrainian forces crucified a three year old boy in Eastern Ukraine.

Similarly, Russia presented the downing of Malaysian Airlines flight 17 as having been carried out by Ukrainian forces attempting to assassinate Putin.

In July 2017, the *Disinformation Review* wrote about a bizarre claim:

We saw the claim that a group of Ukrainian servicemen of the 57th mechanised infantry brigade celebrated a pagan ritual and sacrificed a local resident to a Slavic god. The disinformation was repeated in several outlets, and in one it was illustrated by a photo of a soldier eating a hand. The photo, which has been used in the past by pro-Kremlin disinformation articles, in fact originates from the Russian 2008 science-fiction movie: 'We're from the Future'.[97]

Furthermore, much of the *dezinformatsiya* directed against Ukraine tallies with traditional Soviet ideological tirades about 'Nazi collaborators' and Russian nationalist thought about Ukraine as an 'artificial state': The*Disinformation Review* reported in September 2017:

We have seen several of the usual narratives: 'Ukraine is not a state', 'Ukraine is abandoned by Europe', and 'There is no Ukrainian independent state'. But, the most repeated piece of disinformation was the old favourite linking Nazis and Ukraine. So, the country was accused of being a neo-Nazi monster created by the West, as well as being occupied by Nazis who follow in the footsteps of Joseph Goebbels. There was no specific mention of the actual occupation of parts of Ukraine. Ukraine was also presented as a victim of the 'Evil West' in some outlets – another recurring disinformation theme.[98]

Soviet-style tirades against Ukrainian nationalism did not begin in 2013–2014 but were revived during Ukraine's 2004 elections in response to the new threat from Yushchenko and Our Ukraine which was dubbed as '*Nashism*' (from Yushchenko's party *Nasha Ukrayina* [Our Ukraine]) – a term that resembled 'Nazism'. Similarly, just prior to the invasion of Georgia in 2008, 50 journalists from Russia's leading television channels and newspapers arrived in Tskhinvali, South Ossetia.[99] After the conflict had ended, Russia accused Georgia of committing 'genocide' against South Ossetia, an accusation similar to the many Russia has made against Ukraine since 2014.

Information warfare was a central component of Russian activity during the Euromaidan and throughout the initiation of conflict in 2014 when Russian information warfare produced what Stephen Hutchings and Vera Tolz describe as a 'frenzy of anti-Western Cold War rhetoric'.[100] 'Information troops' were used to prepare public opinion for the military action that followed. Russian propaganda and information warfare mobilised anti-Ukrainian hysteria in the Donbas and Crimea to fever pitch levels during the Euromaidan and spring 2014. During the height of the crisis, a hacked mobile phone conversation between US Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt and US Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland was released. Nuland was captured uttering a vulgarity about the EU, complicating US-EU collaboration.

The image presented by Russia's information warfare of Ukraine in spring 2014 is of a mortal threat to Russians and Russian speakers. In Putin's 18 March 2014 address welcoming the Crimea as part of Russia he said the Euromaidan revolutionaries resorted 'to terror, murder and riots. Nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes and anti-Semites executed this coup. They continue to set the tone in Ukraine to this day'.[101] This was the opposite to that reported by the Council of Europe following a visit to Ukraine in the same month when they found no change in the status of minority rights, no growth in anti-Semitism or threats to Russians and the Russian language in Western Ukraine. The gravest concern was the plight of Crimean Tatars.[102]

While Russia has been exploiting social media itself, it has been strengthening control of the Internet in Russia, a practice with deep roots in the Soviet regime. Luke Harding points out how the FSB inherited KGB-style paranoia, xenophobia and conspiratorial worldview and is obsessed with searching for domestic and foreign enemies.[103]

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The banning of virtual private network (VPN) proxies, Andrei Soldatov writes, 'is time-honoured and can be traced back to Soviet times, before the Internet came to Russia. When the Soviet Union was busy preparing to host the Olympic Games in 1980, it was required to provide automatic international phone connections without an operator – something that was unheard of in the Soviet Union'.[104] Soldatov continues:

The KGB resisted fiercely. To appease them, the Soviet Ministry of Communications suggested that callers dial not only the number they wanted to call, but also their own, so that no one would go unidentified. This is exactly the same proposal the Russian government is offering Internet users today. Back then, the KGB got what it wanted. Today, it seems that for the people on Lubyanka Square nothing has changed.

Russia's cyber warfare did not begin in 2014. Seven years earlier Russia had initiated a cyber and information warfare attack on Estonia, ostensibly in retaliation for Estonia's decision to relocate a Soviet memorial to World War II. The cyber-attack affected Estonia's functions for a month, and the information campaign prompted riots against the relocation of the memorial. A year after the attacks, NATO opened a Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre in Tallinn.

