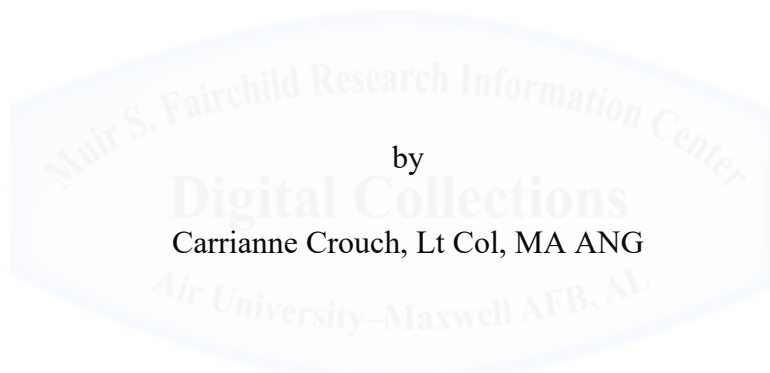


AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

INFORMATION IS POWER:  
FOR RUSSIA, IT IS REALLY ALL ABOUT DEFENSE



A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty

In Partial Fulfillment of the Graduation Requirements

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## Biography

Lt Col Carrienne Crouch is assigned to the Air War College, Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL. Lt Col Crouch's most recent assignment prior to Air War College was Commander, 267th Intelligence Squadron, 202nd Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Group, 102nd Intelligence Wing, Otis Air National Guard Base, MA. She was responsible for leading, training, and equipping three flights of analysts in order to provide cyber intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance operations for 25th Air Force (now part of 16th Air Force), contributing to U.S. Cyber Command and global cryptologic missions.

Lt Col Crouch has supported multiple contingency operations including, NOBLE EAGLE, IRAQI FREEDOM, NEW DAWN, and ENDURING FREEDOM. While deployed to Asia, Lt Col Crouch served as the Director of Operations for the 52nd Expeditionary Intelligence Squadron, where she was responsible for leading joint and coalition airborne ISR operators at multiple operating bases. She also served as an airborne ISR analyst, flying 250 combat hours aboard various aircraft.

Lt Col Crouch received her Bachelor of Business Administration in Computer Information Systems from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock in 2001. She earned her Master of Science in Environmental Sciences and Policy from The Johns Hopkins University in 2014.

Lt Col Crouch's major decorations include the Bronze Star Medal, Meritorious Service Medal with two devices, Air Medal with one device, Air Force Commendation Medal with one device, the Air Force Achievement Medal with one device, and the Army Achievement Medal.

## Abstract

In 2014 the Russian Federation annexed Crimea using tactics embodied in a term the Russians have coined New Generation Warfare (NGW). In 2016, Russia unquestionably interfered in the 2016 United States (U.S.) presidential election by employing the first and second phases of NGW primarily through the manipulation of information. Those operations are ongoing. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and European Union (EU) are also continuously under attack by the Russians employing the first and second phases of NGW. Why Russia has and is conducting NGW operations is not well understood. NGW and the critical role information plays in its success is also poorly understood. This paper attempts to address both of these deficiencies.

The Russian elites perceive their country as a vulnerable nation. A history of invasions, violent Russian revolutions, and geographic challenges fuel this belief. This sense of vulnerability contributes to President Vladimir Putin's continued fear of a U.S.-sponsored regime change in Russia. He has devised a comprehensive strategic defensive plan based on this belief. Putin believes returning Russia to great power status and becoming a pole in a multipolar world will ensure regime survival. To attain that status, several interim goals are his aim: diminish the reputation of the U.S.; fracture Western alliances, such as NATO and the EU; enhance Russia's power projection; and to push back on what he perceives as NATO and Western encroachment.

The Russian military has combined multiple types of warfare doctrine into seemingly a new approach and coined it NGW. None of the strategies are new—what is new is the focus on information and how it is used in the first and second phases of NGW to influence its target population. The latter phases of NGW employ the use of military assets, but NGW's ultimate success is defined by not reaching the level of direct, overt military intervention. Russia has seen success in NGW (most phases) in Crimea in 2014, the first two phases in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, and continues the first two phases in the Baltic States today. Those cases are described in this paper and highlight how information was the key enabler in making NGW successful.

To counter Russian NGW in the future, the U.S. government will need to work with civil society and the private sector on a robust plan to counter Russia's disinformation campaigns. To counter Russia's attempts to fracture the NATO alliance and its pushback against NATO encroachment, the U.S. government and its NATO partners will need to take action to deter Russia while simultaneously reassuring Russian leaders that the U.S. does not desire regime change.

President Putin does not seek to conquer the world or to see the U.S. crumble (although he would hardly shed a tear), but he does desire stability and security and his goal to attain great power status and become a pole in a multipolar world is the defining factor of his strategic defensive campaign. What appears on the surface to be offensive operations, such as annexing Crimea or interfering in the U.S. elections, are actually part of an overall defensive campaign and are operations designed to work toward attaining his interim goals.

## Introduction

In July 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated, “The greatest criminals in our history were those weaklings who threw power on the floor—Tsar Nicholas II and Mikhail Gorbachev—who allowed the power to be picked up by the hysterics and the madmen. *I would never abdicate.*”<sup>1</sup> Putin’s quote is indicative of his state of mind—he will do everything in his power to ensure he never “gives up” power unwittingly. The Russian elite has a historical fear of regime change and for good reason. Russia’s geographic curse, its history of invasions, and its record of violent revolution contribute heavily to Russia’s sense of insecurity. Additionally, the U.S. has a long history of sponsoring regime change in countries in which it desired a government more compatible with Western thinking, or during the Cold War, was at least not pro-Communist.

Coupled with what Russia perceives as an overly aggressive U.S. intent on both Russian containment and maintaining its unipolar position in global affairs, Russia has rationalized its millennium-long fears of being under attack and has coined a new type of warfare whose foundation is based on weaponizing information. This type of warfare was on display in Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014, the U.S. Presidential election in 2016, and its ongoing efforts in the Baltics. Russia has mastered the use of information in its deployment of a type of warfare the Russians have coined New Generation Warfare (NGW). Russia values information as the key enabler and incorporated it into NGW as part of an ongoing comprehensive strategic defensive plan to ensure regime survival because the Kremlin leadership fears U.S.-led regime change in Moscow. This paper begins by explaining Russia’s sense of insecurity; reviewing Russia’s overall defensive campaign strategy; and finally explaining NGW and how information has been incorporated into NGW.

## **Thesis**

Russia has mastered the use of information in its deployment of a type of warfare the Russians have coined New Generation Warfare (NGW). Russia values information as the key enabler and incorporated it into NGW as part of an ongoing comprehensive strategic defensive plan to ensure regime survival because Kremlin leadership fears the U.S. will attempt to conduct a regime change in Russia.



## Russia's Sense of Insecurity

### Geographical curse

Western Russia sits atop the flat, Northern European Plain, host to the majority of the Russian population, and the avenue across which many invasions of Russia have occurred. Additionally, Russia has historically had limited access to the open ocean, limiting its ability to project power globally. With those vulnerabilities in mind today, the current regime has developed a fortress-like mentality.

### *Size*

Russia is immense, its geographic expanse at times seeming almost infinite. It is nearly double the size of the United States, and it stretches continuously from east to west for over five thousand miles and eleven time zones.<sup>2</sup> To cross it by train takes six days!<sup>3</sup> Russia borders Finland and the Arctic Ocean in the north, while China, Mongolia, and Kazakhstan are to its south. On Russia's east is the Pacific Ocean and the Seas of Japan and Okhotsk. On its west, Russia shares a border with Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. From west to east, the interior of Russia is made up geographically of the Northern European Plain, the Ural Mountains, and Siberia (see map). Siberia is difficult terrain to navigate. It is frozen most of the year and is full of dense forests. The Trans-Siberian and Baikal-Amur Mainline are the only two rail networks that run west to east while north to south routes are also sparse. Russia's lack of manpower and an underdeveloped transportation network in Siberia make it exceptionally difficult for Moscow to project power east of the Urals to protect its own borders.<sup>4</sup>

## *Ocean*

Russia has the longest coastline of any nation in the world, but for all of its coastline, it does not possess unfettered access to any ocean year-round. Ports along Russia's northern coast are frozen much of the year as are those on Russia's east coast. In addition, some ports on the east coast open into the Sea of Japan, which is dominated by the Japanese.<sup>5</sup> Russia's annexation of Crimea gives Russia a year-round warm water port; however, in order to navigate to the nearest ocean, Russians must traverse the Bosphorous and Dardanelles Straits, over which Turkey has sovereignty, and then through the Mediterranean, dominated on its northern shore by NATO.<sup>6</sup> With its frozen ports and lack of independent access to the open ocean, Russia is limited in its ability to project power globally.

