DEFENCE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

The official journal of the
NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence

THE RUSSIAN PERSPECTIVE ON INFORMATION WARFARE: CONCEPTUAL ROOTS AND POLITICISATION IN RUSSIAN ACADEMIC, POLITICAL, AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Ofer Fridman

Abstract

During the last decade, 'information warfare' has become a much-politicised term in Russian domestic and foreign affairs. This article sheds light on the conceptual roots that have been shaping this idea in the Russian academic, political, and public discourse. Moreover, the article points to the major actors leading the politicisation of this idea by promoting narratives describing the so-called 'Western information war against Russia'. In the context of Russia's contemporary attempts to re-establish itself as a global power and Western fear and distress associated with Russian activities in the information domain, a grounded understanding of the major conceptual narratives influencing Russian thinking about information warfare, as well as perspectives on how these narratives have been politicised, is of paramount importance.

About the author

Dr Ofer Fridman is a Sessional Lecturer at the University of Reading and a Visiting Research Fellow at the King's Centre for Strategic Communications. His research focuses on the politicisation of 'hybrid warfare' in the context of the current tension between Russia and the West.

An analysis of the vast scope of Russian conceptual and analytical literature on 'information warfare' published over the last decades, shows that the main ideas can be divided into two general groups. One group of writing focuses on information warfare as a set of methods and techniques used to achieve power, capital, and public influence. This body of literature analyses the different methods by which information is used for political or economic goals, generally claiming that:

> 'The methods of Information War [...] are neutral, just like nuclear energy. Similar to nuclear technologies, the techniques of Information War have a dual purpose: they can be used for good or for evil, offensive or defensive. [...] We meet them everywhere—in politics, economy and business, in the workplace and in everyday life.'[1]

Proponents of this approach see information warfare as a very old phenomenon—the manipulation of information for achieving certain political, economic, or other goals. However, they claim that due to the processes of globalisation and integration and the information revolution that have been taking place over recent decades, information wars have become a more prevalent and preferable way of achieving political goals in international relations. By integrating various methods and techniques developed for use in politics and business, and combining the fields of psychology, sociology, politics, marketing, and others, these scholars are attempting to develop a more clearly defined conceptual understanding of information warfare in the 21st century as a general phenomenon prevalent in the political, social, and economic realities.[2]

The second body of literature takes a more ideological stance, claiming that information warfare is a method explicitly used by the West to undermine Russia.[3] On the one hand, proponents of this approach agree with the general definition of information warfare as a non-military method used to achieve political goals: 'during the whole of human history, Information Warfare has been the main tool of global politics to achieve spiritual, political, financial and economic power in the world'.[4] On the other, they claim that information warfare is a 'subversive Western political technique' that not only 'allowed the West to destroy the Soviet Union' but also 'puts the dissolution of

....

[1] Tsyganov, V. and S. Bukharin, *Informatsionnyye voyny v biznese i politike : Teoriya i metodologiya*, (Moscow: Akademicheskiy Proyekt, 2007), pg. 11.

[2] See Bukharin, S., *Metody i tekhnologii informatsionnykh voyn*, (Moscow: Akademicheskiy proyekt, 2007); Vlasenko, I. and M. Kir'yanov, *Informatsionnaya voyna: iskazheniye real'nosti*, (Moscow: Kantsler, 2011); Rastorguyev, S., *Informatsionnaya voyna. Problemy i modeli. Ekzistentsial'naya matematika*, (Moscow: Akademicheskiy proyekt, 2006); Raskin, A. and I. Tarasov, 'Informatsionnoe protivoborstvo v sovremennoy voyne', *Informatsionnye voyny*, Vol. 4(32), 2014, pp. 2–6; Malkov, S. and S. Bilyuga, 'Model ustoychivosti/destabilizatsii politiheskih sistem', *Informatsionnye voyny*, Vol. 1(33), 2015, pp. 7–18; Tsyganov, V. and S. Bukharin, *Informatsionnyye voyny v biznese i politike*.

[3] See Panarin, I., *Informatsionnaya Voyna I kommunikatsii*, (Moscow: Goryachaya Liniya-Telekom, 2015); Filimonov, G., *Kulturno-informatsionnie mekhanizmi vnewnei politiki SSHA*, (Moscow: People's Friendship University of Russia (RUDN), 2012); Filimonov, G., N. Danyuk, and M. Urakov, *Perevorot*, (Saint Petersburg: Piter, 2016); Pertsev, A., 'Osobennosti informatsionnogo protivoborstva v sovremennikh usloviyakh', *Informatsionnye voyny*, Vol. 2(34), 2015, pp. 33–37; Orlov, A., 'Sistemnyi analis amrikanskogo kapitalizma kak factor vliyaniya na informatsionnuyu bezopasnost ssha i rossiiskoi federatsii na primere sobitii na Ukraine v 2013–2015gg', *Informatsionnye voyny*, Vol. 1(37), 2016, pp. 74–77.

[4] Panarin, I., *Informatsionnaya Voyna I kommunikatsii*, pg. 6.

the Russian Federation on the [Western] agenda'.[5] Analysing this body of literature it is possible to identify three major theories that provide the main conceptual narratives for this approach to understanding information warfare: 'subversion-war' developed by Evgeny Messner, 'net-centric war' developed by Aleksandr Dugin, and 'information warfare' developed by Igor Panarin.

These three independently developed, yet similar theories have successfully coexisted within Russian academic and analytical discourses since the late 1990s, politicising information warfare as a Western technique to subvert its adversaries. By conducting an in-depth empirical analysis of academic and political discourses about information warfare in Russia, this article seeks to answer two main questions. The first question is concerned with the conceptual roots of information warfare. The first part of this article will describe the three main theories that have been used to politicise the concept of information warfare in Russia. The second question is concerned with the politicisation process itself. By analysing various actions taken by the Russian political establishment in the context of the alleged information war waged by the West against Russia, and the reaction of the Russian public to these actions, this article will argue that the politicisation of information warfare has not been led explicitly by the Kremlin; it is, rather, a complicated and synergetic process involving the Russian government, Russian scholars, and the Russian public in general.

Information Warfare in Russian Academic Discourse

Three concepts have dominated the Russian academic discourse on information warfare since the mid-1990s: Evgeny Messner's 'subversion-war', Aleksandr Dugin's 'net-centric war', and Igor Panarin's 'information war'. While these concepts were independently developed and promoted, each of them essentially describes the same phenomenon—the process of undermining a legitimate government by manipulating the information domain in order to influence political elites and instil political dissent, separatism, and social strife within a given system.

Evgeny Messner—Subversion-War (Myatezhevoyna)[6]

Evgeny Eduardovich Messner was born on 3 September 1891 in the Kherson Governorate in the Southern Ukrainian region of the Russian Empire. In 1912, after

....
[5] Prokhvatilov, V., 'Ataka myslyashchey pautiny- metaprogrammirovaniye - organizatsionnoye oruzhiye 21 veka', *Informatsionnye voyny*, Vol. 1(13), 2010, pg. 73.

[6] Before starting analysis of the Messner's concept of *myatezhevoyna*, it is important to make several translation clarifications. Some Western (mainly East European) scholars have been translating *myatezhevoyna* as 'mutiny-war'. This translation, however, is incorrect, as 'mutiny' is an open rebellion against the authorities, especially by soldiers or sailors against their officers, and its Russian equivalent is *bunt*. The direct translation of *myatezh'* is 'insurgency', and therefore the direct translation of *myatezhevoyna* from Russian to English is 'a war by insurgency' or 'insurgency-war'. These translations, however, are also misleading for two main reasons. The first was given by Messner himself, who noticeably argued that there is a difference between *myatezhevoyna* and 'guerrilla war' (i.e. 'insurgency-war'), as it describes a much wider phenomenon, and, in fact, 'guerrilla war' is only one possible way to wage *myatezhevoyna*. (Messner, 1971:8). The second reason *myatezhevoyna* cannot be translated as 'insurgency-war' is that from the analysis of Messner's works it becomes clear that by conceptualising *myatezhevoyna*, he implied an activity that intends to erode the adversary's socio-cultural-military cohesion—something that better suits the definition of 'subversion' [*podryvnaya deyatel'nost'*] rather than 'insurgency'. For these reasons, in the following translations, Myatezh' will be translated as 'insurgency', but *myatezhevoyna* as 'subversion-war'.

passing his final examinations at the Mikhailovsky Artillery School as an external student, Messner was stationed in his hometown Odessa and assigned to the 5th Battery of the 15th Artillery Brigade as a *Podporuchik* [Second Lieutenant]. During the First World War, Messner swiftly climbed the military ladder, proving himself to be a talented and daring officer. On 23 October 1916, already *Stabs-Kapitan* [Senior Lieutenant], Messner was sent to the Academic Courses at the Imperial Nicholas Military Academy . He successfully completed his courses among the top ten in his class. During the Russian Civil War he joined the White movement taking an active role in the fighting against the Red Army, most notably he was the last Chief of Staff of the Kornilov Division of General Wrangel's Army. In November 1920, General Staff Colonel Evgeny Messner left Russia with the last of the ships that evacuated the defeated White forces from Crimea.[7]

