

A CALL TO ACTION: RESPONDING TO RUSSIAN HYBRID WARFARE

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Abstract

Using its well developed and practiced programs in propaganda, deception and denial, Russia has conducted its hybrid warfare and anti-access area denial strategy using the 21st century information technologies of communication. In light of Russia's annexation of Crimea, Romania felt threatened by Russia's use of information campaign, especially the narratives that seem to have polarized the Romanian society and discredited the NATO establishment from its prompt execution of its Article 5 commitment. Confronted with these threats, Romania and NATO must understand war in the hybrid domain on an aggregate and its effect on Romania in particular.

Keywords: *hybrid warfare, Russia, propaganda, disinformation.*

Introduction

The concept of hybrid warfare is not new. It has been the standard practice of the Soviet Union in the past to make use of subversive measures to gain influence and shape the political climate in Europe. The current tactic that the Russian Federation has in part adopted today is fully consistent with its long developed history of deception, disinformation and denial (*maskirovka*). In a testimony before the House Committee on Armed Services on March 22 2017, Christopher S. Chivvis from the RAND Corporation defined 21st century "hybrid tactic" as Moscow's use of subversive non-military instrument

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to divide and weaken NATO, subvert pro-Western governments, and polarize Western societies. More generally, one can define the measure of an “information campaign” as providing intentionally false and disseminated messaging, or in other cases, deluding facts or defying objective truth (Chivvis March 22, 2017). Although the concept of hybrid war is not necessarily new, the tactics Russia adopts today are not identical with those implemented during the Cold War and earlier in the 20th century. Moscow is less bound to ideology, which has not been the case previously. Sometimes referred to as the Gerasimov Doctrine, named as such after General Valery Gerasimov’s 2013 article, “The Value of Science is in the Foresight ...,” this has been the subject of detailed discussion throughout the security community (see, for example, Fedyk, 2016).

The frequent use of social media and cyber operations is also relatively new and can be very difficult to counteract. Most recently, tension has risen between Russia and Romania in the aftermath of the latter’s reaffirmation of its NATO commitment. While Romania sets its agenda in close cooperation with the security policies of the Euro-Atlantic community, many within Romania remain sympathetic to its historic ties to the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. In light of these rising domestic tensions, some believe Romania was and still is vulnerable to the Kremlin’s disinformation and misinformation campaigns. This paper will explore the Russian information operations campaign against NATO, specifically against the U.S. and Romania, and its tactics and implications. It concludes with a set of recommended NATO responses.

Russian Information Campaign in the United States (and beyond)

Russia’s information campaign extends further than asserting its influence in the Black Sea region. The United States fell victim to Russian hybrid war as well, namely in the 2016 Presidential election. In 2018, Special Counsel Robert Mueller indicted 12 Russian military personnel for felonies of “interfering with the 2016 U.S. presidential election” by engaging in cyber operations that “involved the staged

release of documents stolen through computer intrusions” (Robert S. Mueller 2018).

The indictment provided an in-depth overview of how the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff (GRU hereinafter), Russia’s military intelligence agency, operated to meddle with the U.S election. Subsequent reporting from the U.S. intelligence community outlined similar operations in the 2018 elections.

The process is really quite simple: either by spoofing or spear phishing, or both. The former refers to the act of a cybercriminal to create a fictitious sender address for an inbound email in order to mislead the recipient of this email into believing that it was sent from a reliable and trusted ally. The latter refers to the exercise of cyber-crime by use of email targeting a specific recipient or a chosen group of recipients who are usually administrators of the victim organization.

A spear phishing email appears as a note from a trusted colleague. The recipient will see that it was sent from a recognized home address, but in reality it was sent by cybercriminals who are targeting confidential information. The content of these emails typically contains a security notification instructing the user to change their passwords by clicking on an embedded link. These links would bring the victim to a website or IP address created by the GRU or another intelligence entity. If the victim chooses to access their websites, the hackers can then install a program that allows them to monitor the victim’s computer screen. Once the aggressors gain access to monitoring the computer screen, they will steal passwords and obtain access to the organization’s network which, in its turn, enables access to the organization’s finances, funding, opposition research, and campaigning plans (Robert S. Mueller 2018).