## *Northern European Plain / Russian Plain*

The Northern European Plain begins in France, north of the Alps, and spills eastward into Russia to the Ural Mountains. It is a vast, flat piece of land over which invading armies can and have easily traversed. The plain is at its narrowest in Poland, where it is only three hundred miles wide. This narrow strip would be the place for Russia to stop an enemy invasion from the west before the enemy reaches the country's heartland. The former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) bordered Poland and that, combined with Moscow's control of the former Warsaw Pact countries, created a Soviet-controlled buffer zone far to the west of Moscow. With Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania all today sovereign nations and Poland as a NATO partner, Russia is farther from the entry point of a potential mass invasion. However, its western border is closer to Moscow now than when Tsar Peter the Great died in 1725.



From Poland, the plain runs east and is completely open from the Baltic Sea south to the Carpathian Mountains and the Black Sea, providing multiple places from which a potential enemy could launch an attack on Moscow. Such an invasion would require long supply lines that would be difficult if not impossible to sustain, but that did not stop Russia's enemies from making multiple attempts to invade the country over the Northern European Plain.

## **History of Invasions**

Russia has seen no shortage of invasions in its long history. These invasions have shaped modern Russians and their view of their homeland relative to foreign powers. As early as the 1200s, East Slavic tribes living under the Kievan Rus, centered in what is today the Ukraine, were continuously attacked by Mongols from the south and east. The Kievan Rus, recognized as the earliest Slavic state in what will become Russia, was destroyed by the Mongols, and the center of Slavic Rus' power moved northeast to Moscow. The move to Moscow created the same problem that has haunted Russia for the last thousand years and continues to haunt them today. There are no mountains, deserts, and few rivers in the west, making Moscow, and the Russian heartland, challenging to defend.<sup>7</sup> In fact, Russia suffered numerous invasions from the west over the last 400 years: the Poles in 1605; the Swedes in 1708; the French in 1812; and the Germans invaded during each of the World Wars in 1914 and 1941. From 1812 forward and including the Crimean War of 1853, the Russians were defending their own territory in the North European Plain on average once every thirty-three years.<sup>8</sup> Russia's history of invasions from the west contributes to the vulnerability Russians feel about security, as does their history of revolutions.

## **History of Revolutions**

## *Russian Revolutions*

Russia has suffered three revolutions and the collapse of both the Tsarist Empire and of the Soviet Union in the twentieth century. In 1905, Tsar Nicholas II was forced to acquiesce to a Russian population weary of food shortages and labor exploitation by granting civil liberties and forming a parliament.<sup>9</sup> The year 1917 hosted two revolutions, which resulted in the end of the Romanov dynasty and the creation of the USSR. In the midst of World War I, the February 1917 Revolution forced Tsar Nicholas II to abdicate in favor of a Provisional Government due to his inept leadership and a war-weary population. The Provisional Government did not end the country's involvement in the war, and calls for Soviet-style leadership and an end to the war led to the October 1917 Revolution that eventually propelled Vladimir Lenin and his Bolshevik Party to power. Three years of civil war and a terrible famine transpired before the Bolsheviks consolidated power and founded the USSR, largely within the borders of the former Tsarist empire.<sup>10</sup>

## *Soviet Revolution*

The USSR under Joseph Stalin was a brutal dictatorship. Following his death, citizens of the USSR suffered additional years of Communist Party control over all political, cultural, and economic facets of life. The USSR's economic problems culminated in the early 1980s with an economy that was only expanding between a half percent and two percent annually.<sup>11</sup> The multiethnic and cultural differences of the USSR also began to bubble to the surface with Baltic States lobbying the U.S. to pressure Moscow, Georgians marching in protest at the potential loss of their native tongue as the state language, and declining birth rates in Slavic nationalities.<sup>12</sup> Economic stagnation, corruption, and domestic problems led to a demand for change from all but

the most hard-liner Communists.<sup>13</sup> In 1985, the Politburo appointed Mikhail Gorbachev General Secretary of the Communist Party<sup>14</sup> and he brought with him a plan to restructure the Soviet economy into a market-based economy,<sup>15</sup> to institute democracy,<sup>16</sup> and to bring back culture to the Soviet people.<sup>17</sup> The plan resulted in unintended effects—the hard-liner conservatives roared back to life,<sup>18</sup> and the Soviet people, now less afraid of the regime, began demanding ethnic and national freedom.<sup>19</sup>

Conservative Soviet hard-liners attempted a coup in August 1991 in order to prevent Mikhail Gorbachev from signing a treaty, which would have revised the Soviet Constitution, extending more authority to the republics of the USSR. The coup failed after democratic resisters, led by Boris Yeltsin, freshly elected as Russia's first freely elected president, rallied both the people and military and peacefully quashed the attempted coup.<sup>20</sup> After the coup, power shifted from Gorbachev, who many Soviet citizens considered weak and indecisive, to Yeltsin, who was still basking in a hero's glory. Yeltsin emboldened the non-Russian republics to "assert their sovereignty",<sup>21</sup> and one by one, they began applying for and receiving international recognition. Gorbachev resigned on 25 December 1991, and six days later, the Soviet Union officially dissolved.

Even in the twenty-first century, Russia continues to face the geographic challenges that have haunted the country and its rulers for a millennium. In the mind of many Russians, the Northern European Plain is still an inviting path for would-be invaders. Russia still does not have sovereign, year-round direct access to any ocean, making it unable to truly project and sustain power globally. These geographic challenges, in addition to Russia's history of invasion and revolutions, are continuously in the back of Russians' minds, leading to a Russian elite that is

wholly insecure and more than a bit paranoid. These factors heavily contribute to the Russian mindset of existing under a constant state of siege.

## **Fears of U.S. Sponsored Regime Change**

Mindful of the speed with which both the Tsarist and Soviet empires collapsed in the 20th century, Vladimir Putin believes the U.S. is laying the foundation for regime change in Russia. Putin's rationale for his belief revolves around three key ideas: The U.S. has a colorful history of successful attempted regime changes; the U.S. will stop at nothing to maintain its unipolar position in global affairs; and NATO's continued encroachment toward Russia's borders.

### *U.S. history of attempted regime*

After World War II, Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin worked tirelessly to install pro-Soviet regimes in Eastern Europe. He was attempting to prevent future invasions by ensuring an enemy's march to Moscow was not enabled by anti-Soviet governments.<sup>22</sup> The U.S., on the other hand, worked to contain the Soviets spread of influence and covertly rollback Moscow's gains and counter the spread of communism.<sup>23</sup> In fact, between 1947 and 1989, the U.S. has attempted regime change sixty six times, in numerous countries and across all administrations, often continuing from one president to the next (see table).<sup>24</sup> Truman and Eisenhower sponsored the majority of regime change attempts in order to rid Eastern Europe of pro-Soviet regimes and preclude the victory of communist or socialist movements in Western European elections. The second regime change movement occurred as Kennedy and Johnson aimed to prevent pro-Soviet regimes from arising in post-colonial Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Carter, Reagan,

and George H.W. Bush carried out the third wave of attempted regime changes. In all, the U.S. attempted twenty-five offensive operations aimed at replacing a pro-Soviet government with a pro-western government,<sup>25</sup> of which only three (all covert attempts) were successful. It also launched twenty-five preventative operations aimed at countries that were not yet allies of the USSR, of which thirteen were successful,<sup>26</sup> and twenty-one hegemonic regime changes aimed at maintaining hierarchical regional order, of which thirteen were successful.<sup>27</sup>

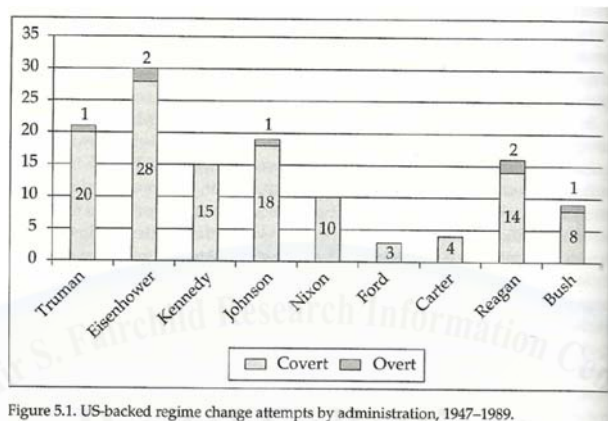


Figure 5.1. US-backed regime change attempts by administration, 1947-1989.

