

7. CONCLUSIONS

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At the current time Russia is not ready to enhance its military presence in Ukraine and follow the model of Crimea in East Ukraine. Russia's military aid is used for keeping the conflict up in Donbass, maintaining separatist governments in Donetsk and Luhansk and destabilizing the Ukrainian state of to return Ukraine to the Russian sphere of influence.

First, Russia's behaviour during the crisis has always been rational and calculated. There is no 'mysterious Russia' acting in an untold manner. Sometimes Russia's actions are responses to certain situations (e.g. the legitimisation of Yanukovich, the annexation of Crimea), which indicate flexibility and openness to scenario changes. The political decision to interfere in Crimea was probably made some time at the end of February 2014, after President Yanukovich escaped to Russia, and Russia became worried about their strategically important military presence in Crimea. The takeover process indicates that this was a well-prepared action and Russia was militarily ready to conduct its operation in Crimea.

Second, Russia has learned from the previous crisis in Georgia and now pays more attention to information warfare issues. The Georgian campaign of 2008 emphasized the demonstration of Russian military power; 'information warfare' is a key term for the current Ukrainian crisis. Military activities often support the main battles, which are conducted through media channels. Russia is testing its new military strategy in which various – 'non-military' actions, known as hybrid warfare, are used to achieve military goals.

Third, Russia has not taken any initiative favouring crisis management, though it would have had good tools for mediating between the Ukrainian government, recognised by Russia, and unrecognised Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. Russian behaviour during the crisis indicates that Russia is not interested in peace and aims to use the current crisis to promote its national interests and to increase its political influence in Ukraine as an alternative power to the West.

The Ukrainian crisis has proven that Russia has adapted well to the new strategic environment and uses non-military tools skilfully to support its military objectives. The extensive use of special operations to foment public discontent in the crisis area and manipulate public opinion can be clearly identified during the Ukrainian crisis. The capability to attack the enemy

simultaneously in the global information space, in the air, on land, and at sea may give huge advantages in a contemporary armed conflict. Russia has stimulated a proxy war in East Ukraine, where the local pro-Russian separatists are used as military tools for Russia's political goals. Russia offers extensive support to the separatists, but its support is thoroughly calculated and tied to Russian national interests. In the Eastern part of Ukraine, Russia mainly participates in hostilities by means of irregular armed groups and private military companies, which can be supplemented with specialists needed to operate within a complex system. The active demonstration of military exercises and military power in the neighbouring areas during the Ukrainian crisis has also been noted. In conducting its operations against Ukraine, Russia follows the guidelines of its 2013 military doctrine. With the new military doctrine, Russian military thinking approaches the military thinking of Sun Tzu, rather than the Western understanding of wars.

Russia's information operations have played a significant role in the overall military operations carried out in the territory of East Ukraine since 2014. Information operations were used at all levels starting with the political level (against the state of Ukraine, state structures, politicians) up to the tactical level for justifying military actions initiated by pro-Russian forces. Information warfare and various psychological operations continue to play a substantial role in the current crisis in Ukraine. Russia uses various media channels to conduct its operations against Ukraine, including governmental and private TV channels (e.g. *Pervyi Kanal*, *Rossiya 1*, *NTV*, *RT*, *LifeNews*), radio (e.g. *Radio Mayak*), mobile phone operators (e.g. *KyivStar*), Internet sources (including online publications, e.g. *Itar Tass*, *RIA Novosti*, *IA Regnum*, *TV Zvezda*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*) and social media networks (e.g. *YouTube*, *Facebook*, *Vk.com*, *odnoklassniki.ru*). Some Ukrainian sources hold pro-Russian attitudes and can also be used to spread disinformation (e.g. *Vesti*). The separatist People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk have their own channels producing anti-Ukrainian propaganda (e.g. *dnr-news.com*, *novorus.info*). The current study has focused on the media channels that represent the Russian mainstream – *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *TV Zvezda*, *IA Regnum*. These mass media channels are generally critical against the Ukrainian government and armed forces, but do not offer a critical view of the Russian government; they justify Russian policy in Ukraine and see the Ukrainian crisis as a battlefield between Russia and West, referring to the clash of civilisations with the West (primarily the US and NATO, but also the European Union) allegedly intending to advance its sphere of influence towards Russian borders. Some social media networks were also examined,

but we chose not to include pro-Russian channels in Ukraine, and representative of the self-proclaimed People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk.

Komsomolskaya Pravda (KP), *Regnum* and *TV Zvezda* often refer to *soft propaganda* mechanisms and methods used for the production of information. *KP* tends to be more aggressive against Ukraine, using emotional rhetoric and a style that constantly incriminates the Ukrainian state, armed forces, and volunteers in crimes against humanity, genocide, international terrorism, torturing and killing of civilians, as well as chauvinism, the discrimination of Russian-speaking people, nationalism, xenophobia, and fascism. The majority of news, statements, reports, and interviews in *KP* are given with a strong judgement. *Regnum*, on the other hand, usually emphasises facts and avoids provoking emotions. The majority of news published by *Regnum* appears without judgement, but does not offer any criticism of the Russian government. Similarly to *Regnum*, *TV Zvezda* is restrained in portraying the crisis and its counterparts. *TV Zvezda* mostly targets the Ukrainian armed forces and government when building negative images. Despite the popular assumption that the almighty *Facebook* and Russian troll factories rule the hearts and minds of people due simply to the massive influx of information, our results demonstrate the need for further research on the reception and influence of these messages. Two categories emerge strongly in constructing the enemy – Ukraine and the West.

When conducting information operations, Russia capably uses the deficiencies of the West and Ukraine, the political-social-economic crisis in Ukraine, and urges the strengthening of nationalist and xenophobic trends that often occur in a crisis-prone Ukraine, divided between its pro-Russian population (Russophones) living mostly in the Eastern and Southern parts of Ukraine (known as Novorossiia), and pro-Ukrainians nationalists (Ukrainophones) with their stronghold in Western Ukraine, the areas that belonged to Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania before the World War II.

Russian information warfare against Ukraine is **multifaceted** and can be interpreted in **different ways**. Russian information operations tend to be **situational** and **flexible**; every narrative is given an individual touch, considering all of its peculiarities. There is no consistent pattern that can be used for interpreting current Russian information warfare narratives. Instead of holding back information, Russia frequently floods the media with information, providing an overwhelming amount of information about a single event, skilfully blended with disinformation. These media campaigns stimulate strong emotions, promote a culture of fear, and create panic. The majority of Russian media channels we analysed emphasized nationalist trends in

Russian society to justify the conflict. Each publication we examined during this research project has its own specific journalistic style. Some publications hold restrained views and avoid emotions. Others foment hatred against the Ukrainian nation, and describe the Ukrainians as puppets of the West, traitors, criminals, fascists, and extremists among others, but describe the separatists as ‘true patriots’.