

INFORMATION

WARFARE

AS A FOREIGN POLICY TOOL OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

In international relations, information is seen as a resource of strategic significance. As a consequence, it can be used in a harmful way, including information warfare. When compiling the most comprehensive definitions of this concept found in Western science, we may assume that it is an organised activity which consists in modifying or destroying communication systems with the intention to achieve political, military, or economic goals.

Russians adopt a different definition. According to them, information warfare is the influence exerted on public opinion in the course of a rivalry between civilisational systems, which is their reference to the Cold War period. The objectives pursued by information warfare are the same as those of conventional warfare, thus Russians mix the military and non-military spheres.

The Russian Federation is often perceived as a backward state unfit for the ongoing technological revolution in the digital world, but this is an incorrect assumption. The changes taking place were not incomprehensible in the USSR, and neither are they in the present-day Russia. Information warfare has occupied a special place in the Kremlin's foreign policy for decades, but never before has it been carried out on such a massive scale and with so many resources. This has resulted in the creation of a tool that enables information influence campaigns on a global scale.

The cornerstone of democratic states is the pluralism of social life, which implies that each side should have the right to speak and be heard. In the context of Russia's activities, this value also comes under threat. According to Russians, granting a voice to all participants of social life is a short-

coming of the democratic system, which should be skilfully exploited by introducing propaganda messages into the national or global information space in order to produce the intended effects. These activities boil down to, for instance, making use of Facebook, Twitter, and Telegram, but also to the creation of networks of news portals that produce and disseminate fabricated content.

The most effective propaganda techniques are the ones we are unaware of, a fact that Russians understand very well. Without deep diving into individual typologies, we can assume that the general aim of their use is to manipulate the recipient by misleading them as to the real events in the international arena or the situation in a given country. The recipient must believe the presented assessment of the situation, and preferably make a particular determination on their own, which is obviously illusory, as it has already been included in the message crafted by the propaganda disseminator. Moreover, the propaganda techniques used do not have to be sophisticated – sometimes using a single word is enough to shape specific views over time. Russia's information influence campaigns have a large-scale character, which boils down, among others, to their presence in the

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media space of information portals whose aim, in addition to creating fabricated content, is also to disseminate it. The objective is to make the recipient believe that since a piece of information appears in many sources, it surely must be true and does not require verification; in reality, each source has the same author. Importantly, Russian news portals often use a certain kind of camouflage, which consists in publishing – as a general rule – neutral or even objective content. It is only when there is tension in Russia's relations with another country that these portals launch a massive information campaign, presenting the Kremlin's view as the only right and true one. Consequently, the manipulated viewer becomes convinced that the Kremlin is the one with the most accurate and proper understanding of the ongoing events.

An illustrative example of the Kremlin's operation is the Russian-Ukrainian war (2022), accompanied by massive information campaigns aimed at justifying Russia's invasion on the grounds of combating the 'pro-Nazi Ukrainian government'. Also, of significance is the fact that these actions started as early as 2014, when the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula took place, and the paralysed international

community was unable to effectively oppose the Kremlin, partly due to Russian-led efforts in the information space. Another example is the interference in the US presidential election (2016) with the aim of supporting Donald Trump on social media. In turn, there have already been efforts since 2014 to detect vulnerabilities in US voting systems in order to exploit them and undermine public confidence in the electoral system. The Russian Federation is also waging an information war against Poland, aimed at interfering in domestic politics by stoking conflicts, antagonising all sides, and creating a negative image of Poland in the international arena.

Russia actively uses methods of information influence to advance its own interests. It is developing capabilities enabling it to manipulate individuals and communities, seeking to confront the West in the global information space. It follows a doctrine aimed at strengthening media coverage and presenting its point of view to the largest possible audience. As a result, any one of us can unknowingly become a part of the activities carrying out the Kremlin's policy. It is therefore necessary to take countermeasures, first and foremost by raising public awareness of this issue.