If the U.S. did not have such a remarkable history of attempting regime change specifically aimed at the USSR, there would be little basis for Russia's paranoia. The U.S. was only successful at directly overthrowing (offensive operations) pro-Soviet governments during the Cold War in three of twenty-five cases but Russia is fully aware of the U.S. sponsorship in all three of those cases (Poland, Afghanistan, and Nicaragua)<sup>28</sup> and that knowledge, plus their belief in continued U.S-sponsored regime change post-Cold War in Kosovo, Iraq, Libya, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan<sup>29</sup> has inevitably led to their concerns about a future U.S.-sponsored regime change aimed at Russia.

## *U.S. Desire to Maintain a Unipolar World*

The Russians believe the U.S. will stop at nothing to maintain its unipolar position in the world.<sup>30</sup> According to Maj Gen (ret.) Aleksandr Vladimirov, the president of Russia's Board of Military Experts, the U.S. must maintain its global hegemony in order to ensure the U.S. dollar continues its dominance as the world's reserve currency, which permits massive deficit spending and thus, huge defense budgets.<sup>31</sup> The Russian elite believes the U.S. has used its influence to impose economic sanctions against Russia following its annexation of Crimea in order to limit Russia's military growth.<sup>32</sup> Putin likely views this as a form of economic warfare and not merely an instrument of national power the U.S. proclaims. In 2014, after annexing Crimea, Putin stated, "The USA prefers to follow the rule of the strongest and not by the international law. They are convinced that they have been chosen and they are exceptional, that they are allowed to shape the destiny of the world, that it is only them that can be right."<sup>33</sup> In a speech before the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, Putin stated, "We all know that after the end of the Cold War, a single center of domination emerged in the world. And then those who found themselves at the top of that pyramid were tempted to think that if we are so strong and exceptional, then we know better than anyone what to do and why at all should we reckon with the UN, which instead of automatically authorizing and legitimizing necessary decisions often creates obstacles or, in other words, 'stands in the way'."<sup>34</sup>

Despite his description of the U.S. as at the top of the pyramid, it is also clear Putin thinks the U.S. is on the decline. In October 2018, Putin remarked, "America's global dominance is coming to an end, with the U.S. itself accelerating that process with a string of mistakes 'typical of an empire.' Thank God, this situation of a unipolar world, of a monopoly, is coming to an end. It's practically already over."<sup>35</sup> Chief of the Russian General Staff Gen Valery

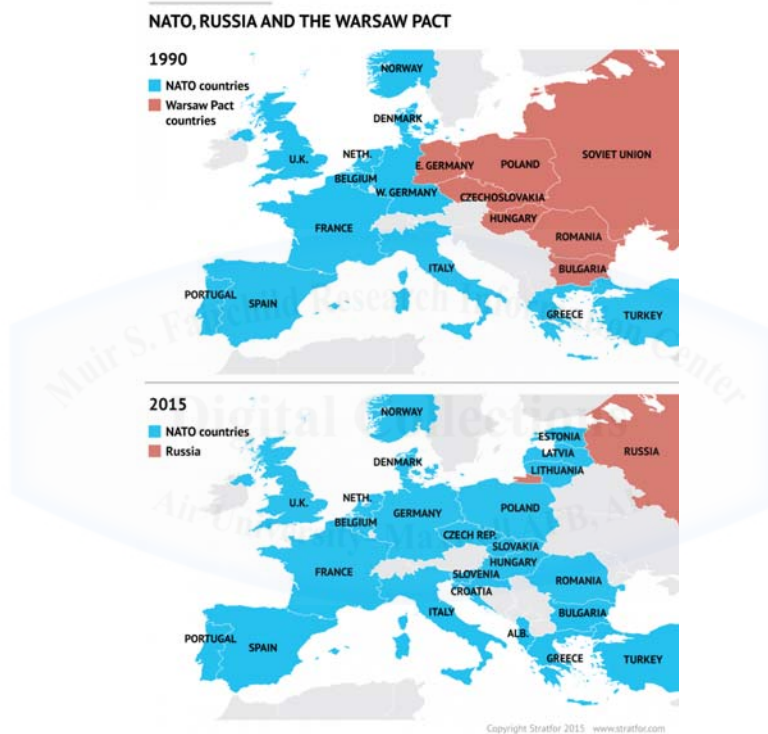
Gerasimov alluded to U.S. fears of losing its unipolarity and global hegemony when he spoke in March 2018 during a presentation to the General Staff Academy. He stated, “Today, a determining influence on the development of the military-political situation in the world is the United States’ striving to prevent losing its ‘global leadership’ and to maintain a unipolar world by any means, including military.”<sup>36</sup> Whether or not Putin and the Russian elite truly believe that the U.S.’s dominance in world affairs is coming to a close is questionable and irrelevant. Moving away from a unipolar world toward a multipolar or polycentric world is a piece of Russia’s overall strategic defense plan, and Russia will continue to take actions that empower Russia as an influencer in the world while diminishing the global role of the U.S. and its allies.

### *NATO Encroachment on Russia’s Borders*

Today, Vladimir Putin faces the same challenges as Ivan the Terrible and Josef Stalin in defending Russia’s western border. When the Soviet Union collapsed in the 1990s, Russian leadership was under the impression that both former Soviet republics and Warsaw Pact countries would not join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). According to Mikhail Gorbachev, “The agreement on the final settlement with Germany stated that no additional NATO troops would be deployed on the territory of the former GDR, and neither would weapons of mass destruction. That meant that NATO’s military infrastructure would not move eastward.

The decision to expand NATO, taken after the break-up of the Soviet Union, was contrary to the spirit of those undertakings.”<sup>37</sup> The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Albania, and the former Soviet republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are all current members of NATO.<sup>38</sup> One need only look at a map of NATO, Russia, and the Warsaw Pact countries in 1990 and compare it to a map of NATO member countries in 2015

(see map) to partially understand why Russia believes it is in danger of another invasion or, at a minimum, is in a defensive posture. As Russia looks forward, it must protect its western border as NATO and the EU push closer toward the Russian heartland. Estonia and Latvia both border Russia in the northwest, and the only remaining buffer between Russia and the rest of NATO today is Ukraine and Belarus. Putin will likely do everything in his power to keep Ukraine from joining NATO and ensure Belarus remains an obedient ally.



## Russia's Overall Strategic Plan

It is no secret Vladimir Putin longs for Russia to inspire the same fear and respect around the globe as the former Soviet Union. He has promised his citizens he will “restore Russia to a great power status, on par with the United States.”<sup>39</sup> Russia's perceived vulnerabilities have driven Kremlin leadership to develop a comprehensive strategic defensive plan for regime survival predicated on returning to great power status and becoming a “pole” in a multipolar world. Components of this plan include: diminishing the reputation of the U.S.; fracturing



Western alliances, such as NATO and the EU;<sup>40</sup> enhancing Russia's power projection;<sup>41</sup> and pushing back against NATO encroachment.<sup>42</sup> Russia has operationalized NGW as the primary weapon to execute the plan. The next section will describe NGW, the role information plays as a sub-component of NGW, and how NGW is being used to execute components of Russia's strategic defensive plan.

## **New Generation Warfare**

Sergey Chekinov, Doctor of Technical Sciences and Sergey Bogdanov, Doctor of Military Sciences, are retired Russian military officers and recognized military academics who describe information superiority in future wars as a requirement in order to meet strategic goals.<sup>43</sup> In fact, they believe nonmilitary tools, including the use of information, could become the primary factor in determining outcomes with future adversaries.<sup>44</sup> Chekinov and Bogdanov coined the phrase "New Generation Warfare" to describe a type of warfare that reflects their interpretation of the evolution of military art. There is nothing new about NGW. Rather it is a combination of the existing concepts of Asymmetric Warfare, Low-Intensity Conflict, Network-Centric Warfare, Sixth-Generation Warfare, and Reflexive Control, which, when combined creatively to situation-specific events, seeks to effect a specific political or military outcome "without necessarily resorting to overt conventional military means, although the latter is certainly not excluded."<sup>45</sup> The foundation and key enabler for all of these components is information. How information is deployed is what enables NGW. "The Russian view of modern warfare is based on the idea that the main battlespace is the mind and, as a result, new-generation wars are to be dominated by information and psychological warfare, in order to achieve superiority in troops and weapons control, morally and psychologically depressing the enemy's

armed forces personnel and civil population.”<sup>46</sup> To better understand NGW, its components are described below.