After leaving Russia, Messner moved to Belgrade where he took active part in the social and military-academic life of the Russian émigrés there. His writings on military theory and tactics were widely published in several military periodicals by Russian communities abroad. After the beginning of the Second World War, Messner continued to lecture at the Higher Military Courses in Belgrade, preparing officers for the Russian Corps, an armed force composed of anti-Communist Russian émigrés in the Territory of the Military Commander in Serbia.[8] Until the spring of 1945 Messner served in the military-propaganda department of the Wehrmacht 'South East', where he led the Russian section and was an active supporter of the establishment of the Russian Liberation Army, also called the Vlasov Army—a group of predominantly Russian forces that fought under German command. In March 1945 Messner became head of the propaganda department in the First Russian National Army established under the command of Russian-émigré General Boris Alexeyevich Smyslovsky-Holmston. The army capitulated in Lichtenstein in May 1945 and Messner emigrated to Argentina with his wife in the autumn of 1947.[9]

In Argentina, Messner continued his earlier work as a journalist, author, publisher, and military theorist. One of his most prominent achievements was the establishment of the South-American branch of the Institute for the Research of War and Peace in Buenos-Aires, named after General Professor Golovin. Until his death in 1974, Messner continued to publish works on political and security matters, as well as modern military history. While most of his publications emphasised his interpretations of ongoing political and military developments within the context of the Cold War, three of his most prominent books—*Lik Soveremennoy Voyni* [The Face of Contemporary *War]*; *Myatezh—Imya Tret'yey Vseminoy* [Subversion—The Name

[7] Messner, E., *Posluzhnoy Spisok*. Buenos Aires, 1972. First published as: Tereshchuk, A. (ed.), Yevgeniy Eduardovich Messner: *Sud'ba Russkogo Ofitsera*, (Saint-Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Sankt-Peterburgskogo Universiteta, 1997); Domnin, I., 'Ot Pervoy mirovoy do "Tret'yey Vsemirnoy"', Zhiznennyy put' General'nogo shtaba polkovnika E. E. Messnera', in Savinkin, A. (ed.) *Khochesh' mira, pobedi myatezhevoynu!—Tvorcheskoye naslediye E. Messnera*, *Rossiyskiy Voyennyy Sbornik*, Issue 21, (Moscow: Voyennyy Universitet, Russkiy Put', 2005).

[8] The Territory of the Military Commander in Serbia was the official title of the area of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia that was placed under a military government of occupation by the Wehrmacht following the invasion, occupation and dismantling of Yugoslavia in April 1941.

[9] Alexanrov, K., *Armia Generala Vlasova*, 1944–1945, (Moscow: Yauza Eskimo, 2006), pp. 182–184; Domnin, I., 'Ot Pervoy mirovoy do "Tret'yey Vsemirnoy"...'.

of the Third World War]; and *Vseminaya Myatezhevoyna* [The Worldwide Subversion-War]—focused on the conceptualisation of the next generation of war, based on his personal experience and his interpretation of the struggle between the West and Communism (the Soviet Union and China).[10]

Messner's understanding of political-military international affairs was highly influenced by the developing struggle between the post-World War Two superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union. Conceptualising this new situation in the context of an extreme clash of ideologies on the one hand, and the possibility of mutually assured destruction on the other, he argued that Trotsky's description of the 1918 Treaty of Brest-Litovsk—'neither war nor peace'—could be said to apply globally after 1945. At the conference in Potsdam, Messner argued that:

> '[T]he international situation was initially crafted by the formula "neither peace, nor war", its most characteristic feature came from the extremely intense diplomatic struggle punctuated by outbreaks of armed unrests and uprisings. It was called the "cold war". It could equally have been foolishly called "hot diplomacy". In this "neither war, nor peace" there were also rather "hot" military operations.'[11]

Messner tended to interpret what are commonly known as 'proxy wars' during the Cold War as a part of a much bigger picture:

> 'We have to stop thinking that war is when somebody is fighting and peace is when there is no fighting. The U.S.A., Australia, New Zealand, Philippines and Thailand are not in a state of war against North Vietnam, but they are fighting against it. There is an armistice between North and South Koreas; however, they fight each other due to the initiative of the North, through partisans on the demarcation line and violent students in Seoul. Israelis and Arabs are considered to be in an armistice, but they quite intensively fight each other. [...] It is possible [for the USSR and the USA] to negotiate about non-aggression or disarmament and simultaneously to fight: the U.S.S.R. fights against the U.S.A. by supplying weapons, instructors, money, [and] supplies to those who feud with America; and by subverting Americans within the United States.'[12]

....

[10] Messner, E., *Lik sovremennoy voyny*, (Buenos Aires: South American Division of the Institute for the Study of the Problems of War and Peace named after Prof. General N.N. Golovin, 1959); Messner, E., *Myatezh—Imya Tret'yey Vseminoy*, (Buenos Aires: South American Division of the Institute for the Study of the Problems of War and Peace named after Prof. General N.N. Golovin, 1960); Messner, E., *Vseminaya Myatezhevoyna*, (Buenos Aires: South American Division of the Institute for the Study of the Problems of War and Peace named after Prof General N.N. Golovin, 1971).

[11] Messner, *Vseminaya Myatezhevoyna*, p. 12.

[12] Ibid., pg. 10.

And since, according to Messner, open 'classic' warfare is impossible, the development of a new type of warfare was underway:

'In previous wars, a military was breaking an enemy military. In the last war, a military was breaking an enemy military and its people. In the future war, a military and its people are going to break an enemy military and its people: people will be active participants of war, and, maybe, even more active than the military. In previous wars the most important part was considered the conquest of the territory. From now, it will be the conquest of the souls in the enemy state.'[13]

And therefore:

'Today we have to reckon with the fact that there is no more division between the theatre of war and the country at war; the sum total of an enemies' territory—this is [now] the theatre of war. Today there is no division between the military and the population—all are participating in war with different gradations of intensity and persistence: some fight openly, others secretly, some fight continuously, others only at a convenient opportunity. Today the regular army has lost its military monopoly...'[14]

And consequently:

'[W]ars have merged with subversions, subversions with wars, creating a new form of armed conflict, which we will call subversion-war, and in which the fighters are not so much the troops themselves, but rather public movements.'[15]

According to Messner, one of the most distinguishing characteristics of the subversion-war is the prominence of the psychological/informational dimension of warfare:

'This new phenomenon has to be considered from different perspectives, but the most important is psychological: if in classic warfare the morale of standing armies was of great importance, then in the current era of nations in arms and violent popular movements, psychological factors have become dominant. A people's army is a psychological organism, therefore a popular movement is a purely psychological phenomenon. A war of military and popular movements—a subversion-war—is a psychological war.'[16]

Though, Messner assessed:

'Classical diplomacy has been partly ousted by an aggressive diplomacy with subversive actions. Already now we have "half-wars": Greece was fighting against Turkey by Grivas in Cyprus, African countries created legions to support an uprising in Algeria, i.e. to fight against France.

....

[13] Messner, *Myatezh - Imya Tret'yey Vseminoy*, pg. 43.

[14] Messner, *Lik sovremennoy voyny...,* pg. 11.

[15] Messner, *Myatezh - Imya Tret'yey Vseminoy*, pg. 5.

[16] Ibid.

Such "half-wars" are waged by partisans, "volunteers", underground fighters, terrorists, saboteurs, wreckers and propagandists in the enemy country, and radio-propagandists [from the outside].'[17]

This characteristic, according to Messner, had become even more prominent:

'People have stopped being passive observers and silent victims of military struggles [...] A citizen of a free country has gotten used to widespread opposition to the government. [...] This predisposes him to oppose the occupying power together with his own military, or [equally] to rise against the authority of his country in union with another fighting party.'[18]

The total involvement of a population, according to Messner, has led to an even more radical transformation of war—a fourth informational/psychological dimension has been introduced. Since war has begun to include the whole of society:

'The soul of the enemy's society has become the most important strategic objective. [...] Degrading the spirit of the enemy and saving your own spirit from degradation—this is the meaning of the struggle in the fourth dimension, which has become more important than the three other dimensions.'[19]

In other words, according to Messner, the increasing involvement of the masses in political and military affairs has made them a primary target, but in the psychological-informational dimension rather than the physical dimension. With the rising importance of the psychological-informational dimension, the main aim of war is not to capture one's enemy's physical territory, but to conquer his spirit to 'knock him down from his ideological positions, to bring confusion and discomfiture into his soul'. And the main tools for doing so are propaganda and agitation.[20] Analysing the rise of this phenomenon, Messner focused on two main characteristics: 'propaganda by word' vs. 'propaganda by deed' and 'offensive propaganda' vs. 'defensive propaganda'.

'The war of the 20th century is not a clear military affair: it consists of politics no less than tactics, the space in this war should be conquered by military, as well as by propaganda. Today nations can deny physical conquest and continue spiritual resistance, even after military capitulation. Through the use of propaganda, one should pour the elixir of life into one's own masses and poison into the enemy's, and, by using [positive] propaganda as an antidote, [one] should save [one's own people] from the enemy's poison.'[21]

[17] Messner, *Myatezh - Imya Tret'yey V seminoy*, pg. 43.

[18] Messner, *Lik sovremennoy voyny*, pg. 37.

[19] Ibid, pg. 5.

[20] Messner, *Myatezh - Imya Tret'yey V seminoy*, pg. 95.

[21] Messner, *Lik sovremennoy voyny*, pg. 29.