Similar instances also occurred in other NATO States. Russia has made it very clear how it feels about pro-Western nations. They are seen as threats. The Kremlin took an interest in Montenegro as well. Russia responded with an information campaign attack funded by Russian oligarchs to oppose Montenegro’s NATO membership and subsidizing small anti-NATO memberships and pro-Russian political parties in the country. Russian efforts were made to polarize and decouple opinions in the country to undermine Article 5, i.e. the

collective defence clause, of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The Kremlin tried to subtly interfere at first; however, when that proved ineffective, it moved on to a more aggressive approach and carried out an armed *coup d'état*. The use of pan-Slavic nationalism and domestic polarization has also led to the “intrusion” in Crimea, providing seemingly sound ground for invasion. In fact, Russian Chief of the General Staff Gerasimov wrote in February 2013 about this, coining the concept of “hybrid war” by pointing to the colour revolutions as part of a deliberate Western strategy. This article first appeared in the *Military-Industrial Kurier*, and has become the point of reference for Russian hybrid tactics, centralized and organized in a collective effort fuelled by what has commonly been referred to as the “Gerasimov doctrine” (Bartles 2018). Earlier Russian attacks in Estonia (2007) and Georgia (2008) seem to fit nicely in this pattern.

The Nature of Romania’s NATO Admission and its Commitment to the West

Romania’s shift and later its commitment to NATO and the EU were evidently centred on a desire to secure its national interest and protect it from Russia. Since 1990, the nature of Romania’s expectation for joining both NATO and the EU was directly connected with its concern for security, and to a lesser degree, economic growth.

Romania’s relations with NATO started a few months after the 1989 Revolution. Despite being one of NATO’s newer clients, Romania was the first post-communist country to join NATO’s Partnership for Peace program. When the Romanian Prime Minister, Petre Roman, came to visit the NATO Headquarters in October 1990 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs n.d.), Romania had been embroiled in what is now known as the Black March, a series of inter-ethnic clashes between Hungarians and Romanians in Targu Mures, Transylvania, in March 1990. It was also concerned with emerging bonds between Bulgaria and Russia in part a result of energy dependency and religious ties. The former Yugoslav crisis in 1991 was likewise a threat to Romania’s national security. Confronted with these challenges to territorial integrity and sovereignty, Bucharest’s friendliness towards NATO was, from very early on, strategic and comprehensible given its eminent

need for security. These conditions, encompassed by the Russian Federation's interest in incorporating Southern Slavs into its declined population and Romania's own incompetence to surmount Russian political influence, at last compelled Bucharest to join NATO and the Atlantic Spirit in search for a long term security insurance (Cosmin Florian OLARIU, Daniel GHIBA 2018).

Romania's relationship with the EU served the country's own national interest as well. Romania's normalization of the relations and engagement with the European Union began simultaneously with its effort to become a potential NATO member. Romania's tilt to the West was established when it signed *The Accord of Association of Romania to the European Union* in 1995, but one could argue that the real progress began as early as 1974, when the nation became a beneficiary country of the European Union *Generalized System of Preferences* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs n.d.). In the beginning of this process, Romania's interest to join the European community was largely driven by economic and political needs. It was the EU member status, for example, that contributed significantly to a favourable settlement on the dispute of Maritime Delimitation in the Black Sea on the UN International Court of Justice (from Romania's perspective). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Romania struggled with several financial crises and suffered from its lack of expertise in managing fiscal and monetary policies. Despite Bucharest's will to reform its economy, Romania's national resource fell short of expectation, driving the nation's decision makers again in search for external support (Cosmin Florian OLARIU, Daniel GHIBA 2018).

Although the European Union didn't offer much in terms of security assurances, Romania believed accession to the Union would increase its importance in NATO. In addition, the appearance and manifestation of multinational organized crime and other new unconventional threats challenged Romania's economy as well as its security. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Romania faced unprecedented non-state threats and alarming financial difficulties. Given these circumstances, one can assume a sense of reciprocity in the nature of Romania's commitment to both NATO and the EU. On the one hand, Bucharest can partially outsource its defence policy to a reliable

partner. On the other hand, it must provide its partners with offensive military bases to withhold access to the Black Sea in an effort to contain the Russian Federation.