### *Asymmetric Warfare*

Asymmetric Warfare is “both systemic and comprehensive, simultaneously employing political, diplomatic, informational, economic, military and other indirect forms. It also can use strategic high-precision non-nuclear weapons systems, with the support of subversive and reconnaissance groups.”<sup>47</sup> The essence of asymmetric warfare is that one side is able to employ means against an adversary, by not matching the enemy’s strengths,<sup>48</sup> but by employing alternative methods to effect a desired change. In Asymmetric Warfare, through information, Russia strives to create an alternate reality as part of its military strategy and then uses this alternate reality to legitimize conflict and avoid direct military confrontation or overt meddling in another country. Information operations are critical to creating this alternate reality.<sup>49</sup>

### *Low-Intensity Conflict*

Low-Intensity Conflict (LIC) occurs as competition between groups or nations below the level of conventional war but above the level of peaceful competition, and ranges from subversion to the use of armed force. Change, discontent, poverty, violence, and instability are what make LIC possible. Operations begin under a crisis meant to destabilize the geopolitical situation. Next, they progress to degrading, impoverishing, or disintegrating the nation to make it a failed state. Finally, the attacker finishes it by swooping in as the “savior” of the affected country. Information is a primary component of LIC and is used to promote the political and

ideological values of the aggressing country in order to destroy the target country's social and ideological system.<sup>50</sup>

### *Network-Centric Warfare*

Network-Centric Warfare is defined as a “concept of control over combat operations as a new way of directing armed forces in 21st-century operations”.<sup>52</sup>

“Network-centric warfare is a war in which the combat strength of a troop (force) grouping is increased thanks to the creation of an information-communication network that would link information (intelligence) sources, control bodies and means of destruction (suppression). This can be done by giving the participants in operations reliable and complete information about the situation practically in real time.”<sup>53</sup> In Network-Centric Warfare, a combat unit, command and staff unit, and information unit operate autonomously by utilizing a single information database, which both collects and shares information in order to enable actions to support the attacking force and manipulate the target nation.<sup>54</sup> Information is a critical piece of Network-Centric Warfare. Intelligence, psychological operations, and information warfare are all key subunits of the autonomous information unit, which is used to adversely impact the decision-making of the opponent, thereby enabling attacking forces.

### *Sixth-Generation Warfare*

Sixth-Generation Warfare is a method of modern warfare that makes or attempts to make the massing of large forces for a conventional war obsolete. It uses non-contact warfare and conventional systems so precisely that the physical effects approach the nuclear threshold of

destruction. The main goal is to destroy the enemy's means of retaliation, attempting to effect the downfall of the political system, then using the local population as the instrument to triumph over the opponent.<sup>55</sup>

### *Reflexive Control*

In Reflexive Control, the tactic is to provide information to the opponent that induces him to take a specific action desired by the controller. The information can be used constructively, where the desired action is favorable to the controller, or destructively, where the desired action is to paralyze the opponent's decision-making ability.<sup>56</sup>

### **Phases of NGW**

In an article called "The Nature and Content of a New Generation War", experts in military strategy Chekinov and Bogadanov, describe NGW and its eight phases. The first four phases are generally non-kinetic and variations of LIC, with the fifth phase beginning some conventional military operations. The eight phases are detailed below:

**First Phase:** non-military asymmetric warfare encompassing information, moral, psychological, ideological, diplomatic, and economic measures as part of a plan to establish a favorable political, economic, and military setup.

**Second Phase:** special operations to mislead political and military leaders by coordinated measures carried out by diplomatic channels, media, and top government and military agencies by leaking false data, orders, directives, and instructions.

**Third Phase:** intimidating, deceiving, and bribing government and military officers, with the

objective of making them abandon their service duties.

**Fourth Phase:** destabilizing propaganda to increase discontent among the population, boosted by the arrival of Russian bands of militants, escalating subversion.

**Fifth Phase:** establishment of no-fly zones over the country to be attacked, imposition of blockades, and extensive use of private military companies in close cooperation with armed opposition units.

**Sixth Phase:** commencement of military action, immediately preceded by large-scale reconnaissance and subversive missions. All types, forms, methods, and forces, including special operations forces, space, Russian radio broadcasts, electronic, diplomatic, and secret service intelligence, and industrial espionage.

**Seventh Phase:** combination of targeted information operation, electronic warfare operation, aerospace operation, continuous air force harassment, combined with the use of high precision weapons launched from various platforms (long-range artillery, and weapons based on new physical principles, including microwaves, radiation, non-lethal biological weapons).

**Eighth Phase:** roll over the remaining points of resistance and destroy surviving enemy units by special operations conducted by reconnaissance units to spot which enemy units have survived and transmit their coordinates to the attacker's missile and artillery units; fire barrages to annihilate the defender's resisting army units by effective advanced weapons; airdrop operations to surround points of resistance; and territory mopping-up operations by ground troops.

The phases of NGW may take place sequentially or simultaneously and not all of them may be employed. In fact, the ultimate goal is success without resorting to overt military actions—phases one through four—and that enabler is information. Russia's NGW is a long-

term play, and information operations used in phases one through three could take place over years. The key to Russian NGW strategy is *influence*, which involves exploiting all aspects of information using skillful internal communications, deception operations, psychological operations, and well-constructed external communications.<sup>57</sup> It takes time to acquire influence, and Russia is playing the long game.

## **NGW in Strategic Defensive Campaigning**

The first tsar of Russia, Ivan the Terrible, first executed the concept of attack as a defense by attempting to expand Russia's territory. He was able to secure territory east through Siberia and south to the Caspian Sea, creating a buffer zone between Moscow and would-be invaders.<sup>58</sup> Putin's tactics today are different only in execution, but the strategy is still the same—attack as a defense. Instead of employing large, invading forces, Putin has mastered NGW, in particular the information dimension, and employs it in a deliberate manner in order to achieve his ultimate defensive goal—to return to great power status.

The next sections will illustrate Russia's use of NGW, and demonstrate that it is robust enough to cover a range of desired effects designed to help Russia accomplish its interim goals of diminishing U.S. reputation, fracturing Western alliances such as NATO and the EU, enhancing Russia's power projection, and pushing back against NATO encroachment. Three cases highlight the effectiveness of NGW and, in particular, the use of information to achieve a desired effect: Annexation of Crimea in 2014; interference in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election; and current influence operations in the Baltic Sea Region.

### **Crimea 2014**

*Information / NGW Crimea 2014*

Russia employed subversive methods of Low-Intensity Conflict, a component of NGW, against Ukraine from 2004 to 2014 with it culminating in the latter phases of NGW when Russia annexed Crimea in 2014. LIC began during the 2004 Ukrainian presidential election, with Russia attempting to influence the election of pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich over the pro-Western candidate, Viktor Yushchenko. Once Russian involvement was discovered, the results were discarded and a new election took place, with the pro-Western Yushchenko declared the winner. Russia ramped up efforts in 2008 against Ukraine as it was contemplating membership in NATO by making political statements verbally questioning Ukraine's sovereignty, issuing passports to Crimean residents, pushing propaganda delegitimizing the Ukrainian government, and touting the common heritage among the Ukrainians and Russians.<sup>59</sup> In 2010, Ukrainians elected Yanukovich President of Ukraine. His election was a result of both his "orange" coalition's inability to govern<sup>60</sup> as well as the successful Russian influence operations that occurred between presidential 2004 and 2010 Presidential elections.<sup>61</sup>