Discussing the role of propaganda, Messner differentiated between 'propaganda by word' and 'propaganda by deed'. While the first includes radio, official speeches, publications, theatre, movies, exhibitions, the latter includes successful and timely actions—'an idea gains credibility when supported by military, political, social, diplomatic, [and] economic achievements'.[22] In other words, Messner argued that propaganda is not only what is said, written, published, broadcast, but also what is done; 'in times of psychological war, neither victory in battle, nor territorial gains, are the goals themselves: their main value is in their psychological effects'.[23] Moreover, 'propaganda by deed' is not limited to military activities, it also includes successful political, economic, and social actions that can be used to influence the psyche of the masses: 'a successful general strike increases the self-confidence of the working class, [and] the stabilisation of the national currency increases the authority of the government'.[24]

Discussing the differences between 'offensive' and 'defensive' propaganda and agitation, Messner argued that while the former is meant to weaken the enemy, the latter is meant to improve morale at home, but 'it should not be defensive, apologetic, [or] justifying; instead it should actively galvanise the emotions and thoughts of our soldiers, warriors and non-warriors'.[25] Moreover, 'the tone of propaganda should be chosen in accordance with the taste [and] psyche of each nation', as 'both defensive and offensive propaganda are doomed to fail if they look like propaganda'.[26] Therefore, according to Messner, successful propaganda should be both multifaceted—one half true for one's own masses, the other for the enemy's—and suitable:

> '[F]or each level of consciousness, for each category of mores, predispositions, [and] interests [employing] special logic, sincerity or duplicity, mind-set or sentimentality.'[27]

According to Messner, the rising importance of the psychological/informational dimension has transformed the nature of conflict, creating an entirely new type of confrontation that he calls subversion-war. Messner defines the main features of this new type of warfare:

> 'When war was a tournament—army against army—it was relatively easy: find a large field and fight to destroy the enemy's formation, try to break force with force. Today, in the era of psychological warfare, neither victory in battle, nor territorial gains, are the goals in themselves: their main value is in their psychological effects. One should not think of destroying an enemy's manpower, but of crushing his psychological power. This is the surest way to victory in subversion-war.'[28]

....

[22] Messner, *Myatezh - Imya Tret'yey Vseminoy*, pg. 95; Messner, *Lik sovremennoy voyny*, p. 30.

[23] Messner, *Myatezh - Imya Tret'yey Vseminoy,* pg. 91.

[24] Ibid., pg. 96.

[25] Ibid., pg. 97.

[26] Messner, Lik sovremennoy voyny, p. 29.

[27] Mesaner, Myatezh - Imya Tret'yey Vseminoy, p. 97.

[28] Ibid., pp. 90–91.

He continues:

> 'Waging war is an art. Waging an insurgency (revolution) is also an art. Today, a new art is developing—waging a subversion-war. Strategists almost always face difficult choices in defining the purpose of their actions (interim and final). In a subversion-war the choice is especially difficult due to the abundance of goals and the differences in their significance (either purely psychological, or material with a psychological side effect, or purely material).'[29]

He also defined the hierarchy of these goals:

> '1) the dissolution of the spirit of the enemy public; 2) the defeat of the enemy's active part (the military, partisan organisations, and violent popular movements); 3) the seizure or destruction of objects of a psychological value; 4) the seizure or destruction of objects of material value; 5) the creation of an impression of order to acquire new allies and crush the spirit of the enemy's allies.'[30]

Similar to the works of other Russian émigré authors published abroad, Messner's books and articles reached the USSR—the Russian State Library has all his books in original publication—but access to them was definitely restricted to a small number of high level officials and professionals. Only after the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Communist system has there been a growing revival of Messner's concept of subversion-war among Russian military thinkers. His works have been widely republished since the 1990s as separate books or as articles included in edited compilations.[31] His anti-Soviet and pro-Western views have been reconceptualised for contemporary audiences. From reading Messner's works, it becomes clear that Messner held very conservative views and was an ardent anti-communist, who truly believed that 'Red-Moscow' and 'Red-Peking' were plotting to disintegrate the socio-cultural and moral fabric of Western society, which was too weak to fight back. Interestingly enough, in their interpretations of the anti-communist foundations of subversion-war in the mid-2000s, some Russian scholars argued:

> 'At the end, the Free World, as if it were listening to the theory and recommendations of Messner and other analysts, understood the danger of the Communist Subversion-War and started to "fight back", ultimately achieving victory.'[32]

....

[29] Ibid., pg. 94.

[30] Ibid.

[31] See Savinkin, A. (ed.) 'Khochesh' mira, pobedi myatezhevoynu! – Tvorcheskoye naslediye E. Messnera', *Rossiyskiy Voyennyy Sbornik*, Issue 21, (Moscow: Voyennyy Universitet, Russkiy Put', 2005); Messner, Evgeny, *Vsemirnaya Myatezhvoyna,* (Moscow: Zhukovskoye Pole, 2004); Savinkin, A. (ed.), 'Russkoye zarubezh'ye: gosudarstvenno-patrioticheskaya i voyennaya mysl'', *Voyennyy Sbornik*, Issue 6, (Moscow: Gumanitarnaya akademiya Vooruzhennykh sil, 1994); Savinkin, A. (ed.), 'Dusha armii: Russkaya voyennaya emigratsiya o moral'no-psikhologicheskikh osnovakh rossiyskoy vooruzhennoy sily', *Voyennyy Sbornik*, Issue 13, (Moscow: Voyennyy universitet, Nezavisimyy voyenno-nauchnyy tsentr «Otechestvo i Voin», Russkiy put', 1997); Savinkin, A. (ed.), 'Voyennaya mysl' v izgnanii: Tvorchestvo russkoy voyennoy emigratsii', *Voyennyy Sbornik*, Issue 16, (Moscow: Voyennyy universitet, Russkiy put', 1999).

[32] Savinkin, A., 'Groznaya Opasnost' Vsemirnoy Myatezhevoyny', in A. Savinkin, (ed.) *Khochesh' mira, pobedi myatezhevoynu!...*

Or, as one scholar put it: 'the Messner formula got it right, but in the exact opposite way'.[33]

Due to his anti-communist views and alliance with the White Movement and later with Nazi Germany, Messner remained generally unknown in the Soviet Union. Only after the end of the Cold War and the following dissolution of the Communist system has there been a growing revival of Messner's concept of subversion-war within the circles of Russian military thinkers. His books were widely republished, and his ideas were adapted to the outcomes of the Cold War.[34] This adaptation allowed Russian contemporary thinkers to claim that the West mastered subversion-war (i.e. psychological/informational warfare) during the Cold War. In other words, an analysis of the contemporary geopolitical situation and ongoing political, military, and economic confrontations (e.g. the conflict in the Balkans, the rise of terrorist organisations, the Arab Spring, the Ukrainian Crisis) through the prism of subversion-war, has allowed Russian scholars to accuse the West (specifically the US) of waging psychological/informational wars as one of the main methods of achieving its political goals in general, and in its relations with Russia in particular.[35]

Aleksandr Dugin—Net-Centric War

Aleksandr Gelyevich Dugin is a Russian political scientist, philosopher of geopolitics, religious historian, and Slavophile. He began publishing in the late 1980s and has proven himself to be a talented writer and speaker. Since then he has established himself as a prolific author, publishing almost one book per year, as well as hundreds of articles, commentaries, and interviews, some of which have been translated into English and other languages. In addition, Dugin has held several senior advisory positions in the Russian political establishment and served as Head of the Department of Sociology of International Relations of the Lomonosov Moscow State University from 2009 to 2014.[36]

It is not possible to discuss the entire spectrum of Dugin's work here, therefore this article will highlight several ideas that have contributed to the politicisation

....

[33] Morozov, E., 'Predisloviye kommentatora', in *Evgeny Messner, Vsemirnaya Myatezhvoyna*, (Moscow: Zhukovskoye Pole, 2004), pg. 8.

[34] See Savinkin, A. (ed.), *Dusha armii: Russkaya voyennaya emigratsiya o moral'no-psikhologicheskikh osnovakh rossiyskoy vooruzhennoy sily*, (Moscow: Voyennyy universitet, Nezavisimyy voyenno-nauchnyy tsentr 'Otechestvo i Voin', Russkiy put', 1997); Savinkin, A. (ed.), *Russkoye zarubezh'ye: gosudarstvenno-patrioticheskaya i voyennaya mysl*, (Moscow: Gumanitarnaya akademiya Vooruzhennykh sil, 1994); Messner, *Vsemirnaya Myatezhvoyna*, (Moscow: Zhukovskoye Pole, 2004); Savinkin, A. (ed.), *Khochesh' mira, pobedi myatezhevoynu!...*

[35] See Domnin, I. and A. Savinkin, 'Assimetrichnoe Voevanie', *Otechestvennyye Zapiski*, No. 5, 2005; Pavlushenko, M. et al., 'Myatezhevoyna kak forma tsivilizatsionnogo stolknoveniya Zapad-Vostok', *Obozrevatel'-Observer*, No.5, 2007, pp. 13–19; Biryukov, S. and A. Davydov, 'Konfliktnaya model' formirovaniya natsional'noy politicheskoy identichnosti kontseptsiya "matezhevoyny" E. Messnera (na primere Bosnii)', *Politicheskiye Instituty i Protsessy* No. 2, 2014, pp.132–145; Nesterov, A., 'Netraditsionnyye ugrozy voyennoy bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii v ramkakh modernizatsii NATO', *Vlast'*, No. 5, 2013, pp. 186–188; Morozov, E., 'Predisloviye kommentatora'; Savinkin, A., 'Groznaya Opasnost' Vsemirnoy Myatezhevoyny'.

