

INTRODUCTION: RUSSIAN HYBRID AND INFORMATION WARFARE

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The term “hybrid warfare” was largely unknown to the general public before the EuroMaidan in Kyiv in late 2013 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Despite the recent increased usage of this term, almost to the point of it becoming yet another buzzword, the underlying principles of the phenomenon have been present since the Soviet era. In more recent times, but prior to the events in Ukraine in 2013 and 2014, the concept of hybrid warfare has also been discussed in Western academic and military scholarly work. For example, in 2007 Frank G. Hoffman, described non-linear warfare as a “*fusion of war forms emerging, one that blurs regular and irregular warfare*”¹. This is discussed in greater details by Prof. *Dr. habil.* Col. (ret.) Zdzislaw Sliwa in the current volume.

What caught both the Kyiv government and the West off guard in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine in 2014 was the ‘*highly effective, in many cases almost real-time coordination of the various means employed, including political, military, special operations and information measures*’.² Bettina Renz explains:

*Throughout much of the post-Soviet period the idea that the Russian military was outdated and stuck in Cold war thinking about the utility of military force had dominated Western perceptions, so the pursuit of an approach that relied heavily on non-military armed force and instruments, such as the use of information and disinformation, was particularly unexpected.*³

It is important to note that Russia (especially over the last 10 years under Vladimir Putin) has increasingly adopted not only aggressive and expansion-

¹ Hoffman, Frank G. 2007. Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars. Arlington, Virginia: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, p. 7.

² Rácz, Andras 2015. Russia’s Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy’s Ability to Resist. Helsinki: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, p. 87.

³ Renz, Bettina 2016. Russia and ‘hybrid warfare’. – Contemporary Politics, Vol. 22, Issue 3, p. 283.

ist political strategies, which rely on geopolitical, revanchist and imperialist ambitions, it has also advanced its actual military capabilities and undertaken sweeping reforms to its army. Over the last 4–5 years the modernisation of the military has been Putin’s top priority.⁴ In 2015, Russia increased its defence spending by 7.5%, with a Defence Ministry budget of \$66.4 billion.⁵ Percentage-wise, this makes Russia third in the world in terms of the share of GDP spent on defence (4.5%, which is exceeded only by Saudi Arabia and UAE).⁶ Ray Finch places this in a larger context:

*Yet strengthening the Russian military is only one component in the larger Kremlin strategy of building a multi-polar global order, where Russia serves as an opposing pole to the West, especially the US. He understands the importance of a strong ideology, as well as the dangers of inordinate military spending.*⁷

William Neneth adds that, besides diminishing the Western hegemony, especially its alleged influence in the former Soviet space, the “*deeper goal is to ensure the survival of the regime created by Putin – the current Russian kleptocracy and security state*”⁸.

In order to fulfil these ambitions, Russia is waging a simultaneous information war against both the West and its own domestic audience. Although there are certain commonalities, Russia produces separate propaganda narratives for its foreign and domestic audiences. For example, one goal of the information campaign against the West is to divide Europeans by augmenting their fear of refugees. The domestic Russian audience, on the other hand, receives discourse related to the ostensible decadence of the US, the depravity of the West in general, and the failed Western policies in the Middle East, as well as information regarding the fascist military junta ruling Ukraine, and so on. In his speech during the 53rd Munich Security Conference (2017) Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called for a “post-West world order”. Lavrov

⁴ **Finch, Ray** 2015. Vladimir Putin and the Russian Military. – Foreign Military Studies Office Leavenworth. <<http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/Putin's-Russia/Finch-Putin%20and%20Rus%20Mil.pdf>> (accessed on 17.11.2016). [**Finch** 2015]

⁵ **Russian Military Budget**. GlobalSecurity.org, <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/russia/mo-budget.htm>> (accessed on 17.11.2016).

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ **Finch** 2015.

⁸ **Neneth, William** 2015. Russia’s State-Centric Hybrid Warfare. – *Diplomaatia*, 140 (April 2015), <<http://www.diplomaatia.ee/en/article/russias-state-centric-hybrid-warfare/>> (accessed on 14.11.2016).

hoped that “responsible leaders” would choose to create a “just world order – if you want you can call it a post-West world order”.⁹

In the case of Ukraine, Russian information operations have been carried out in parallel with military operations, and the two have often been integrated in order to mutually support each other. At the start of Ukraine’s larger military offensives in 2014–2015, fighting fronts were set up at the cities Debaltseve, Ilovaysk, Mariupol, and the Donetsk Airport etc. Russian information campaigns were also used to respond to the Ukrainian army’s preparations for mobilization. The “information troops” included members of the Russian media, trolls, the FSB and the GRU, whose agents are active in Eastern Ukraine, as well as a myriad of other recruited separatist activists. One common technique was the dissemination of panic stories, which were massively distributed in the vicinity of the frontline. The local population, as well as *Facebook*, *Vkontakte* and *Odnoklassniki* also played an important role in spreading various shocking rumours. As a result, the Ukrainians were compelled to abandon a number of villages without a fight.¹⁰

The purpose of the current report *Russian Information Operations against Ukrainian Armed Forces and Ukrainian countermeasures (2014–2015)* is to provide a better understanding of Russia’s information campaigns against Ukraine.

The authors give an overview of the assessments from Ukrainian experts as to the effectiveness and impacts of Russia’s actions and Ukraine’s responses. The research is based on interviews with specialists from Ukraine’s various spheres – e.g. military (officers and retired officers from Ukrainian armed forces), political science (analysts from different institutions and think tanks, e.g. International Centre for Policy Studies), media studies and journalists, officials and advisors from ministries and governmental organizations (e.g. Ministry of Information Policy of Ukraine; Ministry of Defence; Ministry of Culture, President’s Administration; Verkhovna Rada, Committee on National Security and Defence), voluntary activists and NGOs (e.g. Centre

⁹ **Russia’s foreign minister calls for ‘post-West world order’ in speech to global leaders.** – Independent, 18. February 2017. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-post-west-world-order-lavrov-munich-security-conference-nato-trump-putin-ukraine-syria-assad-a7587006.html>> (accessed on 26.03.2017).

¹⁰ **Sazonov, Vladimir; Kopõtin, Igor** 2016. Russian Information War Against Ukrainian Armed Forces in 2014–2015: The Ukrainian Point of View. – Sõjateadlane. Estonian Journal of Military Studies 2, 2016, pp. 66–87.

for Military and Political Studies, Information Resistance section).¹¹ The study aims to contribute towards applied research in the field, leaving the theoretical frameworks and a deeper academic analysis in the background. For a more academic approach to the current topic, see the recently published volume “*The Crisis in Ukraine and Information Operations of the Russian Federation*” in the second volume (2016) of the *Estonian Journal of Military Studies* published by the Estonian National Defence College.

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