In 2013, during the Euromaiden uprising, Russia employed information operations during early NGW phases by using propaganda and disinformation to influence local, regional, and global audiences.<sup>62</sup> Russia used a mix of Russian-language TV, online media, and social networks to employ several propaganda strategies in order to influence the Ukrainian and Crimean population. Propaganda included discrediting Ukraine's EU Association Agreement integration efforts, calling pro-Western forces "fascists", producing fake reports indicating a mass refugee influx from Ukraine to Russia,<sup>63</sup> promoting altered images of Ukrainian tanks and flags with Nazi symbols, promoting Russia's "protection" of Russian speakers in Crimea, denying the presence of Russian forces in Ukraine, and blaming the U.S. for information operations against Russia.<sup>64</sup>

Beginning in November of 2013, Russia began simultaneously conducting operations to annex Crimea as well as instigating political unrest in the eastern Ukraine region of the Donbas in response to the ouster by pro-Western forces of the pro-Russian Ukrainian President, Viktor Yanukovich. The regime change from a pro-Russian to a pro-Western government meant that Russia had lost its influence in one of its critical border nations in the west—a nation with which it shares language, culture, history, and vast business ties with Russia.<sup>65</sup>

### *Part of the Defensive Campaign*

President Putin did not wait for the dust to settle in the new regime before he executed two separate but concurrent military operations in Ukraine aimed at regaining influence there and securing Russia's naval base at Sevastopol in Crimea.<sup>66</sup> The disinformation and denial and deception strategies employed in the latter stages of NGW during the physical takeover of Crimea caused confusion among global leaders, and by the time anyone could determine what was accurate and what was disinformation, Russia had already successfully annexed Crimea. By securing Crimea, Russia once again controlled Sevastopol naval base, not by an agreement with the Ukraine but by physical domination. Full ownership over Sevastopol made Russia once again a Balkan power, giving them a year-round warm water port and enhancing Russia's power projection in the Black Sea Region, southern Europe, and Asia Minor.<sup>67</sup>

Seizing Crimea and attempts at securing Eastern Ukraine also satisfy another of Putin's interim goals—pushing back against NATO expansion into border countries of Russia. Though Ukraine is not a NATO member, a pro-western government could decide to apply for membership in either or both NATO and the EU, moves Russia would abhor. The actions Russia took immediately to annex Crimea and stir unrest in Eastern Ukraine ensure the Ukrainian



population understands that a dalliance with NATO or the EU will have painful consequences for them. In this effort, Putin ensures Ukraine stays “gray”—at a minimum does not join NATO or the EU—while he continues to attempt to influence the Ukrainian population to eventually take a more pro-Russian stance and hopefully elect a pro-Russian government. Operations in Ukraine are designed to create a Russian-influenced buffer zone and to increase the space between the nearest NATO member and Russia.<sup>68</sup>

## **U.S. Elections 2016**

### *Information / NGW in the U.S. 2016 Presidential Elections*

Russia’s NGW is not limited to nations or areas in which it plans to use military force. What makes NGW so effective is its multi-layered approach to increasing turmoil in locations in order to create the conditions in which it knows it can be effective. For some situations, military force may be used (though the end goal is to not resort to physical violence) whereas with others, such as the U.S., the first few phases of NGW create the environment Kremlin leadership desires, which is precisely what occurred during the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

Multiple U.S. federal agencies concluded Russia interfered in the election in a deliberate and extensive manner with two main objectives.<sup>69</sup> The Russians used the first phase of NGW to conduct a “social media campaign that favored presidential candidate Donald J. Trump and disparaged presidential candidate Hillary Clinton.”<sup>70</sup> Additionally, the Russians used first and second phase NGW to conduct cyber operations against employees of the Clinton Campaign to gain damaging or embarrassing information and then subsequently released those documents.<sup>71</sup>

A closer look at the details provides the extent information was used to effect the victory of Candidate Trump.

### *Social Media Campaign*

The earliest Russian involvement in the targeted 2016 elections began through the Internet Research Agency (IRA) as early as 2014. The IRA is a Russian company funded by Russian oligarch Yevgeniy Viktorovich, who has known ties to Vladimir Putin.<sup>72</sup> The original operations began with the intent to “provoke and amplify political and social discord in the United States.”<sup>73</sup> Russian operators traveled to the U.S. in mid-2014 to take photos and gain information for later social media posts. Posing as U.S. activists, they took the photos and information and used them to set up social media profiles aimed at attracting large U.S. audiences and addressing divisive political and social issues.<sup>74</sup> IRA specialists created social media accounts through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Tumblr, and Instagram. The IRA-controlled accounts initially posed as individual persons but by 2015, the IRA-controlled accounts began posing as larger groups or public groups. One IRA-controlled Twitter handle, @TEN\_GOP, was created to impersonate the Tennessee Republican Party. They also posed as activists from grassroots organizations, Black Lives Matter protesters, and Tea Party activists.<sup>75</sup>

By 2016, the IRA’s focus changed from sowing general political discord in the U.S. to deliberate measures to support the Trump Campaign and disparage the Clinton Campaign. IRA-controlled Facebook pages began appearing with topics like, “Being Patriotic,” and “Stop All Immigrants.” The pages were used to criticize Hillary Clinton and continued throughout 2016.<sup>76</sup> The IRA also purchased Facebook advertisements to promote Trump and disparage Clinton. One such advertisement showed a picture of Clinton with a caption, “If one day God lets this liar

enter the White House as a president – that day would be a real national tragedy.”<sup>77</sup> Another advertisement, purchased through an IRA-controlled Instagram account titled “Tea Party News” prompted US citizens to “make a patriotic team of young Trump supporters” by uploading photos with the hashtag “#KIDS4TRUMP.”<sup>78</sup>

IRA-controlled Twitter accounts had two purposes—to impersonate US citizens and to use bot accounts to propagate IRA-controlled content on Twitter. Examples of individual accounts created were: @jenn\_abrams (claiming to be a Virginian Trump supporter with 70,000 followers); @Pamela\_Moore13 (claiming to be a Texan Trump supporter with 70,000 followers); and @America\_1st\_ (an anti-immigration persona with 24,000 followers). Many tweets were re-tweeted by members linked to the Trump campaign as well as high-profile U.S. citizens including former Ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul, Roger Stone, Sean Hannity, and Michael Flynn, Jr.<sup>79</sup> The IRA also managed to convince unwitting Twitter followers to stage political rallies on behalf of the Trump campaign. Rallies promoted by the IRA included three in New York, several in Florida, and several in Pennsylvania.

The IRA used all of the popular social media platforms to impact the U.S. election by vigorously promoting Trump and simultaneously disparaging Clinton. The IRA’s tactics were so effective, members of the Trump campaign unwittingly interacted with IRA members to provide assistance and coordinate on Trump rallies.<sup>80</sup> Facebook estimates approximately 126 million people viewed IRA-controlled content between 2015-2017, while Twitter estimates 1.6 million people viewed IRA-controlled content during the same two-year period.<sup>81</sup>

## *Russian Hacking and Dumping Operations*

The Russian Federation's Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff (GRU) used two of its cyber units, 26165 and 74455, to exploit the computer systems of the Clinton Campaign, the Democratic National Committee (DNC), and the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC). Cyber unit 26165 predominantly hacked into the organizations and then turned those materials over to cyber unit 74455 to disseminate them through various methods with the intent to embarrass and disparage the Clinton Campaign. The GRU's 26165 hacking efforts began in March 2016, while 74455's began disseminating the hacked materials as early as April 2016.<sup>82</sup>

GRU unit 26165 used spear-phishing emails on multiple members of the Clinton Campaign, DNC, and DCCC, targeting both work and personal email addresses. Unit 26165 was exceptionally effective and gained email access to John Podesta, Clinton's campaign manager, other members of the Clinton Campaign, and a DNC member. GRU hackers were successful and gained not only tens of thousands of documents related to the Clinton Campaign, they gained stolen credentials, which gave them access to the DCCC network. Once on the DCCC network, they were able to use a virtual private network to gain access to the DNC's network. On both the DCCC and DNC networks, unit 26165 used malicious software (malware) to harvest any data needed for its anti-Clinton operation including, stolen credentials, operating system information, logged keystrokes, screenshots, and the ability to compress and compile data for exfiltration. Successful GRU 26165 spear-phishing tactics against the DNC, DCCC, and Clinton Campaign members resulted in the GRU's acquisition of tens of thousands of emails between members of the Clinton Campaign and internal strategy documents, fundraising data, and opposition research

retrieved from DNC and DCCC networks.<sup>83</sup> After retrieving the data, the GRU's next move was to get the information out to the American people.

