

## CONCLUSION: THE RUSSIAN INFORMATION OPERATIONS IN 2014–2015

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The Russian information war in Ukraine in 2014 was a massive, multi-faceted, and coherent operation. Russia denies direct involvement, yet it supports local pro-Russian separatists and still sustains the conflict. Thus it can be considered a proxy war. Military activities are supported by an active media campaign that attempts to undermine the Ukrainian authorities and their political goals to reunite the country.

According to the dominant narrative, Russia cannot be a real Eurasian Empire if it does not control Ukraine and the Black Sea, therefore control over the Crimea is of utmost importance. Ukraine plays an important role in the Russian national mythology. Ukraine was an integral part of the birth of the Russian Empire, therefore Ukraine's unique position makes crisis management in the region extremely sensitive.

Moscow tries to consider the particular characteristics of each state and nation that it targets with information warfare. The strategy against another country (i.e. Ukraine) is usually built on pre-planned and prepared information campaigns, in which all possible scenarios have been rehearsed. But this is also only a small part of the global hybrid war that the Kremlin is engaged in. The war encompasses not only on the informational domain, but also cyberspace as well as economic, political, and social spheres, as well as other levels. In the case of Ukraine, Moscow also makes use of aggressive military pressure, overt support of separatists and terrorists in the Donbas region, and direct military intervention.

Lies, deceit, blackmail, threats, hypocrisy and more are the critical weapons of the Putin regime's propaganda arsenal.

The interviews with Ukrainian experts showed that Russian propaganda machine is quite flexible and quickly adapts to new situations. Although many information operations are spontaneous, they are clearly derived from a larger existing strategic plan.

Information and psychological operations in 2014 and 2015 against Ukraine were carried out in parallel with military operations, and were often integrated to support each other. If, for example, Ukraine started a mobiliza-

tion of soldiers, Russia would respond with a series of aggressive information attacks to influence mobilized or potentially mobilized persons, their families, and friends. Another example: at the start of one of the larger military offensives conducted by Ukraine, brutal fighting fronts appeared near Debaltseve, Ilovaysk, Mariupol, and the Donetsk Airport. Russian information activity was especially acute in these areas.

Information campaigns were also employed to respond to preparations for further mobilizations of the Ukrainian army. The Russian media, together with an army of trolls, the FSB and the GRU, whose agents are very active in Eastern Ukraine, and a myriad of other recruited separatist activists play an active role in all of Russia's information campaigns.

Russia often adopts defensive narratives. These are used to justify its positions. Russia also mythologizes the opposition between East and West. Ukrainian authorities, as well various concerned international organisations, are considered to be mere puppets of the West under the guidance of the United States and NATO. During Putin's presidency, Russia has declared the restoration of Russia as a Eurasian empire as a national goal.

In addition to the content of the messages, Russia technically ensures that certain messages reach specific audiences, while others do not (i.e. by controlling TV and radio towers, mobile phone operators etc.).