



# CHAOS AS A STRATEGY

Putin's "Promethean" Gamble

Donald N. Jensen  
Peter B. Doran

November 2018



Center *for*  
European Policy  
Analysis

All opinions are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the position or views of the institutions they represent or the Center for European Policy Analysis.

#### **About CEPA**

The Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) is a 501(c)(3), non-profit, non-partisan, public policy research institute. Our mission is to promote an economically vibrant, strategically secure, and politically free Europe with close and enduring ties to the United States. Our analytical team consists of the world's leading experts on Central-East Europe, Russia, and its neighbors. Through cutting-edge research, analysis, and programs we provide fresh insight on energy, security, and defense to government officials and agencies; we help transatlantic businesses navigate changing strategic landscapes; and we build networks of future Atlanticist leaders.

© 2018 by the Center for European Policy Analysis, Washington, DC. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without permission in writing from the Center for European Policy Analysis, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in news articles, critical articles or reviews.

Center for European Policy Analysis  
1275 Pennsylvania Ave NW, Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20004  
E-mail: [info@cepa.org](mailto:info@cepa.org)  
[www.cepa.org](http://www.cepa.org)

Cover image: Edited version of Russian President Vladimir Putin with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chief of the General Staff General Valery Gerasimov at Vostok 2018. Credit: kremlin.ru.



# CHAOS AS A STRATEGY

## Putin's "Promethean" Gamble

Donald N. Jensen  
Peter B. Doran

November 2018



# Table of Contents

<b>Summary of Findings and Recommendations</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Section 1—Calm Between Storms: Russia and the International System</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Russian Thermidor</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Section 2—Chaos for Strategic Effect</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Sun Tzu</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Clausewitz</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Enter Prometheus...</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>...Gerasimov Updates</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Prometheanism in Action</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Section 3—The Centrality of Information Warfare</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Externally Focused Media</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Impact: Strengths</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Impact: Weaknesses</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Section 4—Prospects: The Evolving Threat</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Findings and Recommendations</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Endnotes</b>	<b>44</b>

# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Findings

- ⌚ Kremlin leaders regard themselves as players in a great power competition with the United States and Europe.
- ⌚ In order to compensate for Russia's long-term internal decline, the Kremlin increasingly is willing to take risks—sometimes recklessly—to balance its relative weakness against the West's relative strength.
- ⌚ The Kremlin is attempting to offset its weakness by committing to a competitive strategy in which the side that copes best with disorder will win.
- ⌚ In order to facilitate this strategy, Russia is seeding chaos in the West via asymmetrical means—i.e. disinformation, subversion, and “political warfare” operations.
- ⌚ The strategy combines both old and new. It combines a 20th century concept for asymmetrical competition popularized by Poland's famed statesman Józef Piłsudski with Russian General Valery Gerasimov's concepts for conducting 21st century warfare.
- ⌚ The result is a nonlinear means of competing against the West only in areas where Russia has advantages.
- ⌚ A central element of this strategy is information warfare. This has become one of the main battlegrounds between Russia and the West and a prime vector where the Kremlin has implemented its “Promethean” strategy.

- ⌚ Russia's authoritarian system enjoys strengths and weaknesses when executing its strategy. A chief strength is Russia's authoritarian system—granting the Kremlin a partial competitive advantage in managing the psychology and politics of disorder. A primary weakness is blowback—efforts at sowing instability abroad can have a ricochet effect.
- ⌚ Given the success of Putin's “Promethean” gamble—and the Kremlin's sustained reliance on it—Russian leaders are likely undervaluing the inherent risks of their strategy. This can be exploited.

## Recommendations

Dangers that we can see are easier to admire than those that we do not understand. In particular, U.S. leaders must consider how the concept of a bloodless “disordering of the far frontier” has figured in past Russian political-military strategy. Likewise, the Kremlin's chaos-seeding strategy shows us what its leaders fear: Western power. To date the West has not fully considered how its power can be brought to bear against the Kremlin's vulnerabilities. Every strategy has a weakness—even chaos.

In combatting the threat of Russia's chaos strategy, the United States and Western democracies have not fully considered how their full toolkits of national power can be brought to bear against Kremlin vulnerabilities. We can begin by removing the predictable and permissive conditions that enabled Russia's chaos strategy in the first place; and work toward a sustainable end state in which Russia returns to “normal” strategic behavior patterns. We can begin to accomplish this in four steps:

- ⌚ First, realize that Russia sees the international system very differently than we do, even

though our interests on specific issues may coincide (for example, counter-terrorism).

- ② Second, approach our dealings with Moscow with the understanding that its use of terms like “international law” and state “sovereignty” are invoked primarily to advance Russia’s interests. Kremlin leaders evoke these concepts for *ad hoc* advantage, not because it endorses a rules-based international system.
- ② Third, understand that Russia’s use of information warfare has a purpose: reflexive control. (Such control is achieved by subtly convincing Russia’s opponents that they are acting in their own interests, when in fact they are following Moscow’s playbook.)
- ② Fourth, prioritize the sequencing of the “carrots and sticks” offered to the Kremlin. Sticks first. This means initially increasing the penalties imposed on Russia for continued revisionist behavior and the sowing of chaos. We can start with tougher sanctions, wider travel bans, greater restrictions on access to the global financial system, and financial snap exercises. Presently, some of these tools are used—but they are underutilized in most cases. This needs to change.

Particularly, in the domain of information warfare, the West must hit back harder. Although the EU’s East StratCom, NATO’s StratCom, and the newly established national StratComs in Europe can be effective tools, they still lack resources, coherence, and full coordination to stop Russia’s malicious activities. We are in a technological contest with Russia. We should aim to win it. The Western response must be superior in impact and sophistication.

Russia relies on harnessing bursts of “sharp power” to succeed in its competition with the West. In response, Western leaders must set as

a collective goal their intention to outmaneuver, outplay, and contain the damage of Russia’s strategy with our overwhelming diplomatic, informational, military, and economic power. This response must be both public and private, and include the government, media outlets,

---

“To date the West has *not fully considered how its power can be brought to bear against the Kremlin’s vulnerabilities. Every strategy has a weakness—even chaos.*”

---

the tech and private sectors, and civil society. Experience shows that an independent message is more credible and effective, and people are ultimately more receptive when these messages come from non-state actors. Investing more in these non-state domains holds a great deal of untapped potential in the





Russian President Vladimir Putin. Photo Credit: kremlin.ru.

West. Finally, these measures must all go hand-in-hand with coordinated economic sanctions and be backed up with Western military power.

Unfortunately, we in the West—particularly in the United States—have been too predictable, too linear. We would do well to consider ourselves the underdog in this contest and push back in nonlinear ways. Perhaps the only thing that Kremlin leaders fear more than Western power is the rejection of their rule by Russia’s own people. While our final goal

should be to ensure that Moscow becomes a constructive member of the Euro-Atlantic security community, our responses for now should serve the shorter-term goal of forcing Russia to play more defense and less offense against the West. For this purpose, we should lessen our preoccupation with “provoking” the Kremlin. It is hardly a basis of sound policy to prioritize Putin’s peace of mind. The Russian government will work with the West if that path suits its goals. Otherwise, it will not. We should do the same.

## INTRODUCTION

Can Vladimir Putin’s nonlinear strategy succeed against the West? For all of Russia’s weaknesses as a Great Power, the Kremlin increasingly is willing to take risks—sometimes recklessly—to balance its disadvantages against the relative power of Western competitors like the United States. Risk taking is a dangerous business for any state—declining or otherwise. But what if the Kremlin believed that it could stack the odds of success in its favor? Could chaos be a strategy in itself? Inside some corridors of power in Moscow, the answer is: yes.

In recent years, Russian leaders and strategists have developed a set of methods aimed at spreading disorder beyond their borders for strategic effect. Their goal is to create an environment in which the side that copes best with chaos wins. The premise is Huntingtonian: that Russia can endure in a clash of civilizations by splintering its opponents’ alliances with each other, dividing them internally, and undermining their political systems while consolidating its own population, resources, and cultural base. Such a strategy intentionally avoids competing in those areas where Russia is weak in hope that, should a direct confrontation occur, Russia will enjoy a more level playing field.

Strategies of chaos are not new. Sun Tzu, Clausewitz, and Haushofer all advocated the use of what would now be called information warfare to confuse and weaken a foe before attacking militarily. In Russian strategic history in particular, there is a tradition of stoking chaos on the far frontier to keep rivals divided and feuding internally rather than combining

their forces to fight against Russia. What is new is that Russia has married an old idea (chaos) with 21st century technology and means. It is an exceptionally potent combination.

---

“In recent years, Russian leaders and strategists have developed a set of methods aimed at spreading disorder beyond their borders for strategic effect.”

---

The catch is that risks can outweigh the rewards when courting turmoil. Indeed, a major disadvantage of chaos strategies is that they tend to backfire: efforts at sowing instability in a neighbor’s lands can ricochet, generating



instability that eventually affects the initiator. Another problem with chaos strategies is that they involve a form of behavior—e.g. the purposeful use of disinformation—that becomes inherently more escalatory with time. Subversive moves that are initially surreptitious become more recognizable with use. And since these tools are ultimately part of war, it is hard to know when a state sponsored disinformation operation campaign is intended for every day, low-threshold “political warfare” or is a prelude to high-end kinetic operations. Worse, the preparations and countermoves that such actions prompt on the part of their targets can trigger tests of strength, the avoidance of which was the starting aim of the strategy.

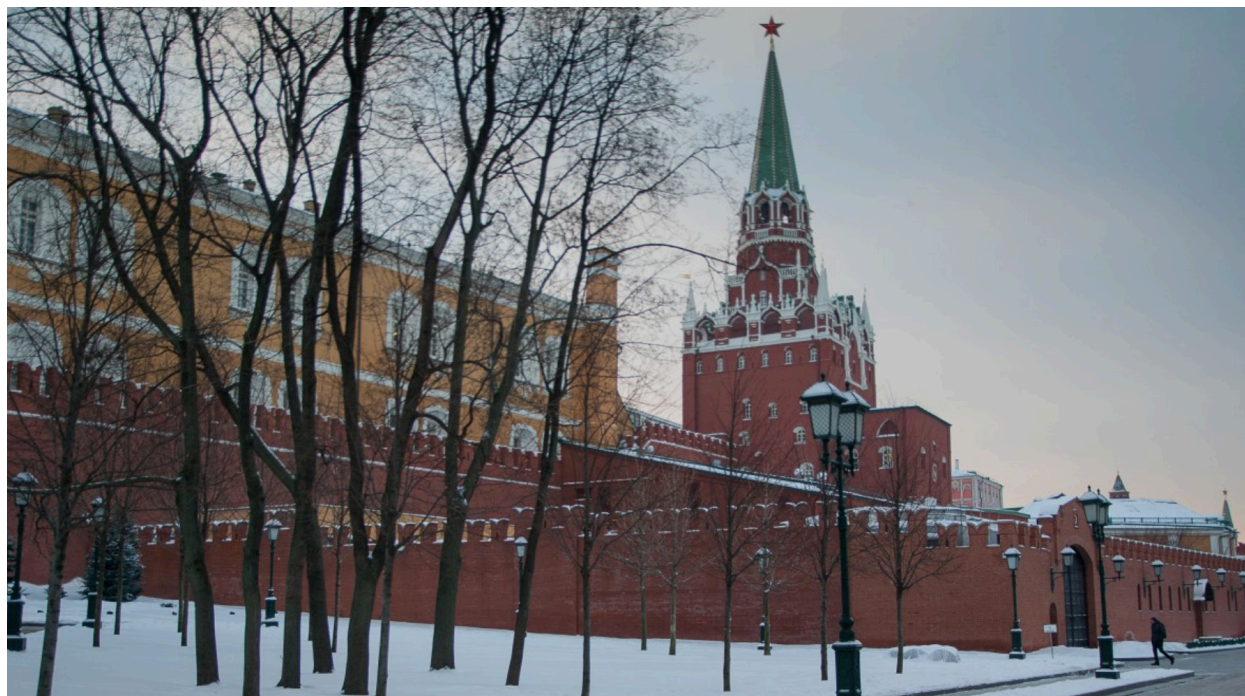
In this context, considerations of Western security competition with Russia have not focused enough on the strategic motivations behind Moscow’s efforts to foster disorder, to obscure its objectives, and to make its actions seem unpredictable. Rather, a great deal of attention has been focused on what can easily be observed: what its social media “bots” are saying or what conspiracy theories its news outlets are purveying. The underlying strategic motivations of Russian leaders are undervalued or missed. In the West, the result is a mindset of *reaction*. Experts and leaders fail to anticipate next moves or evaluate Russia’s endgame goals in this contest. While we remain subjected to continual surprise, Western states are fixated on the threats of chaos instead of looking for opportunities that the weaknesses in Russia’s strategy could generate. This can—and should—change. The following report offers a means of understanding the purpose behind Russia’s strategy—and for altering our response to it.

## SECTION 1—CALM BETWEEN STORMS: RUSSIA AND THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

### Russian Thermidor

Under President Vladimir Putin, the Russian government has embarked upon on a multi-decade effort to rebrand its past and renegotiate its future. These efforts are linked, since they both arise from the same underlying problem: the foundational instruments of Russian power are no longer in the ascent. Confronted with a declining population, chronic social problems, weakening economic competitiveness, the corrosive effects of the “resource curse,” and the persistence of institutionalized corruption, the Kremlin faces power impediments in all directions. The subsequent response by the Putin regime to this challenge has been the prioritization of one goal: survival.

In conceptual terms, Kremlin policies are “Thermidorian.” They are much like the famous pause in the French Revolution that introduced more conservative policies to stabilize the state after a period of great political turmoil. Following the end of communism and the tumult of 1990s, Putin took power from the hands of earlier post-Soviet leaders. He subsequently buttressed state structures against disruptive impulses at home and used the country’s wealth from natural resource exports to increase the standard of living and buy popular acquiescence to his authoritarian



The Kremlin. Photo Credit: pxhere.

rule. Simultaneously, Putin burnished his political credibility by invading Georgia and Ukraine.<sup>1</sup>

The results of this approach are now prevalent across Russia. The revival of Soviet military rituals and iconography, the re-writing of the past, the rehabilitation of dead dictators like Joseph Stalin, the rote repetition of narratives like “Russia the besieged fortress,” or “Russia the victim of the West,” and the copious consumption of consumer goods are all intended to excite and mobilize society against the bottom-up forces that could threaten the current state.<sup>2</sup> And while this effort may have provided Putin and his elites with political breathing space, it has not resolved their underlying dilemma: weakness.