Coping with cyber warfare and hacking is a difficult undertaking when countries are as closely intertwined as were Ukraine and Russia until 2014. For a number of years after the 2014 crisis, Ukrainian officials continued to use Russian email addresses (such as .ru), Russian mail servers, and Russian search engines, such as Yandex. Many Ukrainians used VKontakte, a Russian analogue to Facebook which is controlled by the Kremlin, since 2014.[105] As a NATO report asked, why did the Russians need to hack Ukrainian accounts when they had access to their emails?[106] In May 2017, a Ukrainian presidential decree banned VKonakte, Yandex and Russian email servers.[107]

Cybersecurity experts 'believe Russia is using' Ukraine 'as a cyberwar testing ground – a laboratory for perfecting new forms of global online combat'. Since 2014, the country has been subject to 'a digital blitzkrieg' and 'a sustained cyber assault unlike any the world has ever seen'.[108] 'A hacker army has systematically undermined practically every sector of Ukraine: media, finance, transportation, military, politics, energy', Andy Greenberg writes. 'Wave after wave of intrusions have deleted data, destroyed computers, and in some cases paralyzed organizations' most basic functions'. Cyber-attacks cut off electricity to nearly a quarter of a million Ukrainians just before Christmas in 2015, another attack hit Ukraine's power grid in December 2016 and a third was unleashed in June 2017.

Results

Russia's information warfare has an audience in regions such as Latin America and among supporters of the extreme right and left in Europe. In France, Greece and elsewhere in Europe, extreme left anti-Americanism has a long pedigree. Socialist political leaders, such as UK Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, and extreme right politicians in Europe have been criticised for agreeing to appear on *Russia Today*.[109] UK Labour and Conservative MPs have been also criticised for accepting large fees in exchange for agreeing to appear on *Russia Today*.[110] As a repercussion from the ongoing US investigation into Russia's interference in the 2016 US presidential elections, *Russia Today* and *Sputnik* news agency were ordered to register under FARA (Foreign Agents Registration Act) which is administered by the US Department of Justice.[111] Registering with FARA is usually only a requirement for lobbyists and consultants working on behalf of foreign governments. Registration under FARA automatically led to the removal of *Russia Today* and *Sputnik's* official accreditation to attend press conferences and undertake media activities in the US Congress. To what degree Russia information warfare can be credited for the growth of pro-Putin sentiments is difficult to say as they could be a product of many factors, such as the domestic populist backlash against the liberal establishment. Anti-Americanism and support for Putin have also grown among the extreme right in Europe.

In the US, it is not clear whether Russian information operations or other factors are the cause of a notable flip in attitudes toward Russia and Putin. Fully a third of Republican voters expressed confidence in Putin in 2017, up from 17% in 2015, compared to only 13% of Democratic voters. While nearly two-thirds of Democratic voters see Russia as a threat to national security only 46% of Republican voters do.[112] This reverses a long historical trend in which

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Republicans have been more hawkish on Russia.

Another success was the use of disinformation to swing a close referendum vote in the Netherlands on approval of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement.[113] The Association Agreement was temporarily blocked, and the price raised to include the demand that the EU not offer Ukraine a membership perspective.[114]

Not all of Russia's information war has succeeded. Numerous theories about the shooting down of MH17, the most colourful of which was that the flight was full of shop floor dummies rather than real people, failed to change Western public opinion about who shot down the airliner.

Russia's English-language television station RT has been an increasingly visible tool of Russian information efforts. RT, social media and the proliferation of alternative news web sites has pursued influence for Russia in four areas: (1) fanning anti-Americanism and hostility to pro-Western popular protests, such as the Euromaidan (films depicting the Euromaidan as a Western anti-Russian conspiracy have been made in France and by US film director Oliver Stone); (2) promoting Islamophobia and hostility toward immigrants, coupled with support for anti-EU populist nationalism; (3) planting of false news stories which are laundered into a more acceptable 'clean' variant by being re-tweeted and 'liked' by large numbers of people – eventually the stories are believed as the truth or become seen as credible alternative perspectives; (4) collection of *kompromat* which is integrated with Russia's other information and cyber warfare policies. RT has sought to build its Western audience by luring Western journalists and public figures to work at its English-language television channel. CNN senior anchor Larry King was paid $250,000 to interview Ukrainian Prime Minister Nikolai Azarov, who is in exile in Moscow and wanted by Interpol, after which he received his own show on Russia Today. Former UKIP (United Kingdom Independence Party) leader Nigel Farage was offered his own show on RT.