Since 1991, Romania's path to becoming a NATO and EU member state was long and burdensome. However, our country was able to demonstrate a clear commitment to collective security and NATO, especially to the United States, via its participation in the international engagements in both Iraq and Afghanistan. In a 2003 Helsinki Commission Briefing on Romania's status moving towards NATO and the EU, it was evident that Romania's support for the Western military action in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kosovo had created the impetus within Romania for its drive for NATO membership. The U.S., on the other hand, would gain a loyal ally and partner next to the Black Sea (in addition to the increasingly problematic Turkey). This bilateral relation and U.S. support were necessary conditions for Romania to enter both NATO and the EU. While language, culture, and history all played against Bucharest's decision to join the West, it was the participation of the Romanian Armed Forces in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq that secured NATO accession and admission to West's most powerful collective security alliance (March 29, 2004).

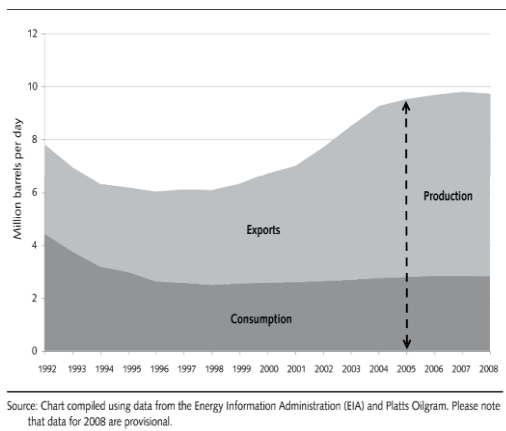
In 2005, Bucharest signed the "Access Agreement" with Washington (Ministry of Foreign Affairs n.d.), which codified the presence of U.S. troops on Romanian soil. Romania hosted multiple NATO training facilities and was home to several American "lily pad" bases. After its admission to NATO, Romania maintained a sturdy and growing level of commitment. Mihail Kogalniceanu (MK hereinafter) and Constanta Air Base in Romania, for example, have become NATO's key hubs for logistics support to Afghanistan. Construction for Aegis BMD ashore at Deveselu began in 2013 as part of Phas 2 of the European Phased Adaptive Approach. Missiles became operational in 2017. The same year, Cincu, Romania, became home to NATO's Joint National Training Centre.

Russia's Reaction

Romania's full embrace of NATO triggered an almost immediate Russian response. Evidence suggests that NATO's decision to deploy the

new Aegis ashore ballistic missile defence system (State September 13, 2011) in Romania's recently established Air Base at Deveselu inspired hostile Russian reactions. Former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State, Frank Rose stated that the deployment carried no intentional purpose of "undermining Russia's strategic deterrence capacity". However, Moscow worried that this movement would damage its nuclear deterrent capability. In addition, Russia's envoy to NATO, Alexander Grushko, asserted that by deploying the MK-41 vertical launch system in Deveselu, the U.S. has violated the bilateral agreement under the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Treaty. From this point of view, the U.S.'s recent threat to withdraw from the INF Treaty itself will almost inevitably reinforce Russia's existing belief that it has been the target of recent NATO deployments in Romania. To Russia, it is part of a pattern that began with the Partnership for Peace and has advanced NATO into the territory of the former Warsaw Pact, and the former Soviet Union itself. NATO commitments reached in London (2012), Chicago (2014) and Warsaw (2014) regarding deterrence, assurance and forward deployments strengthened Russian fears. They likely sparked Novorossiia claims, hybrid warfare in Ukraine/Crimea, and the social media onslaught to message the people in Russia's near abroad to re-think their Western orientation and re-join Mother Moscow. The West and Russia now seem fully captured in an action-reaction escalatory spiral.

Russia's reaction has also played out in the world and regional energy markets. The Black Sea is a vital hub for transporting Russian oil and natural gas to Europe. NATO "control" over this area could further amplify Russia's concern about its energy dominance that is also threatened by the America-led hydrofracturing revolution and the influx of LND to Europe and the regional and world energy markets.



The Russian oil and gas sector inherited the drilling technology and considerable wealth from the Soviet Union. Privatization of the oil sector after the collapse of the Soviet Union brought Russia access to foreign markets. A new Russian policy inclined to maximize profit, rather than to reinforce domestic consumption, allowed most of the incremental oil to be exported.