Behind the facade of “Thermidorian” Russia, the Kremlin’s assets of national power are dwindling—fast. The most obvious example is its demographic challenge. Russian men continue to die young and in alarmingly large

numbers (when compared to their European neighbors). Russia’s falling birthrate also shows few signs of slowing down. Today’s Russian youth, born around the time when Putin first took office in 2000, now constitute the smallest generation in the country. The “missing millions” from Russia’s falling birthrate are also beginning to have a negative impact on the structure of the economy. Because Russia’s youth are so relatively few in number, they will decrease the total size of the Russian workforce by an expected 4.8 million people over the next six years. Overall, the total size of the Russian population is projected to shrink by 11 million between now and the midpoint of the century.

By 2050, only 133 million Russian citizens will be left to populate an eighth of the Earth’s inhabited land area. The overwhelming number of these residents are likely to be concentrated into just three cities: Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Novosibirsk.<sup>3</sup> Outside of Russia’s urban centers, its remaining territory will seem

comparatively empty when contrasted with the teeming polities of peer competitors like India (1.7 billion) and China (1.4 billion).<sup>4</sup> If demography is destiny, then Russia's shrinking population and ever-smaller workforce will mean that future jobs may be available in the country. However, there may not be enough Russians to fill them. This will be a tremendous handicap to Russian competitiveness in the 21st century.

Perhaps energy resources will be Russia's saving grace. Since at least the 1970s, the energy sector has been Russia's economic afterburner. It has supercharged the country through good years. In lean economic years, it has provided at least a minimal degree of support to the other elements of national power: diplomacy, information, and the military. The trouble is that Russia is now suffering from the deep decay of the resource curse ("Dutch disease").<sup>5</sup> This is the process by which Russia's energy wealth has steadily undermined its long-term economic competitiveness. Petrol rubles may have enriched elites and filled store shelves with imported luxuries, but these trappings of affluence have come at a cost: the sustained decline of Russia's manufacturing and non-energy export sectors (particularly in the regions).<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately for the Kremlin, the decline in manufacturing and economic prowess on account of Dutch disease is far advanced. Worse yet, it shows no signs of correction or remediation.

The problem with Dutch disease is structural. Under Putin, the Russian state has become the *de facto* property of a small group of decision-makers who maximize their power and profits through a reciprocal process of export revenue, state patronage, and "value destruction"—e.g. the institutionalization of corruption and waste within the economy. The process is particularly apparent in the natural resource

sector.<sup>7</sup> This segment of the economy, and the state-owned companies within it, are a prime source for "running the engine" of power and profit distribution among elites. But breaking Russia's export dependence, systematically reforming the energy sector, or denying elites ready access to lootable capital would all risk shutting down that engine. The resource curse is thus a feature—not an abnormality—of the Russian economy.

In order to maintain the system that directs national wealth to elites, Russia's political and national security structures have developed a heightened sensitivity to any trend or event that might topple the regime. The Color Revolutions in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan—as well as the Arab Spring in the Middle East—remain prime sources of concern. Russia's leadership has interpreted these revolts not as genuine acts of popular discontent against authoritarian regimes, but as manufactured political events from afar. A common refrain in elite circles is that such events were 'instigated' by the West (especially the United States) in order to encircle and contain Russia and, ultimately, topple the Putin regime itself.

Operating under the logic of "if it could happen there, it can happen here," the Kremlin rolled out a series of revolutionary counter-measures in the wake of the Color Revolutions. Their purpose was to cement the regime's hold on power by mustering pro-government demographics around emotional themes to strengthen its legitimacy. The counter-revolution, moreover, would need rallying cries, so the Kremlin set out to create them. This was the catalyst for the government's political mobilization strategy, its cultivation of nostalgia for bygone national "greatness," for the rewriting of textbooks, the revival of potent Soviet symbols, and for its youth education program targeting the United States as an



enemy in a worldwide conspiracy against Russia.<sup>8</sup>

For Putin, the tide of anti-authoritarian revolutions appears to have struck a nerve. His angst and frustration over this trend were particularly memorable hallmarks of his 2015 address to the United Nations. Putin used this global platform to publicly assail Western support for the Arab Spring and other revolts, asking the General Assembly, “Do you at least realize now what you’ve done? But I’m afraid that this question will remain unanswered, because they [the United States] have never abandoned their policy, which is based on arrogance, exceptionalism, and impunity.”<sup>9</sup>

Context matters. When Putin delivered his 2015 General Assembly address, revolution had just returned to Russia’s doorstep. In neighboring Ukraine, the “Revolution of Dignity” had toppled the Kremlin’s proxy government in that country. Leaders in Moscow blamed the United States and the EU for having supported and facilitated this transition. They described how it created “deep divisions in Ukrainian society and the occurrence of an armed conflict.” Moreover, they warned that it added to “deep socio-economic crisis in Ukraine [which] is turning in the long term into a hardening of instability in Europe”—and all on Russia’s border.<sup>10</sup>

Embedded within Putin’s warning to the United Nations, and associated Kremlin protestations over Ukraine, was an inadvertent revelation. Despite Russia’s relative weaknesses, its leaders still view themselves as players in a Great Power competition with the United States and Europe—and they harbor a grudge. They believe that the international system treats Russia unjustly, even though Russian citizens have benefited from the international

order that both sides—East and West—helped to establish after the collapse of the Soviet Empire. They see the pillars of the post-1991 order—universal human rights, democratic norms, and the rule of law—as a pretext for foreign meddling in their internal affairs. And they fear that such ideas could undermine the legitimacy of their regime and threaten its survival.

---

“Viewed through the lens of **those who rule Russia**, *the world is first and foremost an alien and hostile place in which the strong prosper over the weak.*”

---

Viewed through the lens of those who rule Russia, the world is first and foremost an alien and hostile place in which the strong prosper over the weak. For all the assumptions of “win-win” solutions which are embodied in the Western approach to international relations,

the world, according to Moscow, is divided into winners and losers. This has intensified the strong zero-sum mentality that has informed Russia's traditional approach to international affairs.<sup>11</sup> What's more, such zero-sum thinking fits into the Kremlin's preferred interpretation of the present: Russia is a beleaguered fortress, surrounded by subtle and cynical enemies who are determined to isolate, humble, and homogenize it.<sup>12</sup> (See Appendix I.) This is a grim world.

Adding to the zero-sum thinking that has shaped Russian statecraft is a relatively recent calculation that the international system is profoundly changing. In this assessment, the moment of American "hyperpower" after the Cold War is over. The United States and other Western powers are no longer able to exert the same dominance over the world economy, international politics, and collective norms as in past decades.<sup>13</sup> Kremlin leaders might denounce what they see as Western meddling in the world (specifically under the guise of democratization), but they also sense an opening—one that can facilitate a new international order.

This perceived opportunity is based on a series of postulates, including:

1. The U.S.-led Euro-Atlantic order is eroding.
2. This process is ongoing.
3. Increased social pessimism and tension will result from upheavals in the old status quo.<sup>14</sup>
4. The emergence of new power centers, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, will be one consequence.<sup>15</sup>
5. A weakening of the rules and norms of the previous order will be another outcome.

6. States which rely upon the old rules to buttress their sovereignty will be weaker—no stronger.

As Director of the Carnegie Moscow Center Dmitry Trenin has noted, "As long as all of the leading world powers, including China and Russia, agreed with the rules and regulations of this [old] order, and in the case of China also benefited from it, it represented a true Pax Americana... When Russia broke with the system that developed after the end of the Cold War, the period of peaceful relations between the main players became a thing of the past."<sup>16</sup>

Viewed from this perspective, the recent accumulation of disagreements between Russia and the West are *systemic*.<sup>17</sup> They are rooted in a fundamental quarrel over the new rules that should govern the international system. What's more, the old order still has a capable champion: the United States. Editor-in-Chief of *Russia in Global Affairs* Fyodor Lukyanov captured this sense when writing that Moscow "never took seriously the arguments in favor of a liberal world order: a game with a positive sum, where interdependence softens rivalry, the economy is primary, and politics is secondary."<sup>18</sup> However, Lukyanov went further, arguing that the Western vision of the world should be rejected, since neither democracy nor values promotion were possible anymore. Lukyanov criticized the "second-class Europeanism" offered by the EU—which was hardly a "worthy offer" for Russia—the West's expansion into Eastern Europe, its intervention in Serbia, its decision to "force" Ukraine to choose the EU over Russia, and its continued devotion to worldwide democratization. He asserted that Russia must now use an "Iron Fist" abroad to defend its interests. Like many other Russian commentators, Lukyanov returned to zero-sum calculations. He viewed efforts by

the United States and its allies to bolster their global position as inherently limiting Russia's influence. By exerting political, economic, and military "pressure"—Lukyanov was especially critical of NATO expansion—Western states created a "threat to Russia's national security."<sup>19</sup> There could be no win-win with an "Iron Fist."

One area of difference between Russian officials and experts is how Russia can manage its two-pronged challenge: maintaining sovereignty during a perceived change in the international system (on the one hand), and coping with the putative "threat" from the West (on the other). Lukyanov has argued that Russia should seek a return to 19th century balance of power constructs, "which never disappeared from the Russian political thinking, but which in the West at some point...was considered an anachronism."<sup>20</sup> Trenin has echoed this point, claiming that Russia should help create a system from several major world powers and to reaffirm itself as a "great power whose influence extends to the whole world."<sup>21</sup>

Some Russian scholars are more skeptical about the prospects for a reboot of the 19th century model. Nikolay Silaev and Andrey Sushentsov are representative of this perspective, arguing that the Kremlin's emphasis on the defense of its national sovereignty, and on its own unique "values," have no deep underpinnings. Consequently, they could be swept away by other changes in the global system. The "conservative roll, which has been outlined in the rhetoric of Moscow in recent years, has a protective, in a direct sense, reactionary character: it is only intended to create another barrier against attempts to undermine the national sovereignty and interference in internal affairs, and not to propose a new global agenda."<sup>22</sup>

Despite its ambitious rhetoric, the Kremlin's employment of terms like "sovereignty" and "values" boil down to one animating concept: survival. Importantly, the Kremlin has not offered an actionable and concrete proposal for what should replace the existing structure of international relations. Rather, its emphasis on Great Power concepts ultimately comes

---

“Despite its ambitious rhetoric, the Kremlin’s employment of terms like ‘sovereignty’ and ‘values’ boil down to one animating concept: survival.”

---

down to the proposition that Moscow should be accorded an entitlement to suzerainty over states that have rejected its rule (like Ukraine), and not least the United States should support that right.

Influential commentator Sergey Karaganov finds that Russia so far has neither a positive picture of the future world order nor an attractive strategy for its own development:



“We (like China) do not fill the ideological vacuum created by the collapse of almost all international systems. Multipolarity is not the desired state of the world, but a chaos. The concept works only as the antithesis to the previous unipolarity. But what’s next?

Russia does not have a coherent strategy (apart from strengthening its own deterrent forces) of increasing levels of international security, which currently is in a state of severe stress if not under the threat of failure. The level of relations with the West is extremely bad, albeit largely not through our fault... the current nature of the relationship is counterproductive and harmful, we need a change of coordinates, a different angle of view, and a rejection of the obsession with the West in both pro- and anti-Western ways...”<sup>23</sup>

He concludes that the current situation is very dangerous:

“Chaos and the lack of a dialogue between the world powers, not only Russia and the US but all others as well, make the situation much more dangerous than during the Cold War...this is a transitional period. It can last a very long time. And if we survive it, then in ten, fifteen or twenty years in the world there will be another system in which most likely there will be two large centers: one, conditionally, Eurasian with China’s leadership, but with China balancing a number of powers, including Russia, Iran, India, South Korea, Japan, and the other, which will form around the United States. But this is if there is not a big war that can just finish the story.”<sup>24</sup>

“If we survive it.” These four words capture Russia’s core challenge in the 21st century. But what if there were a way to balance the Kremlin’s multiple disadvantages against the relative power of Great Power competitors like the United States? Such thinking would be premised on a Huntingtonian view of the world. If Russia indeed faced a clash with the West, would it be possible to stack the odds of success in its favor? The Kremlin’s response to this question is to bet heavily that can minimize Western strengths. This requires the splintering of opposing alliances, the dividing of states against each other, and the undermining of their political systems. All the while, Russia’s top-down authoritarian system must consolidate its own population, resources, and cultural base. Such a strategy intentionally avoids competing in those areas where Russia is weak in the hope that, should a direct confrontation occur, Russia will enjoy a more level playing field. Survival is the goal. Chaos is the means.

## SECTION 2—CHAOS FOR STRATEGIC EFFECT

What is Chaos? In the realm of the physical sciences, chaotic systems possess a nearly infinite number of components. When these components interact, they produce seemingly unpredictable or highly complex behavior. The weather, stock markets, and even the diffusion of creamer in a cup of coffee are all examples of “nonlinear dynamic systems” in action.<sup>25</sup> While humans tend to think of these systems as chaotic, there is an underlying order within the disorder. There is an organizing structure to the randomness.<sup>26</sup>

In military science, chaos also has a well-established pedigree. Practitioners and

theorists have long advocated its use as a strategy. Great Powers across history have continually sought to sow instability in neighboring states—often through the use of what we now call information warfare—to enhance their own security. When Great Powers employ chaos strategies, they tend to be peripheral to other, more conventional forms of state competition. Since Great Powers usually have superior resources at their disposal, the defining question in such cases typically comes down to the best use of those resources—either directly or indirectly—against an opponent.

For weaker powers, chaos strategies tend to hold the greatest appeal. The strategy promises to compensate for a weak actor's strategic inferiority. In Russian history in particular there is a tradition of the state stoking chaos on the far frontier to keep rivals divided and feuding internally—and thus unable to combine forces against Russia. Since direct engagement by Russian forces with the modern U.S. military would prove extremely costly, “the [Russia] chaos strategist, by contrast, must manipulate the scenario to his best advantage while striving to prevent the introduction of American military force” into a conflict.<sup>27</sup> Chaos can offer an edge.