[36] Nekrasov, S., 'A. G. Dugin: Nastoyashchiy Postmodern', *Diskurs-Pi* 1(1), 2001, pp. 43–52; Darczewska, J., *The Anatomy of Russian Information Warfare: The Crimean Operation, A Case Study*. Point of View. Vol. 42. (Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies, 2014), pg. 14.

of the concept of information warfare in Russian academic discourse. Dugin has always been one of the most prominent advocates of the idea of a Russian Eurasian civilisation that has unique socio-cultural characteristics, history, and role on the global arena.[37] For example, Dugin argues that:

> 'Russian society is Eurasian, that is partly European and partly non-European, and, [therefore] it is generally a unique and distinctive phenomenon. [...] It is no accident that we live on this land, within these boundaries. It is no accident that these borders were inhabited and settled by us. Between them and us there is a direct sociological, cultural, genetic, causal, conceptual, [and] morphological relationship.'[38]

This leads to the second aspect of Dugin's conceptualisation—the permanent offensive by Western civilization, primarily represented by the US, against the Russian Eurasian civilisation. For Dugin: 'the U.S.A [is] the sum of the West, its political, religious and ideological vanguard [...] the incarnation of the West, of Western capitalism, its centre and axis, its essence'.[39] According to Dugin, Russia has always been one of the most intense enemies of the West; the struggle between Western Protestant civilisation, led initially by the British Empire and then by the US, and Russian Orthodox Eurasian civilisation, can be traced throughout hundreds of years of confrontation, as far back as ancient times:

> '... from the mid-20th century the geopolitical duel, which has been traced by geo-politicians down to the ancient conflicts between Athens and Sparta, Rome and Carthage, etc., finally crystallised into the collision between the Western world (the U.S.A. and Western Europe) and the U.S.S.R., with satellites in Europe and Asia.'[40]

The third aspect of Dugin's ideas, most relevant to the idea of information warfare, is how, in his opinion, the West (mainly the US) has been waging an offensive against Russia throughout the 20th and early 21st centuries. In 2007, Dugin published his book *Geopolitika Postmoderna*, in which he presented his interpretation of the concept of network-centric warfare.[41] Following the publication of this book, Dugin continued to refine his ideas in a series of articles[42] and other books,[43] introducing the term 'net-centric wars' into Russian academic and political discourse. According to Dugin, due to the natural evolution of human civilisation from the agrarian to the industrial periods, and on into the Information Age, the American military establishment developed a

....

[37] Dugin, A., *Russkaya Veshch'*, (Moscow: Arktogeya, 2001); Dugin, A., *Filosofiya voyny*, (Moscow: Yauza, Eksmo, 2004); Dugin, A., *Geopolitika Postmoderna*, (Saint-Petersburg: Amfora, 2007); Dugin, A., *Sotsiologiya geopoliticheskikh protsessov Rossii*, (Moscow: Lomonosov Moscow State University, 2010); Dugin, A., *Russkaya voyna,* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2015); Dugin, A., *Voyna kontinentov—sovremennyy mir v geopoliticheskoy sisteme koordinat,* (Moscow: Akademicheskiy Proyekt, 2015).

[38] Dugin, A., *Sotsiologiya geopoliticheskikh protsessov Rossii*, pp. 31–32.

[39] Dugin, A., *Filosofiya voyny,* pp. 155–156.

[40] Dugin, A., *Geopolitika Postmoderna*, pg. 16.

[41] Ibid., pp. 651–700.

[42] See Dugin, A., 'Teoreticheskiye osnovy setevykh voyn', *Informatsionnye voyny,* Vol. 1(5), 2008, pp. 2–9; Dugin, A., 'Setetsentricheskiye voyny', *Informatsionnye voyny,* Vol. 1(5), 2008, pp. 10–16.

[43] See Dugin, A., *Voyna kontinentov - sovremennyy mir v geopoliticheskoy sisteme koordinat*, pp. 240–258.

new military strategy—net-centric war, which 'occurs in four interconnected areas of human activity: physical, informational, cognitive, and social'.[44] Dugin defines the network as the 'informational dimension, in which major strategic operations are developed, as well as their media, diplomatic, economic, and technical support'. Dugin claims that the main purpose of the US is to establish and control such a network in an attempt to obtain 'full and absolute control over all participants of actual and possible military activities, and their total manipulation in all situations—while war is waged, when it matures, or when there is peace'.[45]

According to Dugin, control is first and foremost achieved by absolute superiority in the informational dimension, and the main purpose of the American net-centric war is to impress upon the minds of the populations the idea that military competition with the US is pointless and should be avoided. Dugin claims that through the informational dimension, Washington attempts to:

> 'build a system of global domination of the U.S.A. over the whole world, i.e. the postmodern analogy of colonialism and submission, executed under new conditions, in new forms and by new means. There is no need for direct occupation, a massive deployment of forces or territorial conquest. [...] Network is a much more flexible weapon, it manipulates with violence and military power only in extreme cases, [while] the major results are achieved by contextual influence in a wide aggregation of factors: informational, social, cognitive, etc.'[46]

Moreover, Dugin claims that the information dimension has a 'highly important, if not central, role' in net-centric wars, as it is 'the most prevalent environment of network wars that has evolved into an independent category—the 'info-sphere', which stands separately and equal to physical means'.[47]

Summarising Dugin's ideas on net-centric wars, it is important to state that, according to him, the US has been waging a persistent and carefully planned offensive against Russia in the informational domain as a part of its net-centric strategy to dominate the world in the postmodern Informational Age. This net-centric war, waged against Russia by a carefully crafted network, includes:

> '…a Pro-American lobby of experts, political scientists, analysts, [and political] technicians that closely surround [Russian] authorities. A vast number of American foundations actively [co]operate, connecting intellectual elites to their network. The representatives of Russian capital and senior officialdom are naturally integrated into the Western world, where their savings are kept. The means of mass communication [that] irradiate readers and viewers with flows of visual and semantic information, are built according to Western patterns.'[48]

....
[44] Ibid., pg. 246.

[45] Ibid., pp. 241–244.

[46] Ibid., pp. 248–249.

[47] Ibid., pg. 247.

[48] Ibid., pg. 250.

To withstand this attack, Dugin argues that Russia has to adopt the 'Eurasian model', which should be in symmetric opposition to the 'Atlantic-American model', and will create its own network, oriented in precisely the opposite direction. This Eurasian network would offer a symmetric response within the informational dimension and would be based on:

> 'Special groups that would include senior officials, the most passionate cadre of different special services, intellectuals, scientists, engineers, political scientists, [and] the corps of patriotically-oriented journalists and culture activists.'[49]

In other words, according to Dugin, the purpose of information warfare is to influence a network of people, instructions, foundations, organisations, etc. that intuitively (or not) promote a certain set of ideas to achieve certain political goals.

The US was the first to master this new type of warfare, and wages net-centric wars against all other countries and nations by manipulating their social processes from the inside, thus winning physical confrontations before they even begin. Therefore, if Russia does not 'postmodernise' its military, secret services, political institutions, information, and communication systems to suit this net-centric struggle, it is doomed to lose this war.[50]

Dugin's politicisation of information warfare as a net-centric war waged by the US against Russia has been adopted by a large group of Russian political scientists, who find his interpretation of the historical East-West struggle appealing. Since its introduction in 2007, Dugin's concept of net-centric war has been used to interpret different geopolitical events in the post-Soviet space, claiming that they are all part of the net-centric war waged by the US against Russia, first and foremost in the informational domain.[51]

Igor Panarin—Information Warfare and the Fall of the USSR

Igor Nikolaevich Panarin holds a higher doctoral degree in political science and a PhD in psychology; he is a full member of the Military Academy of Science of the Russian Federation, and holds numerous senior advisory and coordinating positions within the Russian political establishment. Since the mid-1990s, Panarin has published more than 20 books and hundreds of articles, commentaries, and interviews, the vast majority of which focus on the psychological facets of warfare in general, and on information warfare in particular. While Dugin focuses on the

[49] Ibid., pg. 252.

[50] Ibid., pp. 250–258.