Whitmore points out that 'Agitprop has its limits. Active measures have a downside, and often result in blowback'.[115] Some of Russia's operations have been successful but others have been massive failures. The adoption of new tougher US sanctions in summer 2017 was a backlash against Russia's interference in the US 2016 elections. France and Germany, once broadly supportive of Russian interests in Europe, are now opposing Russia's position on Ukraine and supporting sanctions. At a joint press conference during Putin's visit to France, Macron attacked Russia's actions directly: 'When news outlets spread despicable lies', he said, 'they are no longer journalists. They are organs of influence'. '*Russia Today* and *Sputnik* did not behave as media organisations and journalists, but as agencies of influence and propaganda, lying propaganda – no more, no less'.[116] This was the first occasion a Western leader had been so blunt about Russia's information and cyber warfare against Western democracies.

There are two potential difficulties with the pursuit of hybrid warfare. The first is that it needs certain conditions to successfully work. In the Crimea, Russian hybrid warfare found perfect conditions which were far less prevalent in Eastern-Southern Ukraine. Russian policies have increased Putin's popularity at home[117] but at the same time have severely damaged Putin's and Russia's reputation around the world where few people trust Putin and Russian leaders.[118] Critical views of Putin and Russia are especially prominent in the US and Europe.[119] RT has been unable to capture large audiences in key Western states such as Britain, Germany, the US and Canada. In the UK, RT has 0.04% of viewers, according to the Broadcast Audience Research Board.

The second problem is a backlash from the country that is the object of Russia's hybrid warfare. Russia's unprecedented intervention in the 2016 US presidential elections mobilised support in both houses of Congress for far tougher sanctions against Russia, numerous ongoing investigations of President Trump's ties to Russia and suggestions the US may be considering sending military equipment to Ukraine. In Ukraine, Russia's annexation of the Crimea and military aggression have permanently severed the bonds of what many in Eastern Ukraine had viewed as that of Russian and Ukrainian 'brotherly peoples'. Peacefully integrating Ukraine with Russia is less likely now than ever before.

The different outcomes of Russian hybrid warfare in the Crimea and the Donbas shows how local conditions matter. In the Crimea, there was a near complete Russian penetration of the security forces that were locally recruited, a

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large Black Sea Fleet base and a receptive Russian-speaking population with a history of supporting separatism in the 1990s. Additionally the peninsula was self-enclosed and connected to the Ukrainian mainland only by a thin strip of land and there was popular domestic support in Russia itself for annexation from pro-Putin *and* opposition sectors of society. None of these six factors existed in the Donbas and South-East Ukraine. Kent believes that Kiev looked upon the Crimea as 'a region apart' and the 'Cinderella of the Ukrainian state'.[120] Added to this important difference with Eastern Ukraine is that the country's military *and* Ukrainian nationalists (in the latter case, contrary to Russian propaganda) were not willing to fight for the Crimea.[121]

Rather than saying that 'Ukraine constituted a near-ideal target'[122] for Russian hybrid warfare, it would be more accurate to say that the Crimea was the near-ideal target. In Eastern-Southern Ukraine, Russia appears to have achieved only limited success, failing to spur a more decisive rebellion in Donbas or a broader rebellion into *Novorossiya*. Russia's need to maintain a permanent military commitment to the Donbas will be a continuous drain on resources and a continuous sore spot in its relations with the West.

Moreover, while the effect should not be exaggerated, the invasion has strengthened the Ukrainian state and civil society. Ukrainians volunteered in a wide range of areas to support the war effort and to fight Russia on the battlefield, in the information sphere and collecting for and delivering supplies to Ukrainian forces. StopFake,[123] established by academics and students at Kiev Mohyla Academy, began exposing Russian disinformation three years before the EU set up its own unit. By the 2016 US elections, StopFake had gone from 'provincial do-gooders to international media stars' offering advice to European countries.[124] StopFake says it warned Facebook in 2015 – a year ahead of the US elections – about Russian fake news and its misuse of this social media platform.[125] Other civil society and semi-official groups have also emerged, such as *Kibersotnia* ([Cyber Company] a group of Ukrainian hackers), Information Resistance (led by former military and intelligence officers), Euromaidan Press and the Ukraine Crisis Media Centre.[126] Many other initiatives run by civil society, national governments and international organisations (EU, NATO) have emerged.[127]

The Ukrainian authorities have also undertaken a wide range of policies to reduce ties with Russia. Even as sanctions were being imposed in 2014–2017, polls showed that Ukrainians had become more sceptical towards Russian media sources. Sanctions against Russian media outlets, journalists, artists, books, films, social media and numerous Russian television channels have reduced Moscow's ability to pursue information warfare against Ukraine, while also raising concerns about freedom of speech. A February 2017 presidential decree on a new Information Security Doctrine for Ukraine explained why these steps were undertaken:

Russia is using the newest information technology for influencing people's minds in Ukraine, aiming to inflame national and religious tensions, spread propaganda, advocating aggressive war, to violently change the constitutional order or violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Ukrainian state.