## Sun Tzu

One of the first scholars to extensively consider these kinds of questions in warfare was Sun Tzu. As a starting premise, his *Art of War* postulates that all warfare is first based on deception:<sup>28</sup>

“Thus although you are capable, display incapability to them. When committed to employing your forces, feign inactivity. When your objective is nearby, make

it appear as if distant; when far away, create the illusion of being nearby. Display profits to entice him. Create disorder (in their forces) and take them. If they are substantial, prepare for them; if they are strong, avoid them. If they are angry, perturb them; be deferential to foster their arrogance. If they are rested, force them to exert themselves. If they are united, cause them to be separated. Attack where they are unprepared. Go forth where they will not expect it. These are the ways military strategists are victorious. They cannot be spoken of in advance.”<sup>29</sup>

Notably, Russian military thinking long has been close to Sun Tzu when it comes to the conduct of warfare.<sup>30</sup>

Sun Tzu derived several related concepts from the idea that strategy should unbalance an enemy—e.g. create disharmony and chaos.<sup>31</sup> He focused on manipulating an enemy. In this way, a practitioner of the military arts created opportunities for easy victory. An enemy was weakened through confusion about one's own position, through the subsequent dislocation of opposing forces, and by putting those forces in a state of disorder. Sun Tzu offered a number of strategic and tactical factors that, together with grand strategic factors, combined to put an enemy off balance. Sun Tzu's goal was to maneuver an opponent into a position against which the potential energy of one's own army could be released with the maximum effect and to attack where an opponent was not prepared. One should avoid a battle, Sun Tzu cautioned, until a favorable balance of power was created. In his famous counsel to strategists across millennia, “One who knows when he can fight, and when he cannot fight, will be victorious. One who knows the enemy

and knows himself will not be endangered in a hundred engagements. Subjugating the enemy's army without fighting is the true pinnacle of excellence."<sup>32</sup> Among Sun Tzu's methods to put an enemy off balance, he emphasized the importance of surprise through deception and deceit. He also introduced the concept of *formlessness* (e.g. maintaining a high tempo, ensuring variety and flexibility in actions) and of using both orthodox and unorthodox methods.<sup>33</sup> Another concept that was applicable to chaos in the military arts was Sun Tzu's *yin*—the notion that a general must be responsive to context. They should adapt to any situation in such a manner as to take full advantage of its defining circumstances and avail themselves to all the possibilities of a given situation.<sup>34</sup> In Sun Tzu's thinking, "Do not fix any time for battle, assess and react to the enemy in order to determine the strategy for battle."<sup>35</sup>

## Clausewitz

Alongside Sun Tzu, another titan of strategy who considered the use of chaos was Carl von Clausewitz. In *On War*, Clausewitz defined warfare as a "remarkable trinity" composed of (1) the blind, natural force of violence, hatred, and enmity among masses of people; (2) chance and probability, faced or generated by the commander and his army; and (3) war's rational subordination to the policy of the government.<sup>36</sup> Clausewitz recognized the need for a theory of war that would maintain a "balance between these three tendencies, like an object suspended between three magnets."<sup>37</sup> For Clausewitz, warfare was a mix of order and unpredictability.<sup>38</sup> It resembled the form of a nonlinear dynamic system in that its rhythms and outcomes were shaped by many competing, interactive factors. From this came one of Clausewitz's conclusions about war: "The second attribute of military action

is that it must expect positive reactions, and the process of interaction that results. Here we are not concerned with the problem of calculating such reactions—that is really part of the already mentioned problem of calculating psychological forces—but rather with the fact that the very nature of interaction is bound to make it unpredictable."<sup>39</sup> Hence, Clausewitz became one of the first scholars to perceive and describe "unpredictability" as the key feature of nonlinearity in war.<sup>40</sup>

## Enter Prometheus...

Despite its use and repetition throughout time, not all strategies of chaos are the same—nor are they created equally.<sup>41</sup> During the first half of the 20th century, Poland's famed statesman Józef Piłsudski executed one of the more innovative nonlinear chaos strategies in the history of statecraft. He dubbed it "Prometheanism" in homage to the mythological Greek hero who rejected the authority of the more powerful Zeus. Prometheanism was Piłsudski's answer to the enduring question: How can a relatively weaker power successfully compete against a much stronger one? Today, an updated form of Prometheanism is allowing an aggrieved Russia to overcome its specific strategic disadvantages in the 21st century.

In the case of Piłsudski, Poland's solution was to exploit the vulnerabilities of neighboring Russia by creating divisions and distractions across this rival's territory. Compared to Russia, Piłsudski's Poland was relatively weak. However, he could level the playing field by stoking the troublesome legacy of the former Czarist empire: Russia's nationalities problem. By supporting potentially disruptive independence movements across Russia, Piłsudski intended to keep his rival off balance. Chaos was his strategy. Fostering disorder inside Russia was his means. Keeping an





Józef Piłsudski with Supreme Command of Polish Military Organization in 1917. Photo Credit: Wikimedia.

aggressive Bolshevik state at bay was his goal. Unfortunately, Piłsudski's Prometheanism may have had unintended, adverse consequences: It probably informed the USSR's own subsequent strategy of exploiting its opponents.

In the contemporary context, definitions matter. Here we define Prometheanism as the calculated application of nonlinear statecraft (e.g. the use of disinformation, subversion, etc.) to weaken an opponent by the creation of internal divisions at home and external isolation abroad. We consider Prometheanism as a specific member of a larger family of chaos strategies used throughout history. While Prometheanism is not the only form of a chaos strategy, it can be highly effective under the right circumstances. It can also fail—sometimes spectacularly. Prometheanism is also not specific to Poland. It has often been used by actors against strategically stronger adversaries. Indeed, it existed before Piłsudski gave it a fabulous brand.

One example of a Promethean strategy in action was Germany's successful attempt to back Russian revolutionaries against the Czarist government during World War I. Berlin's strategy supported Lenin and his Bolsheviks. Facilitating their activities in Russia had a purpose (in Berlin's view): to destabilize the Czarist Empire from within and weaken its alliance with Western powers. Germany provided the Bolsheviks with propaganda support and weapons; and it helped Lenin re-enter Russia from his exile in Switzerland. In 1917, Germany's top army command reported to its Foreign Office that, "Lenin's entry into Russia was a success. He is working according to your wishes."<sup>42</sup>

After unleashing Lenin on Russia, Germany's strategy succeeded against improbable odds—and perhaps even beyond Berlin's highest hopes. As German Minister of Foreign Affairs Richard von Kühlmann pointed out following Lenin's successful seizure of power

in the October Revolution, the “disruption of the Entente and the subsequent creation of political combinations agreeable to us constitute the most important aim of our diplomacy.” Von Kühlmann confided to the Kaiser on December 3, 1917: “It was not until the Bolsheviks had received from us a steady flow of funds through various channels and under varying labels that they were in a

---

**“An updated form of Prometheanism is allowing an aggrieved Russia to overcome its specific strategic disadvantages in the 21st century.”**

---

position to be able to build up their main organ *Pravda*, to conduct energetic propaganda and appreciably to extend the originally narrow base of their party.”<sup>43</sup> Peace with Germany followed.

Upon consolidating power in March 1918, Lenin’s Bolsheviks signed of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. It was the peace accord that

Lenin had long promised to sign with Germany. And while the Brest-Litovsk peace talks reflected the Bolsheviks’ own interests, the ensuing peace came at great cost, with the surrendering of vast and important agricultural regions. With this peace, Germany effectively won World War I on the Eastern Front. Alas, the Kaiser’s military fortunes were less sanguine on the Western Front. The overall war ended badly for Germany.

During the interwar period of the 20th century, Soviet policy in the Baltics represented a form of Prometheanism in action, especially in the Kremlin’s use of disinformation and political subversion against its neighbors. By this time, Soviet leaders had learned much from grappling with Piłsudski’s Promethean gambit against them. Moscow had internalized the value of chaos and mastered the technique. The Kremlin’s subsequent Promethean campaign against the Baltics underscored an additional aspect of the strategy: it need not be an end in itself. It can also be preparation for more kinetic forms of warfare. Upon the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939, which divided the territory between Germany and the USSR into respective “spheres of influence,” the Soviet Ambassador to Tallinn reported with satisfaction that Estonians were left “bewildered” and “disoriented.” The Kremlin’s subterfuge was complete. Its calculated use of disinformation in the Baltics had disguised Moscow’s true hostile intentions in the run-up to war, leaving its neighbors strategically off balance. Prometheanism had worked.<sup>44</sup>

In the early phases of the Cold War, the Soviet Union again used Prometheanism against West European states—creating fifth columns and intentionally pitting discrete political factions against one another. The attempt to weaken the West had a number of purposes: to

prevent rearmament in Germany; to discredit pro-British and American leaders in Italy; to engender beneficial political chaos for local communist parties to exploit; and to win *de facto* recognition for Moscow's solidification of power in the eastern half of the continent. The postwar era likewise revealed an inherent danger of Prometheism: blowback. Soviet policy in Europe eventually backfired dramatically by becoming a major stimulus for the Marshall Plan.

## ...Gerasimov Updates

Two decades after the Cold War, Russian General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff, took the next major step in the history of Promethianism by fusing chaos to Russia's contemporary strategic goals. In February 2013, Gerasimov articulated his theory of modern warfare in a now-famous article for the *Military-Industrial Kurier*.<sup>45</sup> (The article was

based on a speech he had presented at the Russian Academy of Military Science the month before.) The modern concept of chaos would thereafter be different thanks to Gerasimov.

Gerasimov started from the beginning. He took tactics developed by the Soviets, blended them with strategic military thinking about total war, and laid out a new theory that was more akin to hacking an enemy's society than attacking it head-on. In the article, Gerasimov wrote: "The very 'rules of war' have changed. The role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness... All this is supplemented by military means of a concealed character."<sup>46</sup> Sun Tzu would be proud.

While discussing the Arab Spring and NATO's intervention in Libya, Gerasimov highlighted,



Russian Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov. Photo Credit: Russian Ministry of Defense.

and apparently endorsed, general trends in Western approaches to warfare starting with the 1991 Gulf War. To him, the key element of change in the current operating environment was the increasing importance of non-military tools in conflicts, such as political, economic, informational, and humanitarian instruments. Gerasimov suggested that “in terms of efforts employed in modern operations, the ratio of non-military and military operations is 4 to 1.”

---

“*Still channeling Sun Tzu, Gerasimov specified that the objective was to achieve an environment of permanent unrest and conflict within an enemy state.*”

---

Goals would be achieved by using clandestine military operations and Special Forces (among other means). By contrast, visible military force would only be used in the form of peace-keeping and crisis management operations.

The article, considered by many to be an outline of Russia’s modern hybrid strategy, laid out a vision of total warfare. It placed politics and war within the same spectrum—philosophically, but also logistically. The

approach was guerrilla and waged on all fronts with a range of actors and tools—hackers, media, businessmen, leaks, and fake news, as well as through conventional and asymmetric military means alike. Thanks to the internet and social media, all kinds of psychological operations—including upending the domestic affairs of nations with information alone—were now plausible. In building a framework for these new tools, Gerasimov declared that non-military tactics were not *auxiliary* to the use of force. They were the war. Chaos was the strategy. Still channeling Sun Tzu, Gerasimov specified that the objective was to achieve an environment of permanent unrest and conflict within an enemy state.<sup>47</sup>

Importantly, Gerasimov did not exclude conventional forces from his thinking. On the contrary, he stressed Russia’s need for innovation and the wider modernization of its armed forces. By including this additional point, he scattered Western assessments of his writing into different directions. Some Western readers of the text wondered if his key message was to outline a new Russian approach to war, or simply to reproach Russian military leaders for not sufficiently studying contemporary war as it was waged by others. The proponents of the latter approach argued that Gerasimov did not refer to a new Russia “doctrine,” nor did he outline future approaches. In this interpretation, he intended to highlight the primary threats to Russian sovereignty in an attempt to suggest that the Kremlin’s political leadership needed to be more open to innovative ideas on future security challenges.<sup>48</sup> Writing on the Gerasimov doctrine, analyst Charles Bartles has argued that it should not be seen as a proclamation of the strategies of the Russian military and security services, but an outline of what *Russia believes is being done by the West*, and how Russia can hope to understand and



counter *what they believe the West is doing to them*. For this reason, Bartles contended that Gerasimov was really expounding upon the alleged use of asymmetric warfare via the various Color Revolutions of the 2000s-2010. He concluded that the West used massive disinformation campaigns to destabilize non-Western friendly nations by means of NGOs within, combined with a barrage of sensational or outright fictional news coverage from friendly media outlets without.<sup>49</sup>

By contrast, scholars who viewed the Gerasimov doctrine as prescriptive emphasized the strong correlation between his concepts and the Kremlin's subsequent military action in Ukraine. Such analysts argued that Gerasimov outlined a Russian model of war which integrated all elements of national power with a military capable of using both deniable irregular and high-technology conventional forces.<sup>50</sup> They pointed out that Russian operations resembled the ancient military thinking of Sun Tzu, rather than a more contemporary Western method of warfare.<sup>51</sup> Thus, Gerasimov's article was too thorough a preview for Russia's subsequent actions in Ukraine to have been a mere descriptive article. Instead, they claimed it represented a form of "mirror imaging"—something designed to mask Russia's method of conducting "hybrid war" with references to an alleged American approach.<sup>52</sup> In this sense, Gerasimov was suggesting a specific approach: to turn the playbook of Western adversaries against them via nonlinear war.<sup>53</sup> It is notable that Putin has personally employed similar mirror imaging. For example, he used the term "controlled chaos" in a pre-election article on defense in 2012. In that article, Putin argued that Russia was under attack from the West, which by various means—political as well as economic—was destabilizing Moscow's strategic neighborhood, and ultimately Russia itself.<sup>54</sup>

Two key events support the conclusion that Gerasimov was being *prescriptive*.