Figure 1: Russian Balance, 1992-2008

The Russian Oil industry also inherited one other thing from the Soviet Union – a good stabilization policy. Russia asserts a strong hand in the Middle East and Central Asia from time to time, but rarely has it employed oil as a political tool in its dealings with customers in the west. This stability of the supply chain that Russia was able to ensure offered its clients in Europe reliability, security, and diversity in the oil industry, differentiating Russia from other OPEC suppliers, and giving Russia enormous competitive leverage against oil suppliers from the Middle East. As Russian President Vladimir Putin has nicely put it, “the role of [Russia] on international energy markets determines, in many ways, [Russia’s] geopolitical influence.” To put it differently and in a way in which President Putin will be reluctant to express publicly, Russia is heavily dependent on its oil and gas revenues. Without further diversifying its economy, Russia simply could not contemplate any action that might destabilize its export of crude oil, petroleum products, and natural gas to Europe (Ebel July 2009). But all that changed with its policies toward Ukraine in 2014 – and even sanctions have not caused Russia to reverse course. As the Nord Stream pipelines with Germany suggest, a mutual vulnerability exists between suppliers and consumers.

Thus, the Russian economy resides on the thin end of the wedge. On the one hand, the income from exporting oil and natural gas makes up a majority of Russia’s fiscal revenues. On the other hand, Russia’s

dependency on exportation of oil makes its foreign and domestic policy revolve around producing and transporting oil products.



Source: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (unclassified).

Figure 2: Competing pipelines in the Southern Corridor for Eurasian Gas Exports to Europe

Russia has two ways of shipping Crude Oil, petroleum products, and natural gas, either by loading oil in LNG and loading them on tankers or by pipelines. In general, tankers are preferred because of the high cost of building infrastructure for pipelines and, in Russia's case, because the transmission of the nation's oil and gas exports will have to go through the Black Sea (unless and until climate change truly becomes a game changer for world energy transport through the Arctic and the Northern Route). Therefore, deployment of land-based SM-3 interceptor ballistic missile defence system at Deveselu Air Base beginning with that in September 2011 could be seen by Russia as a demonstration of NATO's capability, in an expansionist scenario, to disrupt Europe's access to Russian oil and natural gas exports (Ebel July 2009)—as well as precursors to an invasion.

Although the development of NATO's missile interception capability in Romania was defensive in nature, and was in close coordination with Romania's request for a long run security guarantee, tension between Russia and NATO allies in Eastern Europe, namely Romania, has intensified in the immediate aftermath of Romania's increasing involvement in NATO's collective defence. In fact, the Russian Federation has specifically listed Romania as part of its security threat as early as 2014, when it addressed the Ballistic Missile Defence elements in Romania as potentially threatening to Russia's security (*Russian Military Doctrine* (Cucuş, 2015)). Most importantly, there is a possibility that Romania's reaffirmed NATO commitment will incentivize Russia to adopt hybrid measures, like its unilateral annexation of Crimea, by financing anti-Semitic political parties, by corrupting and exploiting Romanian public media, or by other measures supported by an aggressive propaganda machine supervised by a rogue state. Russia could even have leveraged its activities in Romania through pressure in neighbouring Moldova and its breakaway sector, Transnistria. Although what happened in Ukraine could not have invoked Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, to which an organized collective response could have been activated, Romania, Poland, and other Baltic and central European states will continue to urge NATO to play a more preventive and active role in maintaining the common defence. NATO needs to develop its own methods capable of effectively responding to new security threats represented by hybrid war, information operations, and others alike. In order to ensure common defence, NATO must understand the nature of Russian hybrid tactics and information operations, and, if needed, fight a preventative war in the same hybrid domain (CUCUŞ 2015).

Russian Hybrid Warfare in Romania

Romania's participation in NATO and the EU provides a level of consistency between Bucharest's foreign policy and that of its Western partners, which, as previously noted, collides with Russia's strategic interest in the Black Sea and Eastern Europe. As a result, Romania has been a target of Moscow's information operations in its continued effort to polarize societies, change popular attitudes, and prepare the ground

for unilateral occupation. As a member of NATO, Romania should not feel threatened by a designated military aggression from any State, per Article V assurances. However, the approach from a so-called “hybrid tactic,” where social phenomena and public opinion are directed to further polarize the State, puts Romania literally on the front line and forces both Romania and NATO to prepare for a good fight for the high-ground in a hybrid war.