The most contentious areas where Russia's actions have led to Ukraine pushing back has been in the sphere of national identity. As chapter three and chapter four show, Ukraine's relations with Russia will no longer be 'fraternal' and 'brotherly' – at the very least while Putin is in power. An important area for Ukrainian national identity has been the establishment of a distinct Ukrainian mythology of World War II to replace the Soviet/Russian version. While the Russian/Soviet version refers to the Great Patriotic War beginning with Germany's invasion of Russia in 1941, Ukraine's version focuses on World War II, beginning with the Nazi and Soviet invasion of Poland/Eastern Ukraine in 1939, which fits with the broader European narrative of the war. Since 2015, Ukraine has celebrated the end of the war on the 8th of May – as in Europe, rather than on the 9th of May – as in Russia. This symbolically refutes Soviet history, replaces the notion of a common wartime experience with Russia to that of a distinct Ukrainian experience and links Ukraine's suffering in World War II to the current war in Eastern Ukraine. Ukrainian TV advertisements have brought together veterans from both wars with fathers sending their sons off to fight the latest invader of Ukraine. The older generation were among the six million Ukrainians in the ranks of the Soviet army who had fought the Nazis and the younger generation are continuing the fight in the ranks of Ukraine's army and National Guard – this time against Russia. The core message is, 'We won then and we will win now'.[128] Four controversial de-communisation laws adopted in 2015 point to a separation between a de-communising Ukraine and a Russia that is re-Sovietising and promoting a cult of Stalin.

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Conclusion

In contrast to the view that Russia's use of hybrid warfare in Ukraine was novel, this chapter has sought to show that Russia's behaviour in 2014 and since in Ukraine had deep roots in the practices both of the Soviet Union and in Russia before 2014. During the Cold War, *dezinformatsiya*, and *maskirovka* were constantly employed to undermine the regime's challengers, especially national independence movements such as those in Ukraine and the Baltic States. While employed more sporadically, imprisonment and assassination of Ukrainian opponents of Soviet rule was also part of the Soviet repertoire, even after the death of Stalin in 1953. In addition to undermining internal threats to Soviet rule, these tactics were aimed westward, providing finance and disinformation to support the groups that most undermined Western unity.

When the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, the Russian government took over its institutions, including the KGB and GRU, essentially intact. And while the KGB was renamed and reorganised into the Federal Security Service (FSB) and Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), it was not fundamentally reformed. The continuity we see should therefore not be surprising. This is especially true since Russia under Putin is increasingly run by people whose roots were in the Soviet security apparatus.

The tactics we see in Ukraine since 2014 bear strong resemblance to those employed from the beginning of the post-Soviet era, in Trans-Dniestr and Georgia. They include sponsoring and arming proxies to pursue separatism, supporting them when needed with regular Russian army forces, denying the involvement of Russian forces, and seeking to insert Russia as a peacekeeper or mediator.

The focus on hybrid operations, while its roots are deep, took on new life due to three factors. The first was the increasing Russian focus on the concept of its understanding of 'soft power', and the mutation of the concept from one of passive influence to promoting active control. Second was the Russian interpretation of the colour revolutions as 'hybrid' operations driven by external actors that both justified and demanded hybrid responses. The third factor has been the explosion of new media, including social media that have opened up considerable new opportunities for disinformation while also creating the potential for cyberwarfare.

Understanding the long-term continuity underlying Russian hybrid operations is important because it shows that what happened in 2014 was not an improvised response to a temporary challenge. Rather, it was a way of doing business that has long-standing precedent and will likely continue until something very substantial happens to disrupt it. If we perceived a lull in activity after 1991, that period now appears much more likely than the current one to appear anomalous in the long term.

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About the author:

Taras Kuzio is a Non-Resident Fellow at the Centre for Transatlantic Relations at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Study and Professor, Department of Political Science, National University Kyiv Mohyla Academy. He is the author and editor of 21 books and think tank monographs, including *Putin's War Against Ukraine. Revolution, Nationalism, and Crime* (2017), *Ukraine. Democratization, Corruption and the New Russian Imperialism* (2015), *The Crimea. Europe's Next Flashpoint?* (2010) and *Ukraine-Crimea-Russia: Triangle of Conflict* (2007).

Paul D'Anieri is Professor of Political Science and Public Policy at the University of California, Riverside. In the fall of 2017, he was Eugene and Daymel Shklar Research Fellow in Ukrainian Studies at Harvard University. He is the author and editor of numerous books and articles on Ukrainian politics and Ukraine's relations with Russia and the West, including *Economic Interdependence in Ukrainian–Russian Relations* (1999) and *Understanding Ukrainian Politics* (2006).