First, the comprehensive military reform in Russia, ongoing since 2008, integrated the two strands—civilian and military—of hybrid warfare. This was in line with Gerasimov's argument that the prevalence of information systems made them useable as warfighting tools, and they had decreased the "spatial, temporal and information gap between the armed forces and government."<sup>55</sup> In effect, Russia's reform of the armed forces shrunk the barriers between the civilian and military output of information warfare (and other tools of hybrid warfare) to create a requisite degree of synergy between them.<sup>56</sup> These reforms were thus probably based on an updated Russian warfighting concept that:

"...put a new face on hybrid warfare by incorporating non-military measures into the battlefield in intensive ratios effectively, conducting a good refinement of the Soviet legacy 'reflexive control' concepts to disguise Kremlin's campaigns abroad, and also by linking strategic, operational, and tactical levels of a campaign efficiently within the context of full spectrum operations, proxy war, special operations, and subversive activities. This strategic perspective is supported by a new force posture, renewed doctrinal order of battle, and robust combined arms capabilities for elite units at permanent readiness levels."<sup>57</sup>

Second, Russia's aggression against Ukraine a year after the publication of Gerasimov's article demonstrated the intense use of the elements of hybrid warfare methods that he had already discussed. Several related terms have been used to describe Russia's military action there: "hybrid warfare," "gray zone strategies," "competition short of conflict,"

“active measures,” “unconventional warfare,” and “new generation warfare.”<sup>58</sup> Despite differences in vocabulary, these terms all focus on the Kremlin’s use of multiple instruments, as Gerasimov highlighted, with an emphasis on non-military tools to pursue Russian national interests outside its borders.<sup>59</sup>

---

**“While Gerasimov and his generals may think of ‘active measures’ primarily as a prelude to armed operations, the Kremlin’s own national security specialists still regarded them as an alternative.”**

---

While in previous post-Cold War conflicts Russia employed its traditional doctrine and was not impressively successful, Crimea was different: it might either have been an exception to the pattern of Russia’s past performance or it was

a “new norm” with which the West must now contend.<sup>60</sup>

Some analysts have highlighted the key elements of “hybrid warfare” that were successful in Crimea (and in the Donbas). These were:

1. Capturing territory without resorting to overt or conventional military force—exemplified by the infamous “little green men” operating in Ukraine in 2014.
2. Beginning a proxy war with a key role assigned to the security services and special forces, and creating a pretext for overt, conventional military action.<sup>61</sup>
3. Using hybrid measures to influence the politics and policies of countries in the West and elsewhere, in Gerasimov terms, to make “use of internal opposition throughout the adversary’s area as a permanent front.”<sup>62</sup>

Still other analysts have argued that the conflict in the Donbas was a “hybrid war” mostly during its early stages, before the introduction of large numbers of regular Russian troops bolstered the faltering prospects on the battlefield of the pro-Russian “separatist” fighters.<sup>63</sup> In those early days, armed “volunteers” supported by the Russian security services led a wave of occupations of Ukrainian government buildings in Eastern Ukraine. They organized “militias” and announced the goal of the region’s independence and eventual unification with Russia. The Russian government then relied on gray zone tactics that reflected its desire to conceal direct involvement in the fighting. All the while, it provided pro-Moscow fighters with weapons and logistical support. Its regular soldiers stripped of any identifying signs to fight in the insurgents’ ranks, making them the iconic “little green men” of the conflict.<sup>64</sup>

In the case of the war in Ukraine, analyst Mark Galeotti has injected a key, often overlooked point into the discussion about Gerasimov's intentions:

“...we should not be thinking of this primarily in military terms. What we call ‘hybrid war’ in Russian thinking is actually separate things. What Gerasimov was talking about was the use of subversion to prepare the battlefield before intervention... Breaking the chain of command, stirring up local insurrections, jamming communications—these are all classic moves that hardly began in Crimea.”<sup>65</sup>

It is a reasonable point. Generals think like generals. And while Gerasimov and his generals may think of “active measures” primarily as a prelude to armed operations, it is important to remember: the Kremlin's own national security specialists still regarded them as an alternative.

Once again, the organizing problem is survival. The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation makes abundantly clear: the Kremlin views NATO as a formidable enemy. Consequently, this strategic document takes pains to prevent small-scale, localized conflicts from ever inviting the arrival of NATO forces into a contested theater. Implanted here is Russia's recognition of its weakness—and Western strength. Kremlin strategists therefore faced a dilemma: how can a country with a relatively small economy, an army that is still going through an expensive modernization, and little positive soft power compete with a larger, richer coalition of democracies to achieve its foreign policy goals?<sup>66</sup>

## Prometheanism in Action

The Kremlin's answer to the question of competition has been contradictory, opportunistic, and often effective.<sup>67</sup> But there is an answer at the bottom.

Clearly, it is possible to showcase examples of Russia acting as a Great Power. This behavior pattern is most apparent when Russia applies its traditional political, diplomatic, economic, and military means to various global or regional conflicts for the purpose of creating the *impression* of strategic relevance. In this way, the Kremlin tries to demonstrate that it still deserves to play an important role in international politics and that without Russia it is impossible to resolve many global problems.<sup>68</sup> When it serves Moscow's purposes, the Kremlin often uses these forays to insist that a cardinal rule for solving international problems must be non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. There are two reasons to be cautious about Moscow's words and motivations. First, such rhetoric bolsters Russia's larger goal of defending itself against outside regime change (i.e. survival). Second, the Kremlin has no qualms about breaking its own non-interference rule in the case of Ukraine or Syria.

As a contradictory opportunist in the international system, Moscow also has begun to reorient its diplomatic priorities. While Europe remains important, the Kremlin has pursued closer relations with China, and granted high priority to relations with CIS and BRIC countries. Russia has emphasized the development of the Eurasian Economic Union, which came into existence on January 1, 2015, and used its veto power in the UN to advance an anti-Western agenda and defended other rogue regimes like Iran and Syria.



A Soviet platoon in 1992. Photo Credit: United States National Archives.

Hard power still matters. The Kremlin has thus invested heavily in modernizing its armed forces. Its purpose is to thwart Washington's ability to project power into Moscow's self-proclaimed sphere of influence. Russia's military, although no match for the United States on paper, carries out frequent large-scale exercises. It is capable of conducting high-intensity warfare at short notice across a narrow front against its neighbors and NATO forces. Lest anyone forget, Russian military aircraft regularly probe Europe's air defenses and execute dangerous maneuvers around Alliance warships, risking an escalatory incident. Here too, hard power capabilities (and their use) are a means to an end. Abroad, they assert the impression of Russia's Great Power status. At home, they generate strong political benefits to the regime in the form of enhanced public support.<sup>69</sup>

The power imbalance between Russia and the West is nevertheless real. In the situations where Russia enjoys a weaker hand against

its adversaries, the Kremlin employs the Promethean approach. It sows chaos and confusion, even if its strategic objectives are vague.

For all of Russia's weaknesses as a Great Power, leaders in Moscow still think that they possess a decisive advantage in long-term competition with the United States and its allies—and that they can miscalculate. They can consider that Russia is more cohesive internally and might outlast its technologically superior but culturally and politically pluralistic opponents. This working assumption is predicated on the fact that the West may have more capacity but it lacks the will to use it to the fullest; Russia, by contrast, has the will, and can thus do more with less, so long as it retains the initiative and the psychological advantage.<sup>70</sup> The Kremlin's goal is therefore to cause trouble for its own sake—to create an environment in which the side that copes best with chaos (that is, which is less susceptible to societal and geopolitical disruption) wins.



This approach has practical applications in current U.S.-Russian relations. For example, a reportedly widespread view among Russian foreign affairs officials is that Moscow should give U.S. President Donald Trump time to overcome anti-Russian sentiment in Washington, and to shore-up his domestic political base. His expressed interest in better relations with Russia can then be used to normalize the U.S.-Russian bilateral relationship and advance Moscow's interests in a traditional, Great Power fashion. A second approach, reportedly widespread in the security services, seeks to encourage chaos. Interpreting Trump as an anti-establishment politician whom the U.S. political class has rejected, they see him as an actor who disorients the American polity. This view is Machiavellian. It seeks to advantage Russia by spreading disorder in American politics and undermining Western unity. As Russia's influence operations against the West unfold, they will strengthen Russia's ability to probe for deeper weaknesses inside the Atlantic Alliance.<sup>71</sup> The fact that none of these calculations might actually be true is immaterial. Some Russian elites believe it.

### *Time and Risk*

An elemental assumption of Russian Prometheanism is that time is on the Kremlin's side. If only Russian leaders stay the strategic course and remain patient, sooner or later Western unity will crack, U.S.-EU sanctions on Russia will end, disgruntled Western voters will put pro-Russian governments in power across Europe, and Washington will treat Moscow as an equal partner. These hopes have probably strengthened due to the policy disarray emanating from the United Kingdom's decision to leave the EU, and continuing European disagreements over the migration crisis, trade, and defense spending. Especially

after Brexit, Russian elites can calculate that it may be politically impossible for the EU to expand further east now that its political house is crumbling.<sup>72</sup> By reading recent events, moreover, it is possible for Russian leaders to also assume that risk taking works. Thus far, this practice has bolstered Putin's standing at home and forced the West to "take Russia seriously." In fact, it is even possible to read from Putin's own words and actions that he sees the West in general as lacking the will to challenge him.

---

“As with all risky schemes, *the concept is simple. The execution is tricky. In Russia's case, Prometheanism requires the Kremlin to never make a false step.*”

---

On the surface, Moscow can judge that it derives the most benefit from confrontations which do not result in direct, kinetic collisions. By far the greatest danger of this conclusion is that the Kremlin may ignore (or at least undervalue) the inherent risks of its Promethean strategy.

Seeding disorder abroad and picking fights when Russia's advantages seem greatest will always require the West to blink first. Done correctly, however, the Russian regime does not need to spark another Cuban Missile Crisis or Korean War. It can insulate itself from Western "encroachment," and perhaps even renegotiate the future of the international system, without worrying about a full-scale war with NATO. Disorientation and distraction in the West will produce more one-sided concessions for Russia than victory on the battlefield. The key is to never lose control of escalation in a dispute—lest a low-threshold confrontation become highly kinetic.

As with all risky schemes, the concept is simple. The execution is tricky. In Russia's case, Prometheism requires the Kremlin to never make a false step. Here the working assumption is that, while the West has more capacity, it will never match Russia's willingness to deploy the full instruments of state power. Russia, by contrast, will always have that will, and can do more with less so long as it retains the initiative and psychological advantage. Unfortunately, this thinking requires the Kremlin to perpetually play by "Chicago Rules." That is: "He pulls a knife, you pull a gun. He sends one of yours to the hospital, you send one of his to the morgue."<sup>73</sup> In geopolitical terms, Russia must always be willing to take disproportionate retribution, regardless of the rights and wrongs of a situation, with the hope of forcing less resolute adversaries into backing down.<sup>74</sup> Such a dynamic therefore forces Western leaders to be perpetually more concerned with irritating or provoking Putin instead of pursuing their own national interests. When this does not occur, and leaders break the pattern, then the Promethean gamble collapses. Rapid escalation by an adversary can swiftly follow.

## Geography

Within its geographic neighborhood, Russia seeks to maintain its sphere of influence, where its aim is to slow down the pace of democratization and integration into the West and prevent a "spillover" effect that might threaten the Putin regime itself (once again: survival). In the Baltics, the Kremlin tries to drive wedges between ethnic Russians and their governments, NATO, and the EU.<sup>75</sup> In Ukraine, Russia at first largely followed the Gerasimov doctrine: during the 2014 protests it supported extremists on both sides of the crisis—pro-Russian extremists and Ukrainian ultra-nationalists—fueling conflict that the Kremlin used as a pretext to seize Crimea and launch a war in the Donbas. So: "Add a heavy dose of information warfare, and this confusing environment—in which no one is sure of anybody's motives...is one in which the Kremlin can readily exert control."<sup>76</sup>

Farther abroad, Moscow tries to achieve policy paralysis by sowing confusing, stoking fears, and eroding trust in Western and democratic institutions. Its so-called fight against terrorism is one of the most transparent foreign policy pretexts used in recent years to project strategic relevance into more distant regions. Russia uses the counterterrorism narrative to strengthen its foreign policy position and to establish relations on a political and security institutional level. While Russia publicly seeks to show its readiness for international cooperation by invoking the fight against terrorism in Syria, or to restrain North Korea's nuclear ambitions, this is actually a cover for a contrarian policy for its own sake. The larger goal: to flout international conventions and agreements. (See Appendix II.)



On the set of the annual television program “Direct Line with Vladimir Putin.” Photo Credit: kremlin.ru.

## SECTION 3—THE CENTRALITY OF INFORMATION WAR

Where does information warfare fit into Prometheism? More than traditional arenas such as economic and military competition, the information battleground between Russia and the West has become a prime area where the Kremlin has implemented its Promethean strategy.<sup>77</sup>

“Information warfare” is defined here as: The deliberate use of information by one party against an adversary to confuse, mislead, and ultimately influence the actions of a target. This definition is inclusive enough to cover propaganda, influence operations, deception, and *aktivka* (active measures).<sup>78</sup> Just as Piłsudski once attempted to balance Poland’s weaknesses by exploiting Russia’s vulnerabilities, today’s Kremlin-backed efforts to manipulate the information space use the

openness of Western systems against them. Unlike during the Cold War, today’s Russian propaganda does not crudely promote the Kremlin’s foreign policy agenda. Instead, it has tried to confuse, distract, and disrupt Western states. Information operations are often used with other forms of hard and soft power—leveraging cultural ties, energy, money, and bribery in non-kinetic “combined arms” operations. The mix of weapons depends on the assessed vulnerabilities of the target or country.