[51] See Zariffulin, P., 'Setevaya voyna na Severnom Kavkaze', *Informatsionnye voyny*, Vol. 2(6), 2008, pp. 37–41; Korovin, V., 'Setevaya voyna Ameriki protiv Rossii na primere Chechni', *Informatsionnye voyny,* Vol. 2(6), 2008, pp. 42–46; Bovdunov, A., 'Nepravitel'stvennyye organizatsii - setevaya voyna protiv Rossii', *Informatsionnye voyny*, Vol. 3(7), 2008, pp. 30–39; Savin, L., 'Ukraina v setevoy voyne', *Informatsionnye voyny*, Vol. 3(7), 2008, pp. 42–51; Kanishchev, P., 'Setevaya voyna SSHA protiv Rossii - pole boya – Gruziya', *Informatsionnye voyny,* Vol. 3(7), 2008, pp. 52-56; Korovin, V., *Glavnaya voyennaya tayna SSHA. Setevyye voyny : 'tsvetnyye revolyutsii', taynyye zagovory i spetsoperatsii, podryvnaya propaganda, 'promyvaniye mozgov', voyny 21 veka,* (Moscow: Yauza, Eksmo, 2009); Filimonov, *Kulturno-informatsionnie mekhanizmi vnewnei politiki SSHA*, pp.189–206.

struggle between the West and Russia from the perspective of political philosophy, Panarin has been implicitly focusing on information warfare as the major domain of this struggle, claiming that:

> 'Since antiquity, the stability of the political system of any country has been relying on how quickly and completely the political elites receive information (e.g. about [possible] danger), and how quickly they respond... Political activity [by its definition] is an informational struggle over the control of the minds of the elites and [other] social groups.'[52]

Analysing the long history of war, Panarin argues that the informational dimension has always played one of the most decisive roles in human conflict.[53] According to him, an informational confrontation is:

> 'A type of confrontation between parties, represented by the use of special (political, economic, diplomatic, military and other) methods [based on different] ways and means that influence the informational environment of the opposing party [while] protecting their own [environment], in order to achieve clearly defined goals. [Therefore, t]he major dimensions for waging informational-psychological confrontations [are] political, diplomatic, financial-economic, [and] military.'[54]

It is important to note that when Panarin mentions these dimensions, he does not refer to political, diplomatic, financial-economic, or military activities themselves, but rather to the manipulation of their informational images in order to achieve intentional control of the targeted public opinion so that certain political benefits can be gained. According to Panarin, control can be achieved by information manipulation, disinformation, fabrication of information, lobbying, blackmail, or any other possible way of extracting the desired information; or by the mere denial of information from the adversary. Thus, when an information war is waged by one state against another, Panarin states, it 'aims to interrupt the balance of power and achieve superiority in the global informational dimension' targeting 'the decision-making processes of the adversary' by manipulating international and domestic public opinion.[55]

Panarin defines three main stages of information warfare. The first stage is strategic political analysis, which includes the 'collection, aggregation, and exchange of information about adversaries and allies for the purpose of conducting active actions'. The second stage, informational influence, is based on 'infiltration of negative comments and disinformation into the informational domain of the adversary, as well as the suppression of the adversary's attempts to get the information that he requires'. And the third stage, informational defence, is 'blocking the disinformation dispersed and infiltrated by the adversary'.[56]

....

[52] Panarin, I., *Informatsionnaya voyna i geopolitika*, (Moscow: Pokolenie, 2006), p. 165.

[53] See Panarin, I., *Pervaya mirovaya informatsionnaya voyna: razval SSSR*, (Saint-Petersburg: Piter, 2010); I. Panarin, *Informatsionnyye voyna I kommunikatsii*, (Moscow: Goryachaya Liniya-Telekom, 2015); Panarin, I. and L. Panarina, *Informatsionnaya voyna i mir,* (Moscow: OLMA-PRESS, 2003).

[54] Panarin, I. and L. Panarina, *Informatsionnaya voyna i mir,* pp. 20-21.

[55] Panarin, I., *Pervaya mirovaya informatsionnaya voyna: razval SSSR*, pg. 24.

[56] Ibid., pg. 25.

As Panarin sees it, one of the most important aspects of information warfare is the fact that it targets the minds of the political elite and the general population, creating favourable public opinion and, therefore, affecting the whole political decision-making process of the opposing side. Similar to Dugin, Panarin suggests that, for the last several centuries, geopolitics have been dominated by a struggle between two main civilisations—the sea-oriented, i.e. the British Empire and the US, and the continent-oriented, i.e. Eurasia—Germany and Russia. While this struggle has often been expressed in the form of physical clashes (i.e. wars), these have always been accompanied by information warfare before, during, and after the wars.[57] Moreover, Panarin claims that, during the 20th century, the West—first the British Empire and then the US—mastered information warfare, ultimately leading to the dissolution of the Soviet Union as the 'main cause of the geopolitical catastrophe of 1991 was a defeat in the informational war, which lasted for 48 years'.[58] According to Panarin's interpretation of the Cold War, the main informational offence of the US was carried out to compromise and destabilise the Soviet political elite, targeting the weakest element of the Soviet political establishment—the transfer of power.[59]

On the one hand, Panarin highlights the fact that the main reason for the defeat of the Soviet Union in this information war (i.e. the Cold War) was the systematic failure of the Soviet political and military establishments, rather than the skilful exploitation of the information domain by the US. On the other, he argues that the war is not over; the struggle between the political elites of the West and Russia did not end in 1991, and 'in the 21st century information war is the major tool of contemporary world politics, [and] the dominant way to achieve political and economic power' – Russia continues to be the target of Western Informational Warfare.[60]

To avoid the repetition of the detrimental defeat of the USSR in the information war against the West, Panarin suggests that 'the existence of Russia depends on whether a new political elite will be formed—a passionate Russian political elite capable of an adequate response to the global challenges of the 21st century'. This elite, according to him, should be based on intellectuals from the liberal arts and sciences, the senior leadership of the security services and military, and the representatives of big and medium capital. The strategic purpose of this elite should be 'the formation of a positive global public opinion of Russia', since:

> 'Only a new Russian political elite, capable of skilfully conducting the geopolitical information confrontation, can create favourable conditions for the prosperity and development of the individual, society and the state, [and] to achieve its national and economic interests in the international arena.'[61]

Similarly to Dugin, Panarin's politicisation of information warfare as the historical offense of the West against Russia that led Russian people to destroy their country

....

[57] See: Panarin, I., *Pervaya mirovaya informatsionnaya voyna: razval SSSR*; I. Panarin, *Informatsionnaya voyna i geopolitika*; I. Panarin, *Informatsionnyye voyna I kommunikatsii*.

[58] Panarin, I., *Pervaya mirovaya informatsionnaya voyna: razval SSSR*, pg. 10.

[59] See: Panarin, I., *Pervaya mirovaya informatsionnaya voyna: razval SSSR*; I. Panarin, *Informatsionnyye voyna I kommunikatsii*.

[60] Panarin, I., and L. Panarina, *Informatsionnaya voyna i mir*, pg. 4.

[61] Panarin, I., *Informatsionnaya voyna i geopolitika*, pp. 244–245.

twice in the 20th century (the fall of the Russian Empire in 1917 and the fall of the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991)[62] has found fruitful ground in the Russian academic community. During the last decade, numerous articles and books have been using Panarin's concepts and ideas to interpret the deteriorating relations between Russia and the West, claiming that Russia has to defend itself against the informational offensive waged by the West.[63]

Summarising both Dugin's and Panarin's politicisations on information warfare, it is important to highlight their four common aspects. First, both claim that the West (first the British Empire, then the US) has been continuously and purposefully attempting to intervene and undermine the Russian political establishment before, during, and after the Cold War (i.e. as a part of inter-civilisations struggle for dominance). Secondly, the West's major strategy has been information warfare, influencing both Russian and international public opinions against the Russian political elite by manipulating the flow of information on political, diplomatic, financial-economic, and military affairs. The third aspect is the claim of both scholars that, in addition to the manipulation of information from the outside, Western strategy is aimed at creating a 'fifth column' within Russia in an attempt to destabilise Russia from the inside. And finally, as an answer to these old-new threats, both scholars argue that Russia should nurture its new political elite, which will be patriotic and passionate enough to overcome the Western net-centric/information war, making Russia the political, cultural, economic, and military centre of Eurasian civilisation.

The Politicisation of Information Warfare in Russia

The political idea expressed by the proponents of subversion, net-centric or information wars waged by the West against Russia to indirectly undermine the legitimacy of the Kremlin through the informational dimension, has spread like a bush fire through Russian scholarly circles, and among political analysts and commentators. Called by different titles—Hybrid Warfare, Controlled Chaos, Colour Revolutions—this idea has been widely discussed and promoted by academics, the political elite, and military professionals.[64]

[62] Panarin, I., *Pervaya mirovaya informatsionnaya voyna: razval SSSR*; I. Panarin, *Informatsionnaya voyna i geopolitika.*

[63] Kovalev, V. and S. Malkov, 'Chto delat', chtoby ne raspast'sya kak SSSR?', *Informatsionnye voyny,* Vol. 3(35), 2015, pp. 52–57; Yu. Grigor'yev, 'Antirossiyskiye Informatsionnyye Voyny', *Informatsionnye voyny,* Vol. 4(36), 2015, pp. 5–11; S. Tkachenko, *Informatsionnaya voyna protiv Rossii,* (Saint Petersburg: Piter, 2011); Lisichkin, V., L. Shelepin, *Tret'ya mirovaya informatsionno-psikhologicheskaya voyna,* (Moscow: Eskimo-Algoritm, 2003); Novikov, V., *Informatsionnoye oruzhiye—oruzhiye sovremennykh i budushchikh voyn,* (Moscow: Goryachaya Liniya-Telekom, 2011); Belyayev, D., *Razrukha v golovakh. Informatsionnaya voyna protiv Rossii,* (Saint Petersburg: Piter, 2015).