Members of 26165 and 74455 created fictitious online personas "DCLeaks" and "Guccifer 2.0" in order to disseminate the stolen information. Through the DCLeaks Facebook page and DCLeaks Twitter handle, the GRU released personal and financial information of Clinton Campaign members and a DNC member as well as internal Clinton Campaign correspondence. The GRU even created a DCLeaks Gmail account to correspond privately with reporters and other U.S. persons in order to give them early access to the content prior to it being released to the public.<sup>84</sup>

After the DNC realized it had been compromised, the GRU set up a Guccifer 2.0 Wordpress blog where it subsequently published its first post, attributing the DNC intrusion to a lone Romanian hacker. Through the Guccifer 2.0 Wordpress blog, the GRU also published thousands of stolen DNC and DCCC documents, including opposition research conducted by the DNC, internal policy documents, analyses of congressional races, and fundraising. Releases were timed and related to states considered competitive such as Florida and Pennsylvania.<sup>85</sup> Not coincidentally, these two states were also destinations for pro-Trump rallies organized by the IRA.

In addition to using DCLeaks and Guccifer 2.0, the GRU also forged a relationship with Wikileaks in order to amplify its effect on the U.S. population. Wikileaks' previous release of stolen documents related to Hillary Clinton when she served as Secretary of State made Wikileaks a perfect partner for the GRU's operations against her. Wikileaks' founder, Julian Assange, believed if he received information from DCLeaks and Guccifer 2.0, in addition to the thirty thousand Clinton emails he had already acquired through the Freedom of Information Act,

that Wikileaks could be seen as the de facto repository for data disparaging or embarrassing to Candidate Clinton.<sup>86</sup> Between October 2016 and November 2016, Wikileaks released 33 installments of the GRU's stolen emails, including fifty thousand emails from John Podesta's personal email account.<sup>87</sup>

### *Additional GRU Operations*

While the Trump Campaign was cleared from knowingly communicating with Russia, the GRU certainly took advice from Candidate Trump to help him persevere over Candidate Clinton. Within five hours of his famous, "Russia, if you're listening, I hope you're able to find the 30,000 emails that are missing" speech, GRU cyber unit 26165 created and sent spear-phishing emails to the domain that housed Clinton's personal server. Up until this point, there had been no previous targeting of that domain.<sup>88</sup>

The GRU did not limit its cyber operations to individuals. It targeted state boards of elections, secretaries of state, and county governments as well as private companies involved in the hardware and software of electronic polling stations and voter registration. The GRU also targeted the individuals employed at these locations. In one instance, the GRU sent 120 spear-phishing emails to Florida officials responsible for administering the 2016 election, which, if successful, gave the GRU access to the infected computer.<sup>89</sup>

### *Part of the Defensive Campaign*

Interfering with the U.S. Presidential election in 2016 was a part of Russia's overall strategic defensive campaign in two respects: First, it demonstrated to the world that Russia has

the willingness and capability to affect a superpower. Secondly, it had the effect of undermining the U.S. political process, thereby diminishing the reputation of the U.S.

To reach Russia's ultimate goal—to *be* a great power again with its own sphere of influence—Russia must demonstrate it actually *has* great power. Putin demonstrated the impact that NGW, and in particular disinformation, can have when applied effectively. Interfering in the U.S. election was Putin's chance to flex his muscles for the rest of the world and demonstrate just how powerful he is. After all, Kremlin leaders believe that the U.S. is involved in Russian politics, so they should therefore, similarly have the right to intervene in U.S. politics. Those leaders believe they will only gain great power status by confronting the U.S., not cooperating with it."<sup>90</sup>

Putin's biggest fear above all else is U.S.-sponsored regime change in Russia, and those fears helped motivate Russia's first and second phase NGW operations in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.<sup>91</sup> By interfering in the U.S. 2016 election, President Putin made progress on one his interim goals within the overall strategic defensive campaign—to diminish the reputation of the U.S. By interfering in the elections, he undermined the U.S. political process. With a democratic political system in doubt, the U.S. population loses trust in that system. According to Professor Siva Vaidhyanathan, media studies professor at the University of Virginia, the goal of the Russians in 2016 was not specifically to elect Candidate Trump. The goal was to “mess with us, so that no matter who becomes president, the United States is harder to govern, and that over the long run, democracy becomes harder to sustain.”<sup>92</sup>

To Russia, democracy is inherently unstable and results in a lack of control and order. By interfering in the U.S. election, Russia placed doubt in the political process and caused a deep divide among Americans. By Russia's logic, a chaotic democracy does not instill a sense of

security; therefore, the U.S., democracy's biggest advocate, should not be the global hegemon. Putin is essentially chipping away at the U.S.'s reputation little by little. As the U.S.'s reputation trends downward globally, the opportunity arises for another (Russia) to rise and take its place—not as a global hegemon, but in areas where it seeks to influence, such as Eastern Europe and the Baltics.<sup>93</sup>

## **Baltic States Today**

### *Information / NGW in the Baltic States*

The Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are home to a significant number of Russian speakers, most of whom are ethnic Russians. As of 2011 data, Russian speakers in Estonia comprise thirty percent of the population, twenty-five percent of which are ethnic Russians. Latvia hosts thirty-five and twenty-seven percent respectively, and Lithuania eight and six percent, respectively.<sup>94</sup> Policies during the Soviet era were responsible for relocating Russians to the Baltic States to dilute the ethnic population and to instill the Soviet culture. After the collapse of the USSR, the Baltic States applied for and received membership in both NATO and the EU. However, much of the Russian population in the Baltic States has limited rights due to their Russian ethnicity, fostered by anti-Russian regulation. President Putin has capitalized on their feeling of second-class status and feeds Russian media and anti-Western propaganda into the Baltics, which poses a threat to the Baltic States. Unhappy Russians in the Baltics give President Putin the opportunity to incite discord in the population and to influence government in those states through the political process, with the ultimate aim to bring the Baltics under the influence of Russia.<sup>95</sup>



Russia is currently employing the first and second phases of NGW in the Baltic States to sow discord among the population.<sup>96</sup> Russia has used trolls extensively to aid in pro-Russian propaganda as well as to disparage the West by spreading disinformation and propagating fake news.<sup>97</sup> Russian propaganda is a mix of lies and truth, meant to confuse and influence its audience.<sup>98</sup> Using the themes of human rights violations against Russian speaking minorities, anti-NATO messaging, and fear of refugees, Russia exploits human vulnerabilities by using memes, caricatures, videos, and images to evoke an emotional response.<sup>99</sup> Russia uses Russian television such as *Russia Today* and *Sputnik News*,<sup>100</sup> radio broadcasts, newspapers, books, magazines, songs, movies, the internet, and bots and trolls on social media in the Baltic States to reach Russian speakers in those states.<sup>101</sup>

In Lithuania, Russia propagated a false narrative depicting a NATO soldier raping a Lithuanian girl<sup>102</sup> in an effort to besmirch NATO troops and highlight NATO's threat to Russia.<sup>103</sup> Lithuanian police investigated and found no evidence to support the claim. In another instance, Russian social media accounts depicted NATO soldiers as drunkards pursuing fights with the locals.<sup>104</sup>

President Putin's propaganda, which highlights the poor treatment of the Baltic States' Russian-speaking population, not only sows discord and divides society, but could give Putin the justification for intervening there—the same justification Russia used to annex Crimea with regard to Russian-speaking Ukrainians.<sup>105</sup> Russia's propaganda also blames Western-backed fascists as the cause of Ukraine's crisis. Evidence from a study with multiple Russian-speaking Estonians illustrates that the rhetoric is having the desired effect. During several interviews, Russian-speaking Estonians acknowledged their belief in Russia's fascist propaganda regarding Ukraine.<sup>106</sup>

Russia also uses social media in the Baltic States to attack Western ways of life—specifically attacking the gay population and the Western view on abortion—promoting what Russia perceives as its higher moral standards. Facebook hosts Russian-friendly online communities that talk of Putin’s greatness and his embrace of traditional values. Russia uses all tools at its disposal to promote Putin in the same way that it disparages the West.<sup>107</sup>

### *Part of the Defensive Campaign*

Kremlin leadership considers the Baltic States, as former republics within the USSR, to be within their sphere of influence.<sup>108</sup> Though the Baltic States are part of NATO, Putin has an interest in gaining influence with the governments and people of those countries.<sup>109</sup> If successful, at a minimum, it could result in pro-Russian policies at one end of the spectrum or on the other end of the spectrum, with Baltic State governments demanding the removal of NATO troops from those countries or even more dangerous—leaving the alliance altogether. One of Putin’s interim goals in his drive to great power status is his desire to fracture NATO and make it irrelevant.<sup>110</sup> Not only does Putin desire to be the hegemon in the Baltic States region, but by becoming a greater influence, the U.S. becomes less of an influence and Putin’s desire to move to a multipolar world gains traction.<sup>111</sup> In the end, Putin’s long-term goal is to demonstrate that NATO cannot respond to military situations below the level of armed conflict. He desires the world to know that “Russian aggression will always result in an unchallenged fait accompli,”<sup>112</sup> which is exactly what happened in Crimea.