Russia takes a territorial approach to its “information space”—the media, potential audience, and infrastructure—which it views as defined by a country’s borders and immediate neighborhood.<sup>79</sup> As SVR head Sergey Naryshkin said on April 27, 2017, “The task of strengthening information sovereignty is as relevant as increasing the defensive potential or developing the national economy” in the ‘post-truth’ era.<sup>80</sup> This concept reflects the Kremlin’s understanding of geopolitics and

the importance of national sovereignty (noted earlier). Although some Russian scholars believe that the expansion of the internet and digital spaces are beneficial, many others—and the government itself—see it as threatening to national security, traditional Russian values, and the legitimacy of the regime. This is especially the case with social media, which is more difficult to control than television or terrestrial radio.<sup>81</sup>

At home, Vladimir Putin has systematically clamped down on internal communications—primarily television, which reaches 99 percent of the Russian population and which 73 percent of the Russian people watch every day—as well as newspapers, radio stations, and the internet.<sup>82</sup> The Kremlin also “tests” new mechanisms on its population. (“Bots” probably were first used on a massive scale in 2011-12 against Russian leaders to discredit anti-Putin protests.) If the new tactics are proven to be effective, the regime upgrades them for use against external targets. Abroad, the Russian president has positioned himself as an international renegade, deploying high-gloss, contrarian media outlets like *RT* (previously *Russia Today*) and *Sputnik*, as well as an army of online trolls, to shatter the West’s “monopoly on truth.” The sweeping scope and extensive range of this campaign indicates the extent to which the Kremlin has committed to harnessing information in order to amplify existing tensions and divisions in Western societies. As previous CEPA analysis has highlighted, when the “space for a democratic, public discourse and open society breaks down, it can become atomized and easier to manipulate through a policy of divide and conquer.” Information operations are therefore a means for prevailing over a perceived adversary.<sup>83</sup> In the case of Western democracies, crucial elements of an open

society such as TV channels, social media, civic groups, political parties, or economic actors now regularly serve as the Kremlin’s weapons in the spread of disinformation. Sometimes, these actors may even be unaware of it. The net effect is still the same: to use the openness of Western systems against Russia’s perceived adversaries.<sup>84</sup>

Examples of Russia’s information strategy in action are numerous. In the Baltic States, modern Russian disinformation tries to exploit fears of U.S. abandonment, while simultaneously stoking feelings of alienation among local populations. In Romania, Russia foments animosity toward Western “meddling” and eats away at public faith in NATO. In countries like Ukraine, where Russia claims critical national interests, Moscow tried to incite and exploit ethnic and linguistic feelings to create a prelude for a land grab. It is Russian disinformation that has attempted to cultivate anti-Ukrainian sentiments among the Polish population, and widened internal and public cleavages in Lithuania over energy diversification policies. Facts have become disfigured. Policy debates have become diverted. NATO has become the “enemy” in some corners. Publics are left dismayed, suspicious or inert. Euro-Atlantic solidarity erodes. Disinformation is only a *means*. Chaos is the *aim*. (See Appendix III.)

The Russian practice of information warfare combines a number of tried and tested tools of influence with a new embrace of modern technology. Some underlying objectives, guiding principles, and state activity are broadly recognizable as reinvigorated aspects of subversion campaigns dating back to the Cold War era (and earlier). But Russia also has invested extensively in updating the principles of subversion.<sup>85</sup> These investments cover three



main areas: internally and externally focused media with a substantial online presence (*RT* and *Sputnik* are the best known of these outlets); the use of social media (especially online discussion boards and social pages, e.g. Facebook) as a force multiplier to ensure Russian narratives achieve broad reach and penetration, and language skills in order to engage with target audiences on a wide front. The result is a presence in many countries that acts in coordination with Moscow-backed media and the Kremlin itself. It should be emphasized that Russian disinformation operations visible to English-language audiences are only part of a broader front covering multiple languages. These include not only state-backed media and trolling, but also “false flag” media—sock puppet websites set up to resemble genuine news outlets. These seed news feeds with false or contentious reporting that ties in with Russian narratives. This false flag approach extends in different directions, with *RT* determinedly masquerading as a broadcaster or cloning accounts on social media in order to mimic and discredit genuine Western media outlets.<sup>86</sup> The Kremlin also relies on conferences, cultural activities (concerts and other events), video products (documentaries, art films, cartoons, video games, NGOs, individual speakers, opinion leaders, think tanks, and academia). The level of creativity deployed to undermine the West is certainly impressive.

## Externally Focused Media

State-controlled *RT* is perhaps the most prominent mechanism by which Russia disseminates disinformation abroad. The channel plays a critical role in shaping the online and broadcast international media environment, either by openly spreading

narratives in host countries’ native languages, or by laundering Kremlin narratives through local, “independent” proxy media. *RT* is particularly well-placed to accomplish this task. It has a \$300 million budget, online platforms with high visibility on social media, and dozens of foreign-based stations broadcasting in no fewer than six languages: Arabic, English, French, German, Russian, and Spanish. Much of its online content has also been translated into various Eastern European languages. For her part, *RT* chief Margarita Simonyan disputes the assertion that her platform has direct connections with the Kremlin. She has dismissed allegations that *RT* serves as a Putin mouthpiece as “McCarthyism.” That said, Putin has asserted that *RT* and related platforms nevertheless exist to “break the monopoly of the Anglo-Saxon global information streams.”<sup>87</sup>

Also of significance is *Sputnik*. Since November 2014, the state-owned international network has employed a varied array of disinformation tools such as social media, news outlets, and radio content. In 2017, *Sputnik* operated in 31 different languages, had a \$69 million annual budget, and maintained 4.5 million Facebook followers (by contrast, *RT* has 22.5 million). Its primary purpose, much like that of *RT*, is to “ping pong” unreliable information, suspect stories, and pro-Russian narratives from marginal news sites into more mainstream outlets (see Appendix I). As such, despite relatively low readership compared to mainstream media, *Sputnik* has proven useful for Moscow’s interests, often pursuing and amplifying conspiracy theories that have already been discredited.<sup>88</sup>

Cyber activities in the broad sense are critical to Russia’s offensive disinformation campaigns—whether by establishing sources for disinformation via false media outlets online

or by using social media to address targets of opportunity for subversion and destabilization efforts. These activities are augmented by the ubiquitous activities of trolls (often fake online profiles run by humans) and bots (fake profiles run by automated processes), which exploit the relationship between traditional and social media to plant, disseminate, and lend credibility to disinformation campaigns.

---

**“Russia’s authoritarian media enjoy some clear advantages in the competitive creation of chaos.”**

---

The large amount of resources devoted to this effort stems from a recognition that digital media is becoming the main—and for a growing number of young people, the only—platform for political information and communication. This trend is so advanced, that such channels are beginning to resemble a 21st century variant of the “town square.” They are certainly becoming the primary space for political activities, where citizens receive and share political information,

shape their political views and beliefs, and have the opportunity to influence processes related to the functioning of power. Russia’s cyber activities consequently also capitalize on the fact that sharable social media has become the most effective tool for influencing the minds of huge communities, even whole nations.<sup>89</sup>

Another related campaign—and one that is commonly underestimated—entails the use of false accounts posing as authoritative information sources on social media. Take Finland for example. Before they were suspended, the Twitter accounts @Vaalit (‘elections’ in Finnish) and @EuroVaalit looked at first sight like innocent, and possibly even official, sources of election information. No doubt many people, without looking closely, took them for precisely that. In fact, they (and a range of associated accounts) repeated Russian disinformation. Perhaps unsurprisingly, their profiles linked to RT. Multiply this approach by many different languages, countries, and campaigns, and factor in competing Russian successes when closing down opposing social media accounts (noted earlier), and the cumulative effect cannot be other than highly corrosive.<sup>90</sup> More troubling still, the Finnish example is replicable. Russian experts learn and adapt.

## Impact: Strengths

Russia’s authoritarian media enjoy some clear advantages in the competitive creation of chaos. First, the Kremlin does not need to beat its Western competitors outright—only to keep them confused, uncoordinated, and off balance. Second, Russia’s authoritarian system grants its leaders a natural advantage in managing the psychology and politics of disorder—in such regimes, it is easier to make

the comprehensive, whole-of-government approach work. A third advantage is stealth; Russia's disinformation (and associated cyber) operations—a prime vehicle for seeding division and distraction—leverage the anonymity, immediacy, and ubiquity of the digital age. As seen in recent Western elections, Russia regularly catches the West off guard.

Judged by these standards, Russia's authoritarian media has made a major impact on many issues and audiences. Within Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries in particular, Russia has successfully exploited the “bitter memories of past territorial disputes, nationalist-secessionist tendencies, and the haunting specters of chauvinist ideologies promising to make these nations great again.”<sup>91</sup> In January 2016, the infamous German “Lisa” case, in which a Russian-language channel incorrectly reported that migrants had sexually assaulted a 13-year-old German girl, led to massive anti-immigrant and anti-government protests. Even after the story had been disproven, *RT* and *Sputnik*'s German- and English-language outlets amplified it.<sup>92</sup> More recently, Germany's far-right, anti-immigrant, and Kremlin-friendly *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) party received favorable coverage of its candidates and narratives in the run-up to Germany's September 2017 election, which may have helped it become Germany's third-largest party.<sup>93</sup> Favorable *Sputnik* coverage also may have boosted the showing of the pro-Moscow populist parties, the Five Star Movement and *Lega Nord*, in the recent Italian elections.<sup>94</sup> During the 2016 U.S. presidential election campaign, the effectiveness of Russian trolls prompted some U.S. businesses to hire them to run favorable material for \$25 to \$50 per post. One former troll told *RFE/RL* that employees at a St. Petersburg troll factory were required

to remain on duty 24/7, activated for 12-hour shifts, with a daily quota of 135 comments at least 200 characters long on topics and keywords assigned each day.<sup>95</sup> Some salaries were as high as \$1,400 per week, according to another former employee who spoke with the *New York Times* in 2018. “They were just giving me money for writing,” he said. “I was much younger and did not think about the moral side. I simply wrote because I loved writing. I was not trying to change the world.”<sup>96</sup> By mid-2015, the staff had grown from a few dozen to over 1,000. It is a cost-effective means of reshaping the global social media landscape, without the need to necessarily recruit fully committed ideologues.<sup>97</sup>

Kremlin-backed media can, moreover, prove crucial during a political crisis. During and after the 2014 annexation of Crimea, Russian propaganda portrayed Ukraine's “Revolution of Dignity” as a willing ally of fascists who were undertaking an illegal coup. The narratives were many. For example, the revolution was likewise framed as a political operation by the West, as evidenced (according to *RT* and *Sputnik*) by American and European leaders' quick support after the ouster of Putin's proxy leader in Kyiv. Not all narratives were cooked up by Moscow. Some Western media outlets (and even think tanks) unwittingly advance the Kremlin's cause when they framed the popular revolt as a split between Ukraine's “pro-European” west and “pro-Russian” east. This ostensibly made it the *inevitable* product of linguistic, religious, or ethnic divisions. It was not.

### **Rapid Adaptation**

Finally, Russia's information warfare techniques are highly adaptive. One recent development by the Kremlin is the deployment of cluster



Russian President Vladimir Putin. Photo Credit: kremlin.ru.

narratives. This is the bundling of multiple, even contradictory, arguments together. According to experimental research compiled by RAND, this “firehose” propaganda model is effective due to the variety, volume, and views of sources.<sup>98</sup> First, individuals are more likely to accept information when it is received through a *variety* of sources, despite ostensibly coming from different perspectives or different arguments which promote the same conclusions. Second, the persuasiveness of a message is more dependent on the *number* of arguments made than on their quality. Endorsements from large numbers of other readers (even bots) boosts an individual’s trust in the information received. Third, views from propaganda sources are more persuasive when the recipient identifies with the source, whether in terms of ethnicity, language, nationality, ideology, or other factors. “Credibility can be social,” RAND finds, as “people are more likely to perceive a source as credible if others” do too.<sup>99</sup>

Cluster narratives interact in complex ways. For instance, when the volume of information about a subject is high, people tend to favor views from other users in a social media ecosystem instead of experts (unlike when the volume is low). The variety and number of these generally untrustworthy sources has a significant bearing on their trust in the message received. Overall, however, it is clear that the greater the volume of propaganda, and the more sources available, the more effective Russian disinformation campaigns are at drowning out alternative messages and increasing the exposure and perceived credibility of their preferred narratives.<sup>100</sup>

## Impact: Weaknesses

Information warfare has disadvantages as well. Russia’s information strategy can backfire: efforts at sowing instability abroad can have a ricochet effect, generating instability that eventually affects Russia itself. In today’s war



## Center for European Policy Analysis

against Ukraine, Russia has taken the proactive measure of sealing its borders against returning fighters—lest they cause trouble at home.<sup>101</sup> And the interconnected nature of the modern information space makes it harder to achieve effects in a geographically targeted way, heightening Russia’s own susceptibility to a “boomerang effect.”

The Kremlin’s information campaigns can have unintended consequences inside target countries. Take, for example, the United States. While the authors do not believe that Kremlin interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election altered the final result in any way, the ensuing investigations, hearings, media, and public attention to this attack have placed Russian malign influence operations under unprecedented scrutiny. It is now harder for Russia to fly below the radar with disinformation operations. Its bot networks are easier to identify. Its trolls are easier to ignore. And social media companies are

taking unprecedented steps to shut down both. Moreover, Russian observers have noted an increase in the appeal of “anti-Russian” political positions by leaders.<sup>102</sup> This is what blowback looks like.

A second weakness of disinformation is that it becomes inherently more escalatory with time. Subversive moves that are initially surreptitious become more recognizable with use. Since it is ultimately a part of war, it is hard to know when a disinformation campaign is a prelude to more kinetic operations. The preparations and counter-moves that it prompts on the part of a target can trigger tests of strength, the avoidance of which was the starting aim of the strategy.

Although Putin has escalated crises in order to escape them (see ‘Chicago rules’ earlier), he appears unwilling or politically unable to deescalate in a way that would not look like defeat. In this regard, the shadow of Mikhail



The United States Navy during a military training exercise. Photo Credit: U.S. Department of Defense.

Gorbachev's concessions to the West in the final phase of the Cold War looms large in Kremlin thinking. These are interpreted as signs of weakness to contemporary domestic Russian audiences. Putin also seems to have difficulty in deciding what exactly he wants,

---

“A third weakness of disinformation operations is that they are *hard to measure precisely*—and their **actual impact may be exaggerated.**”

---

and what he can sustain as an end product of his policies (see Section 1—“International System”).