[64] See Tsygankov, P., *'Gibridnyye Voyny' v khaotiziruyushchemsya mire XXI veka,* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 2015); Korybko, A., *Hybrid Wars: The Indirect Adaptive Approach to Regime Change,* (Moscow: People's Friendship University of Russia, 2015); Bocharnikov, I., (ed.), *Evolyutsiya form, metodov i instrumentov protivoborstva v sovremennykh konfliktakh,* (Moscow: Ekon-Inform, 2015); Vladimirov, A., 'Gosudarstvo, voyna i natsional'naya bezopasnost' Rossii', *Prostranstvo i vremya,* No. 1, 2011, pp.26-38; Vladimirov, A., 'Strategiya "organizovannogo khaosa"', *Prostranstvo i vremya,* No. 1, 2010, pp.53–57; Manoylo, A., 'Ukrainskiy Krizis i "Upravlyayemyy Khaos": sled "Tsvetnykh Revolyutsiy" Arabskoy Vesny', *Vlast',* No. 4, 2014, pp. 24–28.

Evaluating the political impact of this large body of literature it is difficult to disagree with Russian professor Gregory Tulchinsky, who claimed that:

> 'The specific feature of "information warfare" is the implicitness of their actors. Who is the organiser of these actions? Against whom are they really directed? The ambiguity, regardless their actors, creates a mythicisation of "information wars" and their demonisation. If one wishes, [he] can trace a motivational chain, a "cunning plan", behind any news [story or] any event that can be attributed to some "enemies". This, of course, does not deny the fact of developing or implemented plans and projects done by various political and social forces— both foreign and domestic [...] However, the actors in "information wars" have largely become the product of interpretations and discursive practices, which, in turn, can also be regarded as "information warfare".'[65]

Conceptualising ongoing discourse about information warfare in Russia, as information warfare itself, Tulchinsky stated that 'it is a conflict, represented in the informational dimension, intended to activate some influential group, some institution, people who make decisions'.[66] Taking into consideration the fact that this discourse has been occurring in Russian, it seems right to conclude that the main target of this politicised information war, the Western offensive to destabilise Russia internally, has been Russia's domestic audience—the political elite and the general public. Therefore, to understand the level of this politicisation, it is important to analyse the way in which the 'Western information war against Russia' is expressed in Russian official political discourse and in public opinion.

A brief analysis of the contemporary Russian official political discourse shows that this narrative of a 'Western information war against Russia' is clearly and openly expressed by the Russian leadership. For example, President Vladimir Putin openly claims that:

> 'Our diplomats understand, of course, how important the battle to influence public opinion and shape the public mood is these days. We have given these issues much attention over recent years. However, today, as we face a growing barrage of information attacks unleashed against Russia by some of our so-called partners, we need to make even greater efforts in this direction.'[67]

Another example is Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, who, elaborating on the nature of these attacks, claimed:

> 'The destructive [political] line related to the events in Ukraine, the introduction of illegitimate sanctions against Russia, the attempts to punish our country for upholding truth and justice, for speaking in defense of [our] compatriots [in Ukraine] ... [all these] led to a serious crisis in our relations with the West.

[65] Tulchinsky, G., 'Informatsionnyye voyny kak konflikt interpretatsiy, aktiviziruyushchikh "tret'yego", in O. Malinova, (ed.), *Simvolicheskaya politika, Vol.1: Konstruirovaniye predstavleniy o proshlom kak vlastnyy resurs,* (Moscow: INION RAN, 2012), pp. 251–262; S. Glazunova, G. Tulchinsky, 'Paradoksal'nost' "informatsionnykh voyn" kak reprezentatsii konfliktov v sovremennom obshchestve: v poiskakh "postinformatsionnogo Tret'yego", in *Modernizatsiya kak upravlyayemyy konflikt*, (Moscow: Izdatel'skii .Dom "Klyuch-S", 2012), pp. 333–338.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Putin (2016) Speech at the Meeting of Russian Federation ambassadors and permanent envoys, Moscow, 30 June 2016.

We are faced with a large-scale information war.'[68]

The adaptation of these narratives, shaped by the proponents of the Western information offensive, has not simply ended with political speeches made by the Kremlin's leadership. The very same language can be easily found in the Russian doctrinal documents that have been amended in recent years. For example, the Russian Nation Security Strategy, amended in 2015, states that:

'The growing confrontation in the global information space has an increasing influence on the character of the international situation, as an outcome of the desire of some countries to achieve their geopolitical objectives by using information and communication technologies, including the manipulation of public consciousness and the falsification of history.'[69]

Another example is the new version of the Doctrine of the Information Security of the Russian Federation, proposed by the Russian Security Council, according to which one of the main threats to Russia is the fact that:

'The scale of the use of information-psychological influences by the special services of certain states is expanding. [These influences] are aimed at destabilising the political and social situation in various regions of the world, undermining the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of other states...The informational influence on the Russian population, primarily young people, is increasing. [This influence] is aimed at blurring cultural and spiritual values, undermining the moral foundations, historical foundations, and patriotic traditions of [Russia's] multinational people.'[70]

Moreover, as an outcome of these changes in doctrinal documents, the Russian government successfully passed several laws intended to counteract the alleged Western information offensive and protect Russian information space, such as the 2012 Federal Law № 121-FZ that restricted the activity of NGOs that receive foreign funding,[71] the 2013 Federal Law № 398-FZ that simplified the procedures required to block extremist websites, the 2014 Federal Law № 97-FZ that enforced governmental supervision on successful websites and blogs, the 2016 Federal Law № 374-FZ that forced websites to store data concerning their Russian clients within the

----

[68] 'Sergey Lavrov: Rossiya stolknulas' s bespretsedentnoy informatsionnoy voynoy', *Russia Today* in Russian, 10 April 2015.

[69] Presidential Decree N 683, On the Russian Federation National Security Strategy, Moscow, 31 December 2015

[70] The Security Council of the Russian Federation, Information Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation (draft), Moscow.

[71] The State Duma, Federal Law N 121-FZ - On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation regarding the regulation of the activities of non-profit organizations that perform the functions of a foreign agent, Moscow, 20 July 2012.

territory of Russia,[72] the 2014 Federal Law № 305-FZ that limits foreign investment in Russian media outlets.[73] While this new legislation was followed by a wave of critical reactions from international and Russian domestic communities,[74] it seems that this criticism has had limited consequences and has not been picked up by the general public.

While it seems that the politicisation of information warfare was successfully adopted by the Russian government to implement these laws, it is also important to examine the level of influence of this politicisation on the Russian public. According to the public opinion survey done by Levada Center in December 2014, 87% of responders said that the West is hostile towards Russia, and 42% of them claimed that this hostility is expressed in the form of information war. In October 2015, these numbers remained similarly high, with 82% believing that the West bears a hostile attitude towards Russia, and 44% of them accusing the West of waging an information war. Interestingly enough, answering the question 'What does the West try to achieve by toughening the sanctions against Russia' the vast majority answered 'To weaken and humiliate Russia', 71% in September 2014 and 69% in October 2015, in contrast to only 4% in 2014, and 6% in 2015 who believed that by tightening the sanction the West is trying 'to stop the war, destruction, and people's deaths in Eastern Ukraine'.[75] In other words, it seems that Russian people truly believe in the narrative that tells the story of a Western offensive to undermine Russia, either by information war, or by sanction, which, according to the proponents of the 'Western subversion/net-centric/information war against Russia' scenario, are also elements of a general informational offensive. Moreover, the majority of the Russian population believes that the main Russian TV channels are censored by the government (69% in February 2014 and 58% in May 2016)[76] and in November 2015 only 41% trusted Russian TV channels as their main source of domestic and international news (down from 79% in August 2009).[77] Frequently it seems right to argue that the academic community played an equal if not more powerful role, together with the official line of the political elites, politicising the idea of information war in the eyes of the Russian public.

....
[72] The State Duma, Federal Law N 398-FZ - On Amendments to the Federal Law, "On Information, Information Technologies and Protection of Information", Moscow, 28 December 2013; Federal Law N 97-FZ - On Amendments to the Federal Law "On Information, Information Technologies and Protection of Information" and Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation on the regulation of the exchange of information using information-telecommunication networks, Moscow, 21 July 2014; Federal Law 374-FZ - On Amendments to the Federal Law "On Combating Terrorism" and Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation to establish additional measures to counter terrorism and ensure public safety, Moscow, 6 July 2016.

73 The State Duma, Federal Law N 305-FZ - On Amendments to the Law of the Russian Federation "On Mass Media", Moscow, 14 October 2014.

[74] See 'Internet-kompanii kritikuyut antipiratskiy zakonoproyekt deputatov GD', *Ria-Novosti,* 13 June 2013; Surnacheva, Y., 'Ogranichennyye Dumoy', *Kommersant.ru*, 29 September 2014; 'Russian MPs back law on internet data storage', *BBCNews*, 5 July 2014; 'Russia: Writers and Academics Speak Out Against Law on Foreign Agents', *PEN American Center*, 5 February 2016; Dyomkin, D., 'Council of Europe tells Putin of concern over Russian NGO law', *Reuters*, 20 May 2013.

[75] Levada Center, *Reaktsiya Zapada na politiku Rossii: kritika, vrazhdebnost', sanktsii,* 2 December 2015.

[76] Levada Center, *SMI: vnimaniye i tsenzura,* 6 June 2016.