In Romania, the language barrier impedes the precise retransmission of political messages. However, existing religious, cultural, and historical ties can still encourage pro-Kremlin sentiment, defy objective truth, and provide grounds for incorrect information to grow. Romanian society came under strong Soviet influence during the Cold War. Besides political and economic interconnectedness, socio-cultural institutions built by the Soviet Union were also closely adhered to by Romania authorities. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow’s political and economic leverage shrank, but the strong cultural, societal, and educational ties with Russia remained at the heart of the older generations of Romanians. Romania also has a strong religious tie with Russia. Its spiritual demographics are strongly shaped by Eastern Orthodox Christianity. All of these historical aspects make Russian’s information campaign in Romania a subtle case study.

In Eastern Europe, the standard practice of Russian information tactic has been centred on appealing to and messaging with ultra-nationalistic political views and ethnic loyalties. Pan-Slavic themes and the emphasis of Russian minorities abroad have been the main media upon which pro-Kremlin sentiments lean and inspire. Romania is unique in Eastern Europe in this regard. Pan-Slavic sentiment does not resonate because Romanians are of Latin descent. There is only a small number of ethnic Russians, not enough to form a considerable political group either. Even with these difficulties, the Russian information campaign has achieved some successes and proved yet again the effectiveness and coerciveness of its hybrid tactics. Recent polling results speak powerfully: Romanian public trust in the European Union fell 24% from 2004 to 2017. The same poll also revealed a relatively low social trust in the U.S. for two consecutive years stagnating at roughly 30% (Cosmin Florian OLARIU, Daniel GHIBA 2018). While it is

beyond the scope of this paper to draw a definite conclusion from these data, it seems beyond coincidental that this change occurred at the same time as the implementation of Russia's hybrid campaign.

Common Audiences of Russian Information Campaign

Malign activities to improve Russia's image and spread pro-Moscow sentiment are exercised online through the creation of alternative reality, rebranding facts, and concrete arguments. In a 2017 World Press Freedom Index, the media landscape in Romania was categorized as being "manipulated and spied on." The Romanian press, as the report continues, was composed of "excessive politicization," "corrupt financing mechanism," and "infiltration of [foreign] intelligence." The Kremlin also has a large presence on social media. Figures from Romania's National Institute of Statistics show 10.6 million Romanians have access to the Internet. The rich digital landscape has allowed Russian malign activities to further cultivate confusion, undermine objective truth, and spread mistrust in Western values and solidarity.

Among the most vulnerable groups susceptible to being the subject of Russian propaganda are Romanian nationalist and right wing swingers. These groups often depict themselves as staunch, often inflexible, believers in Romania's uniqueness among nations. They castigate Romania's alliance with the West; militate for a non-aligned and independent path for the country, arguing commonly in favour of a friendly relation with Russia. The usual message conveyed is that of a bleak international milieu where the West, by and large, and American hegemony, in particular, is blamed for disguised imperialism, exploitation of world resource, incentivizing or supporting regional conflict, while having in our domestic sphere a corrupted leadership and heavily biased media.

Religious conservatives, usually ultra-orthodox Christians, have emerged as another vulnerable group as well. This group commonly draws on Romania's ethnically superior traditional society and religious beliefs to criticize the dysfunctional, decadent West.

Soviet Union sentimentalists, most of who have aged while witnessing Romania's transition from a Soviet to a Western-style

society, are also subject to the influence of Russian propaganda. This group has witnessed what they would refer to as a period of chaotic transition to the West when Romania was being economically marginalized, socially discontent, and politically vulnerable against foreign governments. However, this nostalgia for the Soviet ways is not a strong current within Romania. While it is true that Romania experienced some drop in living standards and job stability post-1989, this phenomenon had largely run its course by the end of the 1990s.

Instruments of Russian Information Operations in Romania

The ample use of social media is a common approach adopted by Russian intelligence officers. Independent news agencies, blog writers, commentators provided Kremlin with abundant room to deliver manipulative messages that required little fact-checking or journalistic deontology. Opinion pages on the Internet can also create a snowball effect on social media, allowing targeted audiences to easily fall into cognitive group bias.