A third weakness of disinformation operations is that they are hard to measure precisely—and their actual impact may be exaggerated. Evidence suggests that while Russian media narratives are disseminated broadly in the Middle East, outside of Syria their effect

has been limited. The ability of regional authoritarian governments to control the information their societies receive, cross cutting political pressures, the lack of longstanding ethnic and cultural ties with Russia, and widespread doubts about Russian intentions make it difficult for Moscow to use information operations as an effective tool should it decide to maintain an enhanced permanent presence in the Middle East.<sup>103</sup>

Additionally, the audience for *RT* may be overstated by the Kremlin, deliberately obscuring the difference between “reach” and “audience.” *RT* claims that it reaches 500-700 million viewers across 100 countries. In 2015, one assessment found that the figures reflected “just the theoretical geographical scope of the audience,” not an actual read of *RT*'s real viewers.<sup>104</sup> *RT* and *Sputnik* combined are only watched by 2.8 percent of the residents in Moldova, 1.3 percent in Belarus, and 5.3 percent in Serbia (according to BBG data from June 2017).<sup>105</sup> In the United States, *RT America* has been forced to register as a foreign agent, which means that it must disclose financial information to the U.S. government.<sup>106</sup> *RT*'s UK channel has been reprimanded by telecom regulator OFCOM more than a dozen times for its skewed, false reporting.<sup>107</sup> The key point here: the official attention that *RT* receives may stand in contrast with its actual influence. In Britain, *RT*'s broadcast reach is limited, hovering around 413,000 viewers weekly, as compared to 4.4 million for *Sky News* and 7.3 million for *BBC News*.<sup>108</sup> In the U.S., despite programs made by well-known figures such as Larry King, *RT* is “largely absent” in the Nielsen rankings.

Working in *RT*'s favor is the fact that its social media presence is far more successful than its broadcasting arm. Despite high online

viewership on YouTube and other sites, however, 81 percent of views on RT's top 100 most watched videos were for content relating to "natural disasters, accidents, crime and natural phenomena."<sup>109</sup> Its politics and current events videos received just one percent of its overall YouTube exposure.<sup>110</sup> Pushback from the U.S. government and corporations may have reduced Russia's online disinformation capabilities even further. In October 2017, Twitter decided it would no longer allow paid advertisements from *RT* and *Sputnik*. A month later, in an implicit attempt to "derank" *RT* and *Sputnik* from search results, Google's parent company Alphabet announced it had "adjusted [their] signals to help surface more authoritative pages and demote low-quality content."<sup>111</sup> Even when accounting for Russian propaganda's actual audience, as opposed to its potential reach, most viewers and readers naturally gravitate towards non-political content. Though the Kremlin's goal is to steer *RT*'s audience from such content toward Russian disinformation more broadly, there is little evidence that this strategy has had much success. Still, one compelling point is necessary to stress: the goal of Russian state media actors is not simply to boost ratings or compete one-to-one against traditional broadcasters. Rather, their purpose is to spread disinformation narratives favorable to the Kremlin. As these narratives and false facts "ping pong" between outlets, they are amplified through coordinated social media targeting and the blind fortune of the internet. Despite his considerable powers, Putin still cannot order that a meme "go viral."

### *Immunity*

Lastly, it is important to recall that the diffused, uncoordinated, and self-regulating nature of social media sometimes has facilitated

effective self-defense mechanisms. A new alertness to the prevalence of orchestrated troll campaigns has led to the dissemination of self-help guides for dealing with trolls. The growing availability of tools for detection of the less sophisticated troll and bot campaigns

---

**“Russia’s use of disinformation erodes the trust that other countries or leaders might place in their relationship with Russia and Putin personally.”**

---

through technical and quantitative analysis is assisting in spreading awareness. As a result, according to one Russian assessment, despite the “billions of dollars” spent by the Russian state on attempting to “turn social networks into its obedient weapon...net society has developed immunity in some respects.”<sup>112</sup>

Herein lies the fundamental weakness of the Prometheism strategy. Since the effectiveness of any chaos strategy depends





Russian Victory Day Parade in Moscow in 2014. Photo Credit: kremlin.ru.

on surprise and uncertainty, Russia's use of disinformation erodes the trust that other countries or leaders might place in their relationship with Russia and Putin personally. The Kremlin has chosen to damage this trust. Russia has affirmed that its relations with other states are guided by zero-sum intimidation, not established rules, good faith treaties, or alliance structures. While these pillars of statecraft may have their own weaknesses, they evolved organically over time. They do not exist because the United States imposed them upon an unwilling world. Rather, they convey real and meaningful value to states which employ them in their relations with others. By undercutting international rules, treaties, and alliances, the Kremlin inadvertently eats away at its own standing in the world. Gerasimov failed to factor this crucial variable into his "doctrine." That failure is now imposing long-term costs on Russia's national interests.

## SECTION 4— PROSPECTS: THE EVOLVING THREAT

While the Kremlin's end goal is survival, its pursuit of chaos as a strategy has largely been a holding action. It has used Promethean methods to undermine the West and burnish its ambitions as a Great Power—only to buy time as it rebuilds its military and hardens domestic structures against bottom-up discontent. Despite its many risks and drawbacks, Prometheanism has nevertheless been effective for the Kremlin. Its reliance on this strategy has arguably improved the Kremlin's domestic position. Sadly, Moscow's confrontational approach to the West—at the political, economic, social, and propaganda levels—has become a permanent, strategic *leitmotiv* of Russia's foreign policy. It results from



the intrinsic nature of the Russian authoritarian regime, the mentality of its ruling elite, and the Kremlin's time worn way of looking at the outside world.<sup>113</sup> Prometheanism also rests upon a larger tradition of Russian strategic theory, not just that of Gerasimov. The concept of spreading chaos in the lands of others is a deeply rooted idea in Russian behavior. Thus far, Western responses to this activity have been largely weak and uncoordinated. This only encourages more Kremlin meddling. The openness and pluralism of Western societies also provides built-in opportunities for Russian exploitation and probing. These are unlikely to disappear.

On the plus side, the disinformation tools used by Moscow against the West remain fairly basic. They rely on exploiting human gullibility, known vulnerabilities in the social media ecosystem, and a lack of awareness among the public, the media, and policymakers. However,

Russia's information warfare capability is not a static project. It is dynamic. It is constantly developing new approaches not yet reflected in mainstream reporting or popular awareness. And it is adaptable to changing political landscapes and technological advancements. This should keep Western states in a heightened state of readiness and awareness. In the very near term, technological advancements in artificial intelligence and cyber capabilities will open opportunities for malicious actors to undermine democracies more covertly and effectively than what we have seen to date.<sup>114</sup>

## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Too much of the West's recent attention to Russia has been dedicated to granular considerations of the "whom" and "how" of Kremlin techniques for creating disorder and



Cyber warfare operators with the Maryland Air National Guard. Photo Credit: U.S. Department of Defense.

distraction. We now know how Moscow makes use of Russian-language and foreign-language media outlets and social media networks to sow doubt about Western security structures like NATO. We also understand now how Russia's military doctrine has incorporated "information confrontation" into its methods of warfare. Thanks to multiple analyses of Gerasimov's writings on the use of "indirect and asymmetric methods" for defeating an enemy, our awareness of Moscow's nonlinear methods for manipulating information and political systems is expanding. The threat is not primarily a journalistic or cyber one, as it is often portrayed. It is an issue of national security.

The problem is that Western states are still perpetually playing defense against Russia's latest toxic narrative or remarkable cyber operation. All too often, they are surprised by the Kremlin's next moves. More work must be devoted to fitting these necessary pieces into a holistic framework that includes the "what for" and "what's next" of Russia's efforts.

Part of the problem is our misunderstanding of Russia's strategic behavior in the first place. Prior to the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia was generally viewed as a weak actor with declining power in the global arena. Mired in economic crises, social problems, and plummeting population growth, Moscow's ambition of achieving regional hegemony and global influence seemed to be things of the past. As far as Western leaders were concerned, Russia did not have the wherewithal to support a military or geostrategic rivalry. Western relations with Russia were subsequently premised on assumptions of "win-win" outcomes rather than on zero-sum calculations of "us-versus-them." These assumptions have now been shattered. From its incursions

into Georgia and Ukraine to its bending or breaking of treaties (among them the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe and the Helsinki Final Act) to its militarization of the Black Sea and Kaliningrad exclave, Russia has ramped up its hostility to the existing Euro-Atlantic security order. In the process, it has also demonstrated that even a weakened competitor can be highly disruptive.

To counteract Russia's behavior, the West must understand the Kremlin's use of information warfare as an example of a chaos strategy in action, and not over-focus on social media and IT-heavy analysis. Dangers that we can see are easier to admire than those that we do not understand. In particular, Western analysts must consider how the concept of a bloodless disordering of the far frontier has figured in past Russian political-military strategy. Using both historical and contemporary assessments of Russian thinking, they can improve the West's own competitive strategies.

Indeed, the Kremlin's chaos-seeding strategy shows us what its leaders fear: Western power. To date the West has not fully considered how its power can be brought to bear against the Kremlin's vulnerabilities. Every strategy has a weakness—even chaos. There are disadvantages as well as advantages to our instantaneous modern communications: the interconnected nature of the modern information space makes it harder to achieve effects in a geographically targeted way, heightening Russia's own susceptibility to a "boomerang effect." What unintended consequences are beginning to occur as a result of its chaos strategy? How aware are Russian leaders of these problems and how willing are they to address them? How vulnerable are they to blowback? Where is the Russian regime weakest? These are questions

that Western policymakers must now answer. Unfortunately, too many policymakers interviewed for this study—especially in NATO and the EU—preferred not to do so, claiming that their organizations “do not engage in offensive operations.” At a minimum, this ties our hands at a conceptual level when assessing counter-strategies—it limits our *options*. As this paper also has shown, the Kremlin’s view of information warfare sees little difference between offensive and defensive operations. We can and should learn from this behavior.

The stakes are high: Russia’s chaos strategy has a potentially far-reaching impact on bilateral relations and on the efficacy of our treaties and agreements with Russia (old and new). It may increase the risk of unwanted military escalation and threaten the future stability of frontline states in the CEE region. It should also prompt caution about the prospects for future agreements with Russia on Ukraine, Syria, North Korea, and nuclear arms control.

In light of these risks, U.S. policy must remove the predictable and permissive conditions that enable a chaos strategy in the first place. Kremlin leaders must worry about our next moves, not the other way around. Second, policy must conceive of and work toward a sustainable end state in which Russia returns to “normal” strategic behavior patterns. Here are four key actions that policymakers can take if they are to accomplish both goals:

- ⌚ First, realize that Russia sees the international system very differently than we do, even though our interests on specific issues may coincide (for example, counter-terrorism).
- ⌚ Second, approach our dealings with Moscow with the understanding that its use of terms like “international law” and state “sovereignty” is

primarily instrumental. Kremlin leaders evoke these concepts for *ad hoc* advantage—not as ends in themselves.

- ⌚ Third, understand that Russia’s use of information warfare has a purpose: reflexive

---

“U.S. policy must remove the predictable and permissive conditions that enable a chaos strategy in the first place.”

---

control. (Such control is achieved by subtly convincing Russia’s opponents that they are acting in their own interests, when in fact they are following Moscow’s playbook.)<sup>15</sup>

- ⌚ Fourth, prioritize the sequencing of the “carrots and sticks” offered to the Kremlin. Sticks first. This means initially increasing the penalties imposed on Russia for continued revisionist behavior and the sowing of chaos. We can start with tougher sanctions, wider travel bans, greater restrictions on access to the global

financial system, and financial snap exercises. Presently, some of these tools are used—but they are underutilized in most cases. This needs to change.

Particularly in the domain of information warfare, the West must hit back harder. Although the EU's East StratCom, NATO's StratCom, and the newly established national StratComs in Europe can be effective tools, they still lack resources, coherence, and full coordination to stop Russia's malicious activities. We are in a technological contest with Russia. We should aim to win it. The Western response must be superior in impact and sophistication. Russia relies on harnessing bursts of "sharp power" to succeed. The West must set as a collective goal its intention to outmaneuver, outplay, and contain the damage of Russia's strategy with our overwhelming diplomatic, informational, military, and economic power. This response must be both public and private, and include the government, media outlets, the tech and private sectors, and civil society. Experience shows that an independent message is more credible and effective, and people are ultimately more receptive when these messages come from

non-state actors. Investing more in these non-state domains holds a great deal of untapped potential in the West. Finally, these measures must all go hand-in-hand with coordinated economic sanctions and be backed up with Western military power.<sup>116</sup>

Unfortunately, we in the West—particularly in the United States—have been too predictable, too linear. We would do well to consider ourselves the underdog in this contest and push back in nonlinear ways. Perhaps the only thing that Kremlin leaders fear more than Western power is the rejection of their rule by Russia's own people. While our final goal should be to ensure that Moscow becomes a constructive member of the Euro-Atlantic security community, our responses for now should serve the shorter-term goal of forcing Russia to play more defense and less offense against the West. For this purpose, we should lessen our preoccupation with "provoking" the Kremlin. It is hardly a basis of sound policy to prioritize Putin's peace of mind. The Russian government will work with the West if that path suits its goals. Otherwise, it will not. We should do the same.



# Appendix I

## RUSSIA'S WORLD VIEW

**Russia's view of the international system includes several core tenets:**

- ④ The primacy of hard power. Military strength and “strategic nuclear parity” represent the ultimate guarantee of the world’s attention to and respect for Moscow.
- ④ The dominance of major powers in the international system—most obviously the U.S., Russia, and China. Only they act truly independently. Smaller states and multilateral organizations are seen as objects or instruments of Great Power diplomacy rather than serious actors with proper agendas.
- ④ The multipolarity of the international system. This interpretation, first promoted by Foreign Minister Yevgenii Primakov in the 1990s, is one of a world dominated by the interaction between different Great Powers, where no single major actor is allowed to threaten the status quo and act unilaterally without risking reciprocal action.
- ④ Under Putin, multipolarity has been given a civilizational aspect that contradicts Western ideas of moral universalism. Russia’s 2013 Foreign Policy Concept presupposes “global competition...on a civilizational level, whereby various values and models of development based on the universal principles of democracy and market economy start to clash and compete with each other.”<sup>117</sup> Russia thus presents itself as a normative alternative to the West, with the potential to attract authoritarian elites worldwide.<sup>118</sup>

# Appendix II

## KREMLIN LESSONS LEARNED

**Three events—Russia’s war with Georgia in 2008, the invasion of Ukraine in 2014, and intervention in Syria a year later—as well the Obama Administration’s failed “Reset” have provided Russia with vital lessons in how to conduct its foreign policy:**

- ⦿ The international community can be slow to respond to surprise military action;
- ⦿ hybrid warfare can be more effective than conventional operations;
- ⦿ information operations also can be successful;
- ⦿ international diplomatic processes can easily be derailed or manipulated; and
- ⦿ reliance on chaos as a strategy can contribute to the removal of hostile governments.