[77] Levada Center, *Novostnyye istochniki i doveriye k nim,* 16 December 2015.

To conclude this analysis of the politicisation of information warfare in Russia, it seems right to point to the three main groups involved in the process—the academic community, the Russian political establishment, and the Russian general public. The most interesting question, however, is who has been influencing whom in this process?

Conclusions

Interestingly, when we look at all three aspects of the process—the politicisation of information warfare directed by its scholarly proponents, the adaptation of these narratives by the Russian government and their translation into legal actions favourable to the Kremlin, as well as Russian public opinion that generally absorbed these ideas and legislation without significant criticism—it is very difficult to separate actors and targets. On the one hand, it is possible to assume, as some Western analysts propose,[78] that Panarin, Dugin, and other scholars who vocally politicise the narrative of the Western information war against Russia, go hand in hand with the Russian political establishment, alienating Russian public opinion against the West, thus allowing the Kremlin to enforce its grip on power. On the other, the assumption that the Kremlin uses these scholars seems to be flawed, as Panarin, Dugin, and the revivers of Messner began promoting their ideas in the 1990s, well before Putin's accession to power. Therefore, it seems right to assume that the politicisation of Western Information Warfare against Russia has been directed by these schools of thought, and adopted *de facto* by the political establishment.

There is, however, another possible explanation. History suggests that the Russian people are very proud nation, and in times of trouble they expect their leaders to stand firm and lead them to victory. The Tsarist government during the First World War, or the Soviet leaders during the Afghanistan War, did not prove to be a strong leadership that deserved to be followed. Witness, Nikolas II was the last Tsar and Mikhail Gorbachev—the last Soviet leader.[79] Over the last decade, Vladimir Putin has proven himself a student of history and a very good reader of Russian cultural predispositions. As Dmitri Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Centre and one of the most outspoken critics of Putin's regime, put it: 'Putin's main recipe for staying in power is to stay in close touch with the bulk of the people, and anticipate emerging trends'.[80] From the dissolution of the Soviet Union to the present day, the vast majority of the Russian population has been lamenting their loss of power (66% in 1992, peaking in 2000 with 75%, and 56% in 2016), with as much as a third of the population believing that the fall of the USSR could have been avoided (with highest percentages of 33% in 2011 and 2016).[81] In other words, this sorrow for the lost

....

[78] See J. Darczewska, *The Anatomy of Russian Information Warfare: The Crimean Operation, A Case Study, Point of View*, Vol. 42, (Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies, 2014); U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), *'Little Green Men': a Primer on Modern Russian unconventional Warfare, 2013-2014*, An unclassified version of the original document, (Fort Bragg, 2016).

[79] Trenin, Dmitri, 'Putin's Biggest Challenge Is Public Support', Carnegie Moscow Center, 15 January 2015.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Levada Center, *Bol'she poloviny rossiyan sozhaleyut o raspade SSSR*, 19 April 2016.

pride might explain the thirst of the Russian public for a sound justification of their defeat in the Cold War to Russia's traditional enemy—the West. Maybe the Kremlin does not, in fact, brainwash the Russian people, but simply follows their hearts and minds.

Unfortunately, it seems that none of these explanations is completely right or entirely wrong; the eventual truth seems to be somewhere in the middle. Summarising his idea of the politicisation of information war as information war itself, Tulchinsky concluded: 'sometimes the information war [just] repositions a well-known fact, encouraging the decision-making process or demonstrating that the decision is maturing or has even been made'.[82] In other words, the political success of the narrative of the Western information war against Russia within Russian academic, political, and public spheres seems to be the outcome of many actors who inter-influence one another, participating in the same play but for different reasons. Academics want to promote their ideas, politicians want to enforce their power, and the general public wants to regain a sense of national pride—rather than a result of a carefully planned and staged plot of Putin's regime, as it is frequently presented in the West.

This article is part of a research project generously supported by the Gerda Henkel Foundation.

Bibliography

Alexanrov K., *Armia Generala Vlasova, 1944–1945*, (Moscow: Yauza Eskimo, 2006).

Belyayev D., *Razrukha v golovakh. Informatsionnaya voyna protiv Rossii,* (Saint Petersburg: Piter, 2015).

Biryukov S., Davydov A., 'Konfliktnaya model' formirovaniya natsional'noy politicheskoy identichnosti - kontseptsiya "matezhevoyny" E. Messnera (na primere Bosnii)', *Politicheskiye Instituty i Protsessy* No. 2, 2014, pp.132–145.

Bocharnikov I., (ed.), *Evolyutsiya form, metodov i instrumentov protivoborstva v sovremennykh konfliktakh,* (Moscow: Ekon-Inform, 2015).

Bovdunov A., 'Nepravitel'stvennyye organizatsii—setevaya voyna protiv Rossii', Informatsionnye voyny, Vol. 3(7), 2008, pp. 30–39.

Bukharin S., *Metody i tekhnologii informatsionnykh voyn*, (Moscow: Akademicheskiy proyekt, 2007).

Darczewska J., *The Anatomy of Russian Information Warfare: The Crimean Operation, A Case Study. Point of View.* Vol. 42, (Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies, 2014).

Domnin I., 'Ot Pervoy mirovoy do "Tret'yey Vsemirnoy", Zhiznennyy put' General'nogo shtaba polkovnika E. E. Messnera', in Savinkin A., (ed.) Khochesh' mira, pobedi myatezhevoynu!—Tvorcheskoye naslediye E. Messnera, *Rossiyskiy Voyennyy Sbornik,* Issue 21, (Moscow: Voyennyy Universitet, Russkiy Put', 2005).

....
[82] Tulchinsky, G., 'Informatsionnyye voyny kak konflikt interpretatsiy, aktiviziruyushchikh "tret'yego".

Domnin I., Savinkin A.,'Assimetrichnoe Voevanie', *Otechestvennyye Zapiski,* No. 5, 2005.

Dugin A.,'Setetsentricheskiye voyny', *Informatsionnye voyny,* Vol. 1(5), 2008, pp. 10–16.

Dugin A., 'Teoreticheskiye osnovy setevykh voyn', *Informatsionnye voyny*, Vol. 1(5), 2008, pp. 2–9.

Dugin A., *Filosofiya voyny,* (Moscow: Yauza, Eksmo, 2004).

Dugin A., *Geopolitika Postmoderna,* (Saint-Petersburg: Amfora, 2007).

Dugin A., *Russkaya Veshch',* (Moscow: Arktogeya, 2001).

Dugin A., *Russkaya voyna*, (Moscow: Algoritm, 2015).

Dugin A., *Sotsiologiya geopoliticheskikh protsessov Rossii,* (Moscow: Lomonosov Moscow State University, 2010).

Dugin A., *Voyna kontinentov - sovremennyy mir v geopoliticheskoy sisteme koordinat*, (Moscow: Akademicheskiy Proyekt, 2015).

Dyomkin D., 'Council of Europe tells Putin of concern over Russian NGO law', *Reuters*, 20 May 2013.

Filimonov G., Danyuk N. and M. Urakov, *Perevorot*, (Saint Petersburg: Piter, 2016).

Filimonov G., *Kulturno-informatsionnie mekhanizmi vnewnei politiki SSHA*, (Moscow: People's Friendship University of Russia (RUDN), 2012).

Glazunova S., Tulchinsky G., 'Paradoksal'nost' "informatsionnykh voyn" kak reprezentatsii konfliktov v sovremennom obshchestve: v poiskakh "postinformatsionnogo Tret'yego", in *Modernizatsiya kak upravlyayemyy konflikt*, (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom "Klyuch-S", 2012).

Grigor'yev Yu., 'Antirossiyskiye Informatsionnyye Voyny', *Informatsionnye voyny*, Vol. 4(36), 2015, pp. 5–11.

'Internet-kompanii kritikuyut antipiratskiy zakonoproyekt deputatov GD', *Ria-Novosti,* 13 June 2013.

Kanishchev P., 'Setevaya voyna SSHA protiv Rossii—pole boya—Gruziya', *Informatsionnye voyny,* Vol. 3(7), 2008, pp. 52–56.

Korovin V., 'Setevaya voyna Ameriki protiv Rossii na primere Chechni', *Informatsionnye voyny,* Vol. 2(6), 2008, pp. 42–46.

Korovin V., *Glavnaya voyennaya tayna SSHA. Setevyye voyny: "tsvetnyye revolyutsii", taynyye zagovory i spetsoperatsii, podryvnaya propaganda, "promyvaniye mozgov", voyny 21 veka*, (Moscow: Yauza, Eksmo, 2009).

Korybko A., *Hybrid Wars: The Indirect Adaptive Approach to Regime Change*, (Moscow: People's Friendship University of Russia, 2015).

Kovalev V., Malkov S., 'Chto delat', chtoby ne raspast'sya kak SSSR?', *Informatsionnye voyny,* Vol. 3(35), 2015, pp. 52–57.

Levada Center, *Bol'she poloviny rossiyan sozhaleyut o raspade SSSR*, 19 April 2016.

Levada Center, *Novostnyye istochniki i doveriye k nim*, 16 December 2015.

Levada Center, *Reaktsiya Zapada na politiku Rossii: kritika, vrazhdebnost', sanktsii*, 2 December 2015.

Levada Center, *SMI: vnimaniye i tsenzura*, 6 June 2016.