## Indications & Warning for Future Russian NGW

Russia is not likely to resort to invading a neighbor by conventional military means. Russia will more likely employ NGW to make progress toward its long-term goal of regaining great power status. The first and second phases of NGW are information and psychologically based, so the key to identifying where and when Russia will next employ NGW revolves around understanding what motivates Russian leadership. Russia's ultimate goal of becoming a great power requires interim goals of diminishing U.S. reputation, fracturing western alliances, enhancing Russia's power projection, and pushing back against NATO encroachment.

By identifying the countries and organizations that can help Putin reach these goals, one can assume Russia is or will be executing NGW operations. Generally speaking, Russia desires to harm those nations, organizations, or individuals promoting Western ideologies and would like to promote pro-Putin and pro-Russian propaganda in those countries along its periphery or that share similar ideals. The list of countries, organizations, and individuals upon which President Putin would like to create an effect is long and is outside the scope of this paper; however, a couple of examples are in order.

Both the U.S. and Poland are holding presidential elections in 2020, and both countries should expect widespread Russian interference. Russia would like to continue to sow doubt in the democratic process, and the U.S. and Poland are long-time adversaries. In addition, Belarus is holding a presidential election in 2020, but President Putin and Belarus's president, Alexander Lukashenko, have had strained relations recently over the price of oil.<sup>113</sup> The U.S. attempted to take advantage of their strained relations recently by pulling Belarus out of Russia's sphere, at least partially, by offering to provide oil to Belarus.<sup>114</sup> It is all but certain Russian leadership is already conducting first and second phase NGW in Belarus in an attempt to promote Russian

ideals and President Putin. With Belarus as one of the top contenders on a short-list of countries Russia might consider at some point advancing into the military stages of NGW, Belarus could find itself in a precarious position if the current spat over oil prices is reignited and strained relations between the Russian and Belarussian president continue.

### **Recommendations**

Recommendations are broken down to two: First, the U.S. (and other countries) must find a way to counter phases one and two of Russia's NGW. Without the first two phases, Russia will find it more difficult (though not impossible) to find success in the latter stages of NGW. Secondly, whether or not the U.S. desires regime change in Russia is moot—Russia believes it to be the case. The thesis argues Russia's entire strategy is based on regime survival and that the regime will continue to conduct NGW until it no longer feels it is under threat. The U.S. must find a way to deter Russia while simultaneously reassuring Russians they are not under attack from the West. Without these two recommendations being implemented, Russian leadership will continue to employ first and second phase NGW at will, where it may eventually find enough success to truly wreak havoc in the U.S. internally, or fracture NATO and EU relationships.

### **Countering Information in NGW**

Countering Russia's disinformation and propaganda strategy must be at the forefront of any attempt to gain the upper hand against Russia's meddling. Dr. Alina Polyakova and Ambassador Daniel Fried authored an article entitled, "Democratic Defense Against Disinformation" and made a series of recommendations for democratic governments to fight Russian disinformation and propaganda campaigns. Those recommendations are summarized below: these include a whole-of-society approach utilizing advantages and tools available in

three different areas: government, civil society, and the private sector. While none of these sectors by itself is enough to stop disinformation, collectively, they may reduce the impact of disinformation. Recommendations are grouped at the strategic level and operational/tactical level.

### *Strategic Relations and Messaging*

The U.S. should label foreign state propaganda organs for what they are. The U.S. government needs to loudly identify Russian networks, such as RT and Sputnik, as vehicles for propaganda. Due to the First Amendment, the U.S. cannot ban RT nor Sputnik, but the U.S. can and has ordered RT and others to register under the Foreign Agent Registration Act (FARA).

The U.S. government should also actively monitor overt foreign propaganda narratives and inform the public on their content. The State Department's Global Engagement Center (GEC), created after the 2016 elections to counter state-sponsored propaganda, should be adequately funded to support counter-information initiatives abroad. The GEC should be the point of contact (POC) for European Stratcom teams and to be the coordinator for U.S. civil-society and academic endeavors.

The U.S. government should establish an office that would serve for private-sector companies as the POC for information-sharing between social media platforms and the intelligence community (IC). This information coordination office would share information with the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the GEC, and appropriate Congressional oversight committees.

The U.S. government should regulate and apply legislation to political and issue ads generated by Russia and other authoritarian sources. The Honest Ads Act, a bipartisan measure,

would extend disclosure requirements for political and issue ads to social media, matching standards for other media. Though political ads require disclosure, issue ads do not, and this loophole has permitted Russians to use social-media ads for disinformation purposes. The Act would require social-media companies to make reasonable efforts to prevent foreign persons from engaging in campaign-related communications activities, including ads. Social media companies should clearly identify the sponsors and funders of all content.

### *Operational and Tactical*

The U.S. government should establish a high-level interagency fusion cell, modeled after the National Counterterrorism Center, perhaps called the National Counter-Disinformation Center, which would be the operations-based cell and include liaisons from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Central Intelligence Agency, the information coordination office discussed in number three above, the Department of Defense, the GEC, and other relevant agencies. This office should be funded and empowered to implement operational activities based on inputs from the information coordination office.

The U.S. government and social media companies should fund tech-savvy civil-society groups. Examples of these organizations include: StopFake, the Atlantic Council's DFR Lab, the Alliance for Securing Democracy's Hamilton, and Baltic Elves. They have shown an ability to identify prominent Russian troll/bot/cyborgs and to expose campaigns run by them. They are also often faster at and more effective than the government at identifying, countering, and discrediting Russian propaganda. In addition, civil society and academia should develop open-source standards for sharing information on malicious actors and their activities. This effort would enable the tech-savvy groups to share information faster with social media companies and

limit exposure to avoid amplifying disinformation tweets or posts. Those groups would be required to share information with social media companies and the DHS information coordination office.

Print, television, radio outlets, and civil-society groups should educate editors and reporters on how to quickly identify suspected disinformation. Traditional media and high-impact online “influencers” are often the target of disinformation campaigns. Spotting disinformation would ensure exposure is limited to the large U.S. audiences who consume the mainstream media. Traditional media companies should then be able to identify content originating from propaganda organs such as RT and Sputnik and treat their output as suspect. For example, instead of alluding to “The Russian News organization, RT,” the journalist would allude to the Russian propaganda outlet, RT.

Social media companies should “mute” content from automated accounts. This would prevent content from populating newsfeeds or influencing trending topics. It serves the same function as “de-ranking” does with Google. In addition, social media companies should also experiment with labeling automated and fake accounts. They should experiment with algorithms used to better identify credible versus weak content. Companies would use a set of transparent metrics, including user feedback, site longevity, and third-party independent reference points to help identify credible content. Social media companies should also revise advertising policies to ban ads from known propaganda outlets. Free speech does not require allowing commercial relations with foreign propaganda organs. The alternative is to make sure the ads are prominently labeled with their originators’ companies. Lastly, social media companies should limit the dissemination of social media content by bots and cyborgs. They could do this by blocking, disabling, or labeling them.

All three sectors—the U.S. government, civil society, and private sector—have a responsibility to educate consumers about how disinformation works, how to identify it, and how to expose it. Media and digital literacy courses are a great tool to teach consumers how to think critically about online and social-media content. Russian disinformation is not a new practice and will continue long into the future. Mandating a digital literacy course as part of the public education curriculum would ensure U.S. citizens learn from an early age how to spot disinformation.