Russian leaders have implemented these lessons by turning the West’s democratic norms and institutions against themselves, opening wider existing fault lines, and taking every opportunity to neutralize the United States and its allies. This approach is what George Kennan called political war: “The employment of all the means at a nation’s command, short of war—to achieve its national objectives. Such operations are both overt and covert. They range from such overt actions as political alliances, economic measures...and ‘white’ propaganda to such covert operations as clandestine support of ‘friendly’ foreign elements, ‘black’ psychological warfare and even encouragement of underground resistance in hostile states.”<sup>119</sup>

Russia has applied these lessons in a variety of areas:<sup>120</sup>

- ⦿ In the **Western Balkans**, Russia is actively trying to hinder NATO enlargement. Although Montenegro’s accession could not be prevented, Russia is attempting to portray the actions of the EU and the United States as a failed project and maintain a global superpower image through manipulation of its historical ties in the region.
- ⦿ In **Libya**, Moscow’s broader goal is to obtain a new ally on NATO’s southern border, whose influence could be used against the Alliance and the West. Russia has actively supported the Libyan National Army led by General Khalifa Haftar, a force opposing the UN-supported Libyan unity government. Alongside trying to bolster his political legitimacy, Russia supports Haftar also in other ways. For example, it has repeatedly taken on the printing of Libyan dinars, which are delivered to the cash-poor territories controlled by Haftar. Russia also maintains ties with the Libyan unity government, which understands that Russia is equally capable of escalating the conflict as it is of defusing it.

# Appendix II

## KREMLIN LESSONS LEARNED

- ④ In the **Persian Gulf**, Russia is trying to undermine the U.S.-led regional security architecture. To do so, Russia is trying to benefit from the frictions between the U.S. and its Arab allies concerning, above all, Iran's role in the region. Russia has courted the monarchies around the Gulf both economically and politically. It is also preparing arms sale transactions with both Saudi Arabia and Qatar. In the same way, Russia has also repeatedly passed itself off as a so-called neutral peace broker in Yemen's civil war. With these steps, Russia tries to undermine the U.S.' regional role and simultaneously transform itself into an indispensable negotiation partner in the Middle East.
- ④ In **Syria**, the Russian narrative trumpets an ongoing fight against terrorism, but the reality is that Russia became involved there to halt a string of defeats for the Bashar al-Assad regime while trying to increase its presence and possibilities to influence developments in the region. In this sense, Russia's intervention in Syria since 2015 has been successful. Although Iran's influence in Syria has grown significantly as a result of the conflict, Moscow has managed to reinforce its own military presence in Syria. In addition, Russia has succeeded in breaking out of the diplomatic isolation imposed on it due to the Ukraine conflict, and achieved a situation where, at least on the Syrian issue, Russia can act as an equal counterpart alongside the leading powers and regional forces.
- ④ In **North Korea**, Russia's ambition is clear: to become an internationally recognized global actor and to undermine the role of the U.S. at the same time. Russia is exploiting the conflict to spread a narrative that the U.S. is principally to blame in the North Korea question. It volunteers itself as a "peace dove" which prefers diplomatic channels and could possibly broker talks.
- ④ In **Afghanistan**, Russia is using counterterrorism rhetoric to justify its activities. Russia is increasing its troop presence under the guise that the U.S.-led coalition is failing in its fight against drug trade and terrorism. Russia maintains contacts with the major parties to the Afghanistan conflict in order to keep its options open for any future scenario.

# Appendix III

## KREMLIN DISINFORMATION TECHNIQUES<sup>121</sup>

**Disinformation and new propaganda can take many forms—from the use of false visuals or misleading headlines, to social media techniques that create an impression that the “majority” understands an issue in a certain way. In the echo chamber of the modern information space, the spreading of disinformation is as easy as a “like,” “tweet,” or a “share.” The following are some of the Kremlin’s most commonly used techniques for spreading false stories and disinformation:**

- ④ Ping pong: The coordinated use of complementary websites to springboard a story into mainstream circulation.
- ④ Wolf cries wolf: The vilification of an individual or institution for something you also do.
- ④ Misleading title: Facts or statements in the article are correct, or mostly correct, but the title is misleading.
- ④ No proof: Facts or statements that are not backed up with proof or sources.
- ④ Card stacking: Facts or statements are partially true. This occurs when information is correct, but it is offered selectively, or key facts are omitted. The Kremlin typically uses this technique to guide audiences to a conclusion that fits into a pre-fabricated or false narrative.
- ④ False fact: Facts or statements are false. For example, an interview mentioned in an article that never took place or an event or incident featured in a news story that did not actually occur.
- ④ False visuals: A variant of false facts, this technique employs the use of fake or manipulated provocative visual material. Its purpose is to lend extra credibility to a false fact or narrative.
- ④ Denying facts: A variant of “false facts,” this occurs when real facts are denied or wrongly undermined. The facts of an event might be reported, but an attempt is made to discredit their veracity. Alternatively, the facts may be re-interpreted to achieve the same effect: to establish doubt among an audience over the validity of a story or narrative.



## Appendix III

- ⦿ Exaggeration and over-generalization: This method dramatizes, raises false alarms or uses a particular premise to shape a conclusion. A related technique is *totum pro parte*.
- ⦿ *Totum pro parte*: The “whole for a part.” An example: portraying the views of a single journalist or expert as the official view or position of a government.
- ⦿ Changing the quotation, source, or context: Facts and statements are reported from other sources, but they are now different than the original or do not account for the latest editorial changes. For example, a quotation is correct, but the person to whom it is attributed has changed, or a quote’s context is altered so as to change its meaning or significance in the original story.
- ⦿ Loaded words or metaphors: Using expressions and metaphors to support a false narrative or hide a true one; for example, using a term like “mysterious death” instead of “poisoning” or “murder” to describe the facts of a story.
- ⦿ Ridiculing, discrediting, diminution: Marginalizing facts, statements, or people through mockery, name-calling (i.e. *argumentum ad hominem*), or by undermining their authority. This includes using traditional and new media humor, in order to discredit on non-substantive merits.
- ⦿ Whataboutism: Using false comparisons to support a pre-fabricated narrative or justify deeds and policies; i.e., “We may be bad, but others are just as bad” or “The annexation of Crimea was just like the invasion of Iraq.” This technique is often accompanied by an *ad hominem* attack.
- ⦿ Narrative laundering: Concealing and cleaning the provenance of a source or claim. When a so-called expert of dubious integrity presents false facts or narratives as the truth. Often, this happens when propaganda outlets mimic the format of mainstream media. A common technique is to feature a guest “expert” or “scholar” on a TV program whose false fact or narrative can then be repackaged for wider distribution. For example, “Austrian media writes that...” or “A well-known German political expert says that...”
- ⦿ Exploiting balance: This happens when otherwise mainstream media outlets try to “balance” their reporting by featuring professional propagandists or faux journalists and experts. The effect is to inject an otherwise legitimate news story or debate with false facts and narratives. This technique is common in televised formats, which feature point-counterpoint debates. Propagandists subsequently hijack a good-faith exchange of opposing views.

# Appendix III

- ④ Presenting opinion as facts (and vice-versa): An opinion is presented as a fact in order to advance or discredit a narrative.
- ④ Conspiracy theories: Employing rumors, myths, or claims of conspiracy to distract or dismay an audience. Examples include: “NATO wants to invade Russia;” “The United States created the Zika virus;” “Secret Baltic agencies are infecting Russian computers with viruses;” or “Latvia wants to send its Russian population to concentration camps.” A variation of this technique is conspiracy in reverse—or attempting to discredit a factual news story by labeling it a conspiracy.
- ④ Joining the bandwagon: Creating the impression that the “majority” prefers or understands an issue in a certain way. The majority’s presumed wisdom lends credence to a conclusion or false narrative; e.g., “People are asking...,” “People want...,” or “People know best.”
- ④ False dilemma: Forcing audiences into a false binary choice, typically “us” vs. “them.”
- ④ Drowning facts with emotion: A form of the “appeal to emotion” fallacy, this is when a story is presented in such an emotional way that facts lose their importance. An example is the “Lisa case,” in which Muslim immigrants in Germany were falsely reported to have sexually assaulted a Russian girl. While the event was entirely fabricated, its appeal to emotion distracted audiences from the absence of facts. Common variants of this method evoke post-Soviet nostalgia across Central and Eastern Europe, or stoke public fear of nuclear war.
- ④ Creating the context: Most commonly found on broadcast news programs, it creates the context for a pre-fabricated narrative by preceding and following a news story in such a way that it changes the meaning of the news itself. For example, in order to send the message that recent terrorist attacks in Europe were the result of EU member states not working with Russia—which is helping to fight ISIS in Syria—commentary broadcast before the news on the March 2016 Brussels attacks described Russia’s success in Syria and its ability to fight ISIS effectively.

# Endnotes

- 1 Maria Snegovaya, “Reviving the Propaganda State: How the Kremlin Hijacked History to Survive,” *Center for European Policy Analysis*, January 2018, [https://cepa.ecms.pl/files/?id\\_plik=4824](https://cepa.ecms.pl/files/?id_plik=4824). “Global Trends: Paradox of Progress: Russia and Eurasia,” *Office of the Director of National Intelligence*, January 2017, <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/the-next-five-years/russia-and-eurasia>.
- 2 For narratives, see: “The Kremlin’s ‘Besieged Fortress’ Narrative Criticised in Independent Media,” *European External Action Service East Stratcom Task Force*, March 4, 2018, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/the-kremlins-besieged-fortress-narrative-criticised-in-independent-media/>.
- 3 For workforce decline, see: Tom Balmforth, “Another Worrying Sign for Russia’s Dire Demographics,” *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, September 27, 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-population-decline-labor-oreshkin/28760413.html>. For country population and urban projections, see: “World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision, Country Profiles: Russian Federation,” *United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs*, Population Division, 2018, <https://population.un.org/wup/Country-Profiles/>. For birthrate decline see: “Russia’s Birthrate Drops By 10.7 Percent In 2017,” *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, January 29, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-birthrate-drops-2017/29005373.html>.
- 4 “World Population Prospects, Data Booklet,” *United Nations*, 2017, [https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2017\\_DataBooklet.pdf](https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2017_DataBooklet.pdf). See also: “Global Trends: Paradox of Progress: Russia and Eurasia.”
- 5 Michael Ross, “The Natural Resource Curse: How Wealth Can Make You Poor,” *Natural Resources and Violent Conflict: Options and Actions*, *World Bank*, 2003.
- 6 Nienke Oomes and Katerina Kalcheva, “Diagnosing Dutch Disease: Does Russia Have the Symptoms?,” *International Monetary Fund*, April 2007, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2007/wp07102.pdf>. See also: Nienke Oomes and Olga Ponamorenko, “The Price of Oil Dependency: Dutch Disease in Russian Regions,” *SEO Amsterdam Economics*, December 2015, [http://www.seo.nl/uploads/media/DP83\\_The\\_Price\\_of\\_Oil\\_Dependency\\_\\_Dutch\\_Disease\\_in\\_Russian\\_Regions.pdf](http://www.seo.nl/uploads/media/DP83_The_Price_of_Oil_Dependency__Dutch_Disease_in_Russian_Regions.pdf).
- 7 “The Putin Era in Historical Perspective,” *National Intelligence Council*, February 2007. See also: Maria Domańska, “Conflict-dependent Russia: The domestic determinants of the Kremlin’s anti-western policy,” *Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW)*, August 2018, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/point-view/2017-11-06/conflict-dependent-russia-domestic-determinants-kremlins-anti>.
- 8 Snegovaya. See also: Mikhail Zygar, “Burevestnik cvetnyh revoljucij: Džordž Buš sozdaet special’nyj korpus podderžki novyh demokratij,” *Kommersant*, May 20, 2005, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/579095>.
- 9 “Vladimir Putin Took Part in the Plenary Meeting of the 70th Session of the UN General Assembly in New York,” *Kremlin*, September 28, 2015, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50385>.

- 10 Jakob Hedenskog, Tomas Malmjöf, Johan Norberg, Susanne Oxenstierna, Carolina Vendil Pallin, Gudrun Persson, Roger Roffey, and Fredrik Westerlund, "Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective 2016," *FOI*, December 8, 2016, <https://www.foi.se/report-search/pdf?fileName...7fca-451e-bdd6-d0ce7107c38a.pdf>, 117-21.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 114-115.
- 12 Mark Galeotti, "Russia pursues 'dark power' and the West has no answer," *Raamop Rusland*, March 15, 2018, <https://raamoprusland.nl/dossiers/kremlin/894-russia-pursues-dark-power-in-the-skripal-case>.
- 13 Hedenskog et al., 114.
- 14 Andrey Bezrukov and Andrey Sushentsov, "Contours of an Alarming Future," *Russia in Global Affairs*, September 21, 2015, <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Contours-of-an-Alarming-Future-17693>.
- 15 Sergey Lavrov, "Historical Perspective of Russia's Foreign Policy," *Russia in Global Affairs*, December 8, 2017, <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/Istoricheskaya-perspektiva-vneshnei-politiki-Rossii-19208>; Fyodor Lukyanov, "After Crimea. What Will The New Global World Order Be?," *Lenta.ru*, June 1, 2016, [https://lenta.ru/articles/2016/06/01/after\\_crimea/](https://lenta.ru/articles/2016/06/01/after_crimea/).
- 16 Dmitry Trenin, "Mitigation of the Conflict in a Hybrid war," *Moscow Center Carnegie*, January 25, 2018, <http://carnegie.ru/2018/01/25/ru-pub-75296>.
- 17 "The Concept Of Foreign Policy Of The Russian Federation (approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on November 30, 2016)," *MFA Russia*, December 1, 2016, [http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/2542248](http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/2542248).
- 18 Fyodor Lukyanov, "Back to Realism: The US Defense Strategy Reflects The Worldview Of Modern Times," *Russia in Global Affairs*, January 24, 2018, <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/redcol/Nazad-k-realizmu-19310>.
- 19 Fyodor Lukyanov, "Putin's Foreign Policy: The Quest to Restore Russia's Rightful Place," *Foreign Affairs*, April 18, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2016-04-18/putins-foreign-policy>.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 Trenin.
- 22 Nikolay Silaev and Andrei Sushentsov, "Allies of Russia and the Geopolitical Frontier in Eurasia," *Russia in Global Affairs*, June 4, 2017, <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/Soyuzniki-Rossii-i-geopoliticheskii-frontir-v-Evrazii-18811>.
- 23 Sergey Karaganov, "Russia's Desperation Has Saddled a Wave of History," *Russia in Global Affairs*, December 5, 2017, <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/pubcol/Russkaya-otchayannost-osedlala-volnu-istorii-19180>.
- 24 Emphasis by authors. Karaganov, "Russia's Desperation."
- 25 Stephen H. Kellert, *In the Wake of Chaos: Unpredictable Order in Dynamical Systems*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993), 2.