Lisichkin V., Shelepin L., *Tret'ya mirovaya informatsionno-psikhologicheskaya voyna*, (Moscow: Eskimo-Algoritm, 2003).

Malkov S., Bilyuga S., 'Model ustoychivosti/destabilizatsii politiheskih sistem', *Informatsionnye voyny*, Vol. 1(33), 2015, pp. 7–18.

Manoylo A., 'Ukrainskiy Krizis i "Upravlyayemyy Khaos": sled "Tsvetnykh Revolyutsiy" Arabskoy Vesny', *Vlast'*, No. 4, 2014, pp. 24–28.

Messner E., *Lik sovremennoy voyny*, (Buenos Aires: South American Division of the Institute for the Study of the Problems of War and Peace named after Prof. General N.N. Golovin, 1959).

Messner E., *Myatezh—Imya Tret'yey Vseminoy,* (Buenos Aires: South American Division of the Institute for the Study of the Problems of War and Peace named after Prof. General N.N. Golovin, 1960); E. Messner, *Vseminaya Myatezhevoyna*, (Buenos Aires: South American Division of the Institute for the Study of the Problems of War and Peace named after Prof. General N.N. Golovin, 1971).

Messner E., *Posluzhnoy Spisok*. (Buenos Aires, 1972). First published as: Tereshchuk A., (ed.), *Yevgeniy Eduardovich Messner: Sud'ba Russkogo Ofitsera,* (Saint-Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Sankt-Peterburgskogo Universiteta, 1997).

Messner E., *Vsemirnaya Myatezhvoyna,* (Moscow: Zhukovskoye Pole, 2004).

Morozov E., 'Predisloviye kommentatora', in Messner E., *Vsemirnaya Myatezhvoyna*, (Moscow: Zhukovskoye Pole, 2004).

Nekrasov S., 'A. G. Dugin: Nastoyashchiy Postmodern', *Diskurs-Pi,* Vol. 1(1), 2001, pp. 43–52.

Nesterov A., 'Netraditsionnyye ugrozy voyennoy bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii v ramkakh modernizatsii NATO', *Vlast',* No. 5, 2013, pp. 186–188.

Novikov V., *Informatsionnoye oruzhiye—oruzhiye sovremennykh i budushchikh voyn*, (Moscow: Goryachaya Liniya-Telekom, 2011).

Orlov A., 'Sistemnyi analis amrikanskogo kapitalizma kak factor vliyaniya na informatsionnuyu bezopasnost ssha i rossiiskoi federatsii na primere sobitii na Ukraine v 2013-2015gg', *Informatsionnye voyny,* Vol. 1(37), 2016, pp. 74–77.

Panarin I., *Informatsionnaya voyna i geopolitika*, (Moscow: Pokolenie, 2006).

Panarin I., *Informatsionnaya Voyna I kommunikatsii,* (Moscow: Goryachaya Liniya-Telekom, 2015).

Panarin I., *Informatsionnyye voyna I kommunikatsii*, (Moscow: Goryachaya Liniya-Telekom, 2015).

Panarin I., Panarina L., *Informatsionnaya voyna i mir*, (Moscow: OLMA-PRESS, 2003).

Panarin I., *Pervaya mirovaya informatsionnaya voyna: razval SSSR*, (Saint-Petersburg: Piter, 2010).

Pavlushenko M., et al., 'Myatezhevoyna kak forma tsivilizatsionnogo stolknoveniya Zapad-Vostok', *Obozrevatel'-Observer*, No. 5, 2007, pp.13–19.

Pertsev A., 'Osobennosti informatsionnogo protiviborstva v sovremennikh usloviyakh, *Informatsionnye voyny,* Vol. 2(34), 2015, pp. 33–37.

Presidential Decree N 683, On the Russian Federation National Security Strategy, Moscow, 31.12.2015.

Prokhvatilov V., 'Ataka myslyashchey pautiny- metaprogrammirovaniye - organizatsionnoye oruzhiye 21 veka', *Informatsionnye voyny,* Vol. 1(13), 2010, pp. 73–83.

Putin V., Speech at the Meeting of Russian Federation ambassadors and permanent envoys, 30 June, 2016 Moscow.

Raskin A., Tarasov I., 'Informatsionnoe protivoborstvo v sovremennoy voyne', *Informatsionnye voyny,* Vol. 4(32), 2014, pp. 2–6.

Rastorguyev S., *Informatsionnaya voyna. Problemy i modeli. Ekzistentsial'naya matematika*, (Moscow: Akademicheskiy proyekt, 2006).

'Russia: Writers and Academics Speak Out Against Law on Foreign Agents', PEN American Center, 5 February 2016.

'Russian MPs back law on internet data storage', *BBCNews*, 5 July 2014.

Savin L., 'Ukraina v setevoy voyne', *Informatsionnye voyny,* Vol. 3(7), 2008, pp. 42–51.

Savinkin A., 'Groznaya Opasnost' Vsemirnoy Myatezhevoyny', in Savinkin A., (ed.) Khochesh' mira, pobedi myatezhevoynu! – Tvorcheskoye naslediye E. Messnera, *Rossiyskiy Voyennyy Sbornik,* Issue 21, (Moscow: Voyennyy Universitet, Russkiy Put', 2005).

Savinkin A., (ed.) Khochesh' mira, pobedi myatezhevoynu! – Tvorcheskoye naslediye E. Messnera, *Rossiyskiy Voyennyy Sbornik,* Issue 21, (Moscow: Voyennyy Universitet, Russkiy Put', 2005).

Savinkin A., (ed.), Dusha armii: Russkaya voyennaya emigratsiya o moral'no-psikhologicheskikh osnovakh rossiyskoy vooruzhennoy sily, *Voyennyy Sbornik*, Issue 13, (Moscow: Voyennyy universitet, Nezavisimyy voyenno-nauchnyy tsentr «Otechestvo i Voin», Russkiy put', 1997).

Savinkin A., (ed.), Russkoye zarubezh'ye: gosudarstvenno-patriotcheskaya i voyennaya mysl', *Voyennyy Sbornik,* Issue 6, (Moscow: Gumanitarnaya akademiya Vooruzhennykh sil, 1994).

Savinkin A., (ed.), Voyennaya mysl' v izgnanii: Tvorchestvo russkoy voyennoy emigratsii, *Voyennyy Sbornik,* Issue 16, (Moscow: Voyennyy universitet, Russkiy put', 1999).

'Sergey Lavrov: Rossiya stolknulas' s bespretsedentnoy informatsionnoy voynoy', *Russia Today* in Russian, 10 April 2015.

Surnacheva Y., 'Ogranichennyye Dumoy', *Kommersant.ru*, 29 September 2014.

The Security Council of the Russian Federation, Information Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation (draft), Moscow.

The State Duma, Federal Law 374-FZ - On Amendments to the Federal Law "On Combating Terrorism" and Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation to establish additional measures to counter terrorism and ensure public safety, Moscow, 6 July 2016.

The State Duma, Federal Law N 121-FZ - On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation regarding the regulation of the activities of non-profit organizations that perform the functions of a foreign agent, Moscow, 20 July 2012.

The State Duma, Federal Law N 305-FZ - On Amendments to the Law of the Russian Federation "On Mass Media", Moscow, 14 October 2014.

The State Duma, Federal Law N 398-FZ - On Amendments to the Federal Law" On Information, Information Technologies and Protection of Information", Moscow, 28 December 2013.

The State Duma, Federal Law N 97-FZ - On Amendments to the Federal Law "On Information, Information Technologies and Protection of Information" and Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation on the regulation of the exchange of information using information-telecommunication networks, Moscow, 21 July 2014.

Tkachenko S., *Informatsionnaya voyna protiv Rossii*, (Saint Petersburg: Piter, 2011).

Trenin D., 'Putin's Biggest Challenge Is Public Support', Carnegie Moscow Center, 15 January 2015.

Tsygankov P., *"Gibridnyye Voyny" v khaotiziruyushchemsya mire XXI veka,* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 2015).

Tsyganov V., Bukharin S., *Informatsionnyye voyny v biznese i politike : Teoriya i metodologiya*, (Moscow: Akademicheskiy Proyekt, 2007).

Tulchinsky G., 'Informatsionnyye voyny kak konflikt interpretatsiy, aktiviziruyushchikh "tret'yego", in O. Malinova, (ed.), *Simvolicheskaya politika, Vol.1: Konstruirovaniye predstavleniy o proshlom kak vlastnyy resurs*, (Moscow: INION RAN, 2012).

U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), *'Little Green Men': a Primer on Modern Russian unconventional Warfare*, 2013-2014, An unclassified version of the original document, (Fort Bragg, 2016).

Vladimirov A., 'Gosudarstvo, voyna i natsional'naya bezopasnost' Rossii', *Prostranstvo i vremya*, No. 1, 2011, pp. 26–38.

Vladimirov A., 'Strategiya "organizovannogo khaosa"', *Prostranstvo i vremya,* No. 1, 2010, pp. 53–57.

Vlasenko I., *Kir'yanov M., Informatsionnaya voyna: iskazheniye real'nosti,* (Moscow: Kantsler, 2011).

Zariffulin P., 'Setevaya voyna na Severnom Kavkaze', *Informatsionnye voyny,* Vol. 2(6), 2008, pp. 37–41.