Troll farms, also known as “patriotic hackers” are employed by the Kremlin to spread false and misleading information generated by Russian media outlets such as *Russia Today* and *Sputnik News*. These media outlets take cues from state-controlled agencies and spread particular narratives that the sponsor intended to circulate in the public domain. Once information is out on the Internet, intelligence officers then prey on “useful idiots” who are a part of the public but have the tendency to re-enforce pro-Russian sentiment. The Kremlin also tries to divide NATO and subvert pro-Western governments by drawing on the success from the Soviet era, or by amplifying anti-NATO rhetoric, through the use of media. These tactics try to gauge a rise in emotion by putting out old war nationalistic media to create a stronger sentiment of patriotism and nationalism, which aligns with the pro-Russian narrative.

Moscow’s hybrid war tactics are known for their diversity and specificity. The Russian disinformation campaign sometimes takes into account the character of the specific nation it targets, and then manipulates political sentiment and cultural characteristics. Russia capitalizes on Romanian cultural vulnerabilities such as the make-up of different groups in Romanian society. Russian state-sponsored agencies

have notable influence over think tanks, human rights groups, and politicians; most importantly, they from time to time have attempted to exercise “authority” over the Romanian Orthodox Church. Russia has a history of using the Orthodox Church as a propaganda tool by presenting “traditional” Russian values as being traditional Christian values. The Kremlin has the church as an ally inside Russia and thus a mass supporting audience.

However, transferring this influence tool within Romania has been problematic, as the two Churches are not well-connected. In fact the visit of Patriarch Kirill to Bucharest in October 2017 marked the first such visit since Patriarch Alexy I visited Romania in 1962.

Apart from *Sputnik* and *RT*, domestic Romanian media platform and outlets have no formal or proven ties to Russia. Yet, rarely is the Romanian press inclined to accommodate transparency in building their organizational and financial structures. Corina Rebegea, an expert at the Centre for European Policy Analysis, believes some Romanian media outlets are conducting “camouflage” actions aimed at indirectly conveying pro-Kremlin messages. She believes overt Russian propaganda would not have been perceived in a positive manner by a broader range of audience because of wide spread Russophobia existing in Romanian society, and that the Russians have colluded with other Romanian outlets to create a delusion through diversifying the provider of propaganda. In any case, the narratives these outlets have are similar, ranging from a pervasive, nationalistic, and anti-establishment (EU/NATO/US) campaign, to criticisms depicting Romania as a vassal of Western imperialism. This content often incorporates an effort to polarize Romanian society, including fierce criticism against not only Western society but capitalism and globalization on more general terms, which puts these progressive values in obvious antithesis with Romanian tradition. The tradition quoted here involves traditional and moral values as well as religious values. Recalling the close ties Russian Orthodoxy has with its foreign policy agenda, it is not difficult to realize the soft power instruments the Kremlin has adopted through the use of religion, and, for this reason, and one can equally raise suspicion about Russia’s role behind each of the religious, moral, and traditional values quoted in pro-Kremlin messages.

The Kremlin also uses conventional social media strategy to attract the middle-aged population and youth groups in Romania. Russian information operation agencies provide narratives that square with the criterion of being simultaneously divisive and popular. Nationalism has been such a recent subject and of great popularity for this specific reason. Right wingers often arise in impoverished areas as a result of poverty, and have been used to create a sour impression of NATO and anti-Western backlash. Many Romanians lack trust in democratic institutions because of the political corruption and lack of representation. This is particularly concerning on the road leading up to the 2019 Romanian presidential election. Russian information operations might have created a gap between Romanian public opinion and the political agenda, making it difficult for political parties to adequately adhere to public views.

The U.S. reaction was perhaps best captured by Assistant Secretary of State Wess Mitchell in his testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: “Within the Bureau, we recruited one of the architects of the Global Engagement Centre legislation from the staff of a member of this committee; we formed a new position – the Senior Advisor for Russian Malign Activities and Trends (or, SARMAT) – to develop cross-regional strategies across offices. EUR created a dedicated team to take the offensive in publicly exposing Russian malign activities, which since January of this year has called out the Kremlin on 112 occasions. We are now working with our ally, the UK, to form an international coalition for coordinating efforts in this field and have requested over \$380 million in security and economic assistance accounts in the President’s 2019 budget.” (Mitchell 2018)

Furthermore, Facebook Chairman and CEO Mark Zuckerberg testified to Congress on numerous occasions as to the magnitude of the problems (in the U.S.) and indicated Facebook was shutting down millions of fake accounts monthly (Zuckerberg 2018).

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Russian Information Operations

There is no way of assuring precision in the evaluation of information campaigns mainly because of the diversity of its

instruments. Are more Romanians inclined to oppose or resist NATO deployments or EU membership as a result of the Russian campaign? If so, what percentage of the Romanian population is involved? What are the reasons for their anti-establishment sentiment? How many of these reasons are incentivized by Russian information operations? Has the American political system and other political systems been destabilized? In attempting to evaluate the cause for these potential and difficult to measure effects, impartial judges must inevitably adopt a somewhat subjective point of view, bearing equal responsibility with the Russians for having potentially misinformed the audiences about what is happening in Romania and elsewhere. Nevertheless, there are facts that can guide us.

First and foremost, the Romanian media appears to be fertile ground for Russian information campaigns. Media are poorly regulated in Romania. In the absence of regulatory standards and norms for social media and online materials, there are no functional or practical laws that can effectively address Russian harmful activities. The difficulty here is that the Kremlin's hybrid tactic is diversified, involving the use of cyber operations to disinform and the use of public instruments, taking advantages of natural democratic inefficiencies to misinform. In the first situation, the information provided is purposely articulated, false and disseminated to meet certain agenda. In the second case, the information provided is partly or totally incorrect, but it may not have been falsified for a certain purpose. Currently, regulatory bodies do not exist to examine the quality and accuracy of information from online sources. Since the hybrid tactic mainly involves the use of the internet, it is practically impossible to prevent it from spreading due to:

1. the difficulty of overseeing the deontology and holding respective news agencies accountable;
2. the complexity in penalizing online publications, such as the potential violation of the freedom of press; and
3. the impracticality of identifying and counteracting all sources of the ideological "hybrid" risks.

When assessing the vulnerability and resilience to Russian information campaigns and hybrid warfare, the absence of a clear solution and the presence of barriers as identified above have made

Romania a useful case study. In the absence of a large Russian population and Pan-Slavic traditions, the patterns of Russian misinformation were limited to nationalism and religious extremism, both of which can be identified with some precision. These patterns feature an identical anti-Western narrative aimed at agitating audiences and creating a psychological state of paranoia in which the Euro-Atlantic frameworks are depicted in cynical terms and contrasted with a friendly and peaceful vision of the Russian Federation. In spite of the language barrier, outside observers can find narratives that elicit a strikingly similar line of argumentation in the Romanian digital environment.

The collusion between Russian government-sponsored information campaigns and Romanian domestic outlets is also noteworthy. There have been scenarios in which politicians or other persons of exceptional influence have mimicked the information strategies the Kremlin has adopted, especially its use of nationalism and conservative right-wing sentiment, usually for the purpose of fulfilling a political agenda otherwise disconnected with the Kremlin's view.

Recommendation on Potential Strategic Response

To deploy NATO resources to 1) counteract Russian information operations in Romania (and elsewhere) and 2) to respond either with preventative or pre-emptive strike in the hybrid domain means first and foremost to examine the effectiveness of such Russian activities, as being the subject of our discussion, in the fullness of its context. Should NATO view the hybrid tactic as a real and tangible threat, it should appoint a special counsel to investigate the input and output of Russian information campaigns, as well as the collusion between Russian and Romanian intermediaries. A first step would be to increase the funding of the SARMAT teams throughout the European and Eurasian Bureau region as Dr. Mitchell identified in his 2018 testimony.

Secondly, there is a real need to broaden the European understanding of security based on the assumption that hybrid war is changing in character and perhaps even in nature. An understanding of Russia's propaganda machine will create a renewed call to resist Russian malign activities as a key component of the security threat

environment in Europe and reassure NATO's establishment. Moreover, it is a concept that builds trust with NATO allies even if it is denied by Russia. In addition, it will most certainly incentivize European members to invest in emergent technologies for NATO due to the nature of the changing threat Russian hybrid warfare poses to domestic political infrastructures and cultures. The U.S. can exploit the potential to take action. Highlighting such policy could make the European public more aware and critical of pro-Kremlin messages and could improve NATO's credibility and support.

Lastly, NATO must confront more directly the conventional force imbalances that have tilted in Russia's favour along NATO's Eastern European border with Russia (Ochmanek and Rand