Finland is one story showing promise in fighting disinformation campaigns. It has used education and a strong government acknowledgment and interaction to limit the effect of disinformation on the Finnish people. Italy has also introduced digital literacy to its public school curriculum in its attempt to teach teens how to be critical media consumers in order to combat disinformation.<sup>115</sup>

### **Deterrence, Reassurance, and Policies**

Russia uses all of the national instruments of power (diplomatic, information, military, economic) against its adversaries while the U.S. has predominantly engaged Russia with the economic tool. The U.S. will need to use the other non-military instruments of power to respond effectively to Russian NGW in the twenty-first century.<sup>116</sup> The U.S. must look at Russia's overall goal—returning to great power status and becoming a pole in multipolar world—as well as its interim goals in order to mount an effective response.

Russia is executing NGW operations to achieve the first interim goal—to diminish the reputation of the U.S.— by promoting disinformation and propaganda in the U.S. to sow discord and fracture the democratic system. The counter to this disinformation was discussed previously.



Two of Russia's interim goals—to fracture western alliances, such as NATO and the EU, and to push back against NATO encroachment—are also being executed with first and second phase NGW in the form of disinformation and propaganda. However, there are other steps the U.S. could take besides a counter-disinformation campaign to show strength and unity within NATO without further antagonizing Russia. Russia will not stop its campaign to try to fracture those alliances or to push back against NATO encroachment, but the U.S. and other NATO members can take the following steps to ensure their strength. The following statements and breakout of options is taken entirely from Dr. Kimberly Marten's "Reducing Tensions Between Russia and NATO." First, the U.S. and other countries need to deter Russia from threatening or undermining any members of the alliance. Secondly, the U.S. needs to assure President Putin that NATO is for defensive purposes only and does not threaten Russian territory. Third, U.S. policy decisions should be based on law, including international law, to deflect Russian accusations of hypocrisy.<sup>117</sup>

### *Deterrence Measures*

To deter Russia in the European theater, NATO should rely on its comprehensive capabilities, not just conventional military forces. In other words, NATO should not post a large conventional buildup in the Baltics, as doing so could appear to be aggression—not deterrence. The alliance should think creatively about cross-domain deterrence as part of its comprehensive capability toolkit. Efforts might include creating a "cyber incubator" policy to encourage partnership between the U.S. government and private sector whereby private sector members serve a one-two year term in U.S. Cyber Command; encouraging the establishment of NATO-country cyber embassies on foreign soil to enhance deterrence through denial; preparing a broad

menu of graduated sanctions as a cross-domain deterrence tool; and encouraging the resolution of ethnic political tensions in Estonia and Latvia.

The U.S. government should encourage NATO in its planning scenarios to include consideration of how the alliance would react to potential new Russian land grabs beyond NATO borders. Russian aggression in Ukraine and Georgia or other states in the future might be designed in part to break NATO by sowing confusion about how to respond. The U.S. should encourage NATO to incorporate these scenarios into planning to map out possible joint responses. This might deter Russia from believing that aggression in non-NATO areas could cause the alliance to collapse.

### *Reassurance Measures*

The U.S. can take several measures to reassure Russia that NATO does not pose a threat to Russia, beginning with treating Russian leaders and the Russian state with respect. By treating the Russian leadership with professional and unemotional communication, the U.S. is likely to achieve more toward its aims, or at the very least, not causing the leaders to lose face in Russia, which only inflames matters. Secondly, the U.S. government should formally reaffirm that the U.S. does not seek to impose regime change in Russia. Simultaneously, the U.S. should emphasize cyber operations against civilians is unacceptable. Economic sanctions should stand and be expanded if Russia does not back off its first and second phase NGW operations against the U.S. and other European nations.

The U.S. Department of State should reaffirm the U.S. desire to maintain the NATO-Russia Founding Act (NRFA). This Act gave Russia a voice with regard to NATO actions. NRFA is an agreement, not a treaty, but the U.S. should remind Russia it has a voice with

NATO, and the agreement is the cornerstone of NATO-Russia relations. Additionally, the U.S. government should work with allies to publicly clarify NATO's understanding of its NRFA pledge of no "additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces." For example, at the 2016 Warsaw Summit, NATO's called its new deployments "rotating" battalions instead of the long-term deployments that they are, even though they are consistent with the NRFA pledge. Using transparent language is a step toward boosting the credibility of the alliance and combatting Russian claims of NATO aggression.

The U.S. government should support new conventional military deployments in Europe only up to the limit of NATO's internal understanding of the 1999 adapted conventional forces in Europe (A/CFE) treaty requirements, unless Russia invades or seriously damages a NATO member state. Russia has repeatedly requested that NATO be limited to what was agreed upon in the unratified A/CFE treaty in 1999, which is significantly lower than the approximately twenty-thousand NATO troops deployed worldwide.<sup>118</sup>

Lastly, the U.S. government should publicly state that the U.S. believes Ukraine does not currently meet NATO membership standards and has a long way to go. Russian officials have stated the prospect of NATO membership was a driving factor in Russia's annexation of Crimea. Ukraine is far from meeting the requirements for NATO membership, and discussion of Ukraine in NATO is premature and puts NATO in a somewhat precarious position. A public statement from the U.S. government stating that Ukraine is far from meeting NATO requirements would reassure Russia and encourage Ukrainians to move the country on a more stable path to free and fair elections.

## *Transparent Policies*

The U.S. should advance transparency as a measure to improve relations with Russia. The U.S. government should encourage new bi-lateral and multilateral agreements on limiting dangerous military incidents between NATO and other European states and Russia, especially in the Baltic and Nordic regions. The U.S. government should also work with NATO allies to eventually reestablish regional arms control negotiations on both conventional and nuclear weapons.

By implementing these measures, NATO shows unity and strength and will deter Russia from threatening NATO countries without further antagonizing them. Russia will not stop its campaign to fracture NATO or pushback against encroachment toward Russian territory, but counter-disinformation campaigns and deterrence and reassurance measures will ensure Russia respects NATO for the strong alliance it is while simultaneously de-escalating tensions between Russia and NATO. To prevent Russia from gaining too much power, the U.S., European Union, and NATO should take the steps outlined above in countering disinformation, deterrence and reassurance measures, as well as utilizing diplomatic and economic national instruments of power to keep Russia at bay.

## **Conclusion**

The Russian Federation and its predecessors have a long and stormy history of invasions, violent revolutions, and geography problems that have led to a large sense of vulnerability and insecurity. This sense of vulnerability has led President Putin to enact his entire strategic plan around defense. He believes the way to secure his regime is to become a great power again and become a pole in a multipolar world. To get there, he is attempting to diminish the reputation of

the U.S., fracture Western alliances, enhance Russia's power projection, and push back against NATO encroachment.

Russia has taken multiple types of warfare and combined it into what it calls New Generation Warfare, which has been executed successfully in multiple areas. The key to NGW is information or disinformation and its use in propaganda and psychological operations. It is during the first two phases of NGW that information and psychological operations are employed. Total success in NGW means that military employment is never reached—discord among the target population and internal strife created the effect Putin was looking for. On the surface, this appears to be offensive in nature, and if one is only looking at the operation, not his overall strategy, those operations are offensive; however, Russia's entire strategy is based on regime survival, and offensive measures are taken to ensure the regime lives to see another day.

The U.S., its NATO partners, and the EU can all take steps to mitigate Russia's actions. The first step is to counter Russia's first and second phase NGW—the disinformation and psychological campaigns in target countries. The recommendation section list multiple options available to democracies in Russia's crosshairs. The U.S. and NATO can take additional steps to deter Putin while simultaneously reassuring him that his regime is not under attack. If carefully and masterfully played, the U.S. and Russia could find themselves able to work together on some initiatives, or at least not let tensions rise to the level of armed conflict. The measures outlined in this paper will deter Putin from further aggression and reassure him that the U.S. is not his enemy.

Failure to incorporate any or some of these actions will result in continued disinformation campaigns aimed at Western democracies. Russia's tactics will only evolve, and if the U.S. does not get a handle on how to counter Russia's disinformation campaign, it could result in such

internal strife in the U.S. that the democratic institution as a whole is called in to question. This is Putin's desire—to see U.S. democracy undermined. The U.S. does not need to crumble for Putin to get the effect he is looking for. He is looking to sow enough doubt into our democratic institution that the world begins to have doubts about the stability of the U.S. This would result in the U.S. losing its global hegemon status and provide the opportunity for other nations, like Russia, to rise in its place. Russia is playing the long game, and although his strategy is ultimately a defensive campaign, the U.S. needs to engage in its own defensive campaign in order to keep Russia in check.



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