- 26 Scott E. Womack, *Chaos, Clausewitz, and Combat: A Critical Analysis of Operational Planning in the Vietnam War, 1966-1971*, (Fort Belvoir, VA: Defense Technical Information Center, Document Number ADA306112), 168.
- 27 P.H. Liotta, "Chaos as Strategy," *Parameters*, Summer 2002, <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/Parameters/articles/02summer/liotta.htm>, 47-56.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 56.
- 29 Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Ralph D. Sawyer, (New York: Barnes and Nobles, New York, 1994), 191.
- 30 Holger Mölder, Kristiina Müür, and Vladimir Sazonov, eds., "Russian Information Campaign against the Ukrainian State and Defence Forces," *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2016, <https://www.stratcomcoe.org/russian-information-campaign-against-ukrainian-state-and-defence-forces>.
- 31 Frans P. Osinga, *Science, Strategy and War: The Strategic Theory of John Boyd*, (London: Routledge, 2007), 59.
- 32 Tzu, 191.
- 33 Osinga, 59.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 60.
- 35 Tzu, 224.
- 36 Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Paret, trans., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 87.
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 Alan Beyerchen, "Clausewitz, Nonlinearity, and the Unpredictability of War," *International Security* 17 (Winter 1992-1993), [https://www.fd.unl.pt/docentes\\_docs/ma/aens\\_MA\\_20002.pdf](https://www.fd.unl.pt/docentes_docs/ma/aens_MA_20002.pdf).
- 39 Clausewitz, 139.
- 40 German strategist Karl Ernst Haushofer deserves recognition as an additional, later contributor.
- 41 For example, the Arab Revolt during World War I was a specific chaos strategy executed by the United Kingdom. against Turkey. It is not, however, the type of "Promethean" strategy considered by the authors in this report.
- 42 "How Germany Got the Russian Revolution off the Ground," *Deutsche Welle*, November 7, 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/media-center/podcasts/s-100977>.
- 43 George Schmid, *Between Ideology and Realpolitik: Woodrow Wilson and the Russian Revolution, 1917-1921*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press), 45.
- 44 See: David Kirby, "Morality or Expediency? The Baltic Question in British-Soviet Relations 1941-1942," in *The Baltic States on Peace and War 1917-1945*, V. Stanley Vardys and Romuald Misiūnas, eds., (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), 72.

- 45 Valeriy Gerasimov, "Noviye vyzovy trebuyut pereosmysleniya form i sposobov vedeniya boevykh deistviy," *Voenno-promyshlenniy kur'er*, May 3, 2013, [http://vpknews.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK\\_08\\_476.pdf](http://vpknews.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK_08_476.pdf).
- 46 Molly K. Mckew, "The Gerasimov Doctrine," *Politico*, September 5, 2017, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/09/05/gerasimov-doctrine-russia-foreign-policy-215538>.
- 47 *Ibid.*
- 48 Bettina Renz, "Russia and 'hybrid warfare,'" *Contemporary Politics* 22 (2016), DOI: 10.1080/13569775.2016.1201316, 283-30.
- 49 Charles K. Bartles, "Getting Gerasimov Right," *Military Review*, January-February 2016, [https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/militaryreview/Archives/English/MilitaryReview\\_20160228\\_art009.pdf](https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/militaryreview/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20160228_art009.pdf).
- 50 Victor R. Morris, "Grading Gerasimov: Evaluating Russian Nonlinear War through Modern Chinese Doctrine," *Small Wars Journal*, September 17, 2015, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/grading-gerasimov-evaluating-russian-nonlinear-war-through-modern-chinese-doctrine>.
- 51 Mölder, *et al.*, 2016, 113.
- 52 Morris.
- 53 N. Inkster, "Information Warfare and the US Presidential Election," *Survival* 58, (2016): 23-32, doi:10.1080/00396338.2016.1231527.
- 54 Hedenskog *et al.*, 111.
- 55 Gerasimov.
- 56 Bettina Renz and Hanna Smith, "Russia and Hybrid Warfare – Going beyond the Label," *Aleksanteri Papers*, 2016, [https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/175291/renz\\_smith\\_russia\\_and\\_hybrid\\_warfare.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/175291/renz_smith_russia_and_hybrid_warfare.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y).
- 57 Can Kasapoglu, "Russia's Renewed Military Thinking: Non-Linear Warfare and Reflexive Control," *NATO Defense College*, November 25, 2015, <http://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=877>.
- 58 Christopher S. Chivvis, "Understanding Russian 'Hybrid Warfare' And What Can Be Done About It," *RAND Corporation*, March 22, 2017, [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/CT400/CT468/RAND\\_CT468.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/CT400/CT468/RAND_CT468.pdf).
- 59 *Ibid.*
- 60 Mölder *et al.*, 56.
- 61 *Ibid.*, 58.
- 62 Chivvis. Gerasimov. See generally, Donald N. Jensen, "Moscow in the Donbas: Command, Control, Crime and the Minsk Peace Process," *NATO Defense College*, March 24, 2017, <http://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1029>.
- 63 *Ibid.*, Jensen.

- 64 Evgeny Finkel, “The Conflict in the Donbas between Gray and Black: The Importance of Perspective,” *START*, December 2016, <https://nsiteam.com/social/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Ukraine-Qualitative-Case-Study-FINAL.pdf>, 12.
- 65 Mark Galeotti, “I’m Sorry for Creating the ‘Gerasimov Doctrine,’” *Foreign Policy*, March 5, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/05/im-sorry-for-creating-the-gerasimov-doctrine/>.
- 66 *Ibid.*
- 67 Galeotti, “Russia pursues ‘Dark power.’”
- 68 “International Security and Estonia 2018,” *Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service*, 2018, <https://www.valisluureamet.ee/pdf/raport-2018-ENG-web.pdf>, 24.
- 69 “The Future of War: The New Battlegrounds,” *The Economist*, January 27, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2018/01/25/the-future-of-war>.
- 70 Galeotti, “Russia pursues ‘Dark power.’”
- 71 Dmitry Trenin, “Mitigation of the Conflict in a Hybrid war,” *Moscow Center Carnegie*, January 25, 2018, <http://carnegie.ru/2018/01/25/ru-pub-75296>.
- 72 “Russian Military Capability,” 114-15.
- 73 The authors thank David Mamet for his contribution to geopolitics via “The Untouchables.”
- 74 Galeotti, “Russia pursues ‘Dark Power.’”
- 75 Todd C. Helmus, et al., “Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda In Eastern Europe,” *RAND Corporation*, 2018, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2237.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2237.html).
- 76 McKew.
- 77 For more, see, Donald N. Jensen, “Russia’s Disinformation Offensive,” Ilan Berman, ed., *Digital Dictators: Media, Authoritarianism, and America’s New Challenge* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing).
- 78 Herb Lin, “Developing Responses to Cyber-Enabled Information Warfare and Influence Operations,” *Lawfare*, September 6, 2018, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/developing-responses-cyber-enabled-information-warfare-and-influence-operations>.
- 79 “Doctrine of Information Security of the Russian Federation, (December 2016),” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, December 5, 2016, [http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/2563163](http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/2563163).
- 80 “Foreign intelligence chief says current ideological standoff worse than Cold War era,” *TASS*, April 27, 2017, <http://tass.com/politics/943501>.
- 81 Natalya Kovaleva, “Russian Information Space, Russian Scholarship, and Kremlin Controls,” *Counterdisinfo*, July 24, 2018, <https://counterdisinfo.org/natalya-kovaleva-russian-information-space-russian-scholarship-and-kremlin-controls/>.

- 82 Anna Oshkalo, "Top 10 Russia's Media in 2014," *Russian Search Tips*, January 14, 2015, <https://www.russiansearchtips.com/2015/01/top-10-russias-largest-media-2014/>.
- 83 Edward Lucas, "Winning the Information War Redux," *Center for European Policy Analysis*, April 24, 2017, <https://www.cepa.org/infowar-redux>.  
See also, Jill Dougherty, "How the Media Became One of Putin's Most Powerful Weapons," *The Atlantic*, April 21, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/04/how-the-media-became-putins-most-powerful-weapon/391062/>.
- 84 Donald N. Jensen, "Russia in the Middle East: A New Front in the Information War?," *Jamestown Foundation*, December 20, 2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/russia-middle-east-new-front-information/>.
- 85 Keir Giles, "Russia's 'New' Tools for Confronting the West," *Chatham House*, March 2016, 27-28, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/2016-03-russia-new-tools-giles.pdf>.
- 86 *Ibid.*
- 87 Jim Rutenberg, "RT, Sputnik and Russia's New Theory of War," *New York Times*, September 13, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/13/magazine/rt-sputnik-and-russias-new-theory-of-war.html>.
- 88 "Putin's Asymmetric Assault On Democracy In Russia And Europe: Implications For U.S. National Security," *Minority Staff Report Prepared for the Use of the Committee On Foreign Relations United States Senate*, 42.
- 89 Giles, 44-45.
- 90 *Ibid.*, 46.
- 91 Spencer P. Boyer and Alina Polyakova, "The Future of Political Warfare: Russia, the West, and the Future of Global Digital Competition," *Brookings*, March 2018, [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/fp\\_20180316\\_future\\_political\\_warfare.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/fp_20180316_future_political_warfare.pdf).
- 92 *Ibid.*
- 93 Simon Shuster, "How Russian Voters Fueled the Rise of Germany's Far-Right," *Time*, September 25, 2017, <http://time.com/4955503/germany-elections-2017-far-right-russia-angela-merkel/>.
- 94 Donald N. Jensen, "The Italian Elections Open the Door toward Russia Wider," *Center for European Policy Analysis*, March 20, 2018, <http://infowar.cepa.org/EN/Italian-elections-open-the-door-toward-Russia-wider>.
- 95 "One Professional Troll Tells All," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, March 25, 2015, <https://www.rferl.org/a/how-to-guide-russian-trolling-trolls/26919999.html>.
- 96 Neil MacFarquhar, "Inside the Russian Troll Factory: Zombies and a Breakneck Pace," *New York Times*, February 18, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/18/world/europe/russia-troll-factory.html>.
- 97 "One Professional Troll Tells All."



- 98 Christopher Paul and Miriam Mathews, “The Russian ‘Firehose of Falsehood’ Propaganda Model,” *RAND Corporation Perspective*, 2016, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE198.html>.
- 99 *Ibid.*
- 100 *Ibid.*
- 101 Jensen, “Moscow in the Donbas.”
- 102 Liliya Shevtsova, “Vlyapalis,” *Ekho Moskvy*, August 14, 2018, <https://echo.msk.ru/blog/shevtsova/2258916-echo/>.
- 103 Jensen, “Russia in the Middle East: A New Front in the Information War?”
- 104 Katie Zavadski, “Putin’s Propaganda TV Lies about its Popularity,” *The Daily Beast*, September 17, 2015, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/putins-propaganda-tv-lies-about-its-popularity>.
- 105 “Putin’s Asymmetric Assault On Democracy In Russia And Europe: Implications For U.S. National Security,” 41.
- 106 Ginger Gleason and Jack Stubbs, “Russia’s RT America Registers as ‘Foreign Agent’ in U.S.,” *Reuters*, November 13, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-usa-media-restrictions-rt/russias-rt-america-registers-as-foreign-agent-in-u-s-idUSKBN1DD25B>.
- 107 Holly Watt, “Ofcom Investigates Alex Salmond’s TV Show on Kremlin-Backed Channel,” *Guardian*, December 1, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/18/ofcom-investigates-alex-salmonds-tv-show-kremlin-backed-network>.
- 108 Tim Dowling, “24-hour Putin people: my week watching Kremlin ‘propaganda channel’ RT,” *Guardian*, November 29, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/nov/29/24-hour-putin-people-my-week-watching-kremlin-propaganda-channel-rt-russia-today>.
- 109 Zavadski.
- 110 *Ibid.*
- 111 “Putin’s Asymmetric Assault On Democracy In Russia And Europe: Implications For U.S. National Security,” 43.
- 112 Giles, 46.
- 113 Domańska.
- 114 Alina Polyakova, “The Next Russian Attack Will be Far Worse than Bots and Trolls,” *Brookings*, March 22, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/03/22/the-next-russian-attack-will-be-far-worse-than-bots-and-trolls>.
- 115 Annie Kowalewski, “Disinformation and Reflexive Control: The New Cold War,” *Georgetown Security Studies Review*, February 1, 2017, <http://georgetownsecuritystudiesreview.org/2017/02/01/disinformation-and-reflexive-control-the-new-cold-war/>.

116 Miro Smith, "Standing Up to Russia's Sharp Power," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, September 12, 2018, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2018/09/standing-up-to-russias-sharp-power/>.

117 Hedenskog *et al.*, 115-16. For more see, Bobo Lo, *Russia and the New World Disorder*, (London: Chatham House), 2015.

118 *Ibid.*, Hedenskog.

119 Mark Galeotti, "I'm Sorry for Creating the "Gerasimov Doctrine." "Policy Planning Staff Memorandum," *National Archives and Records Administration*, May 4, 1948, <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/history/johnson/65ciafounding3.htm>.

120 "International Security and Estonia 2018," 24.

121 "Techniques," *Center for European Policy Analysis*, <http://infowar.cepa.org/Techniques>.



*Center for*  
**European Policy  
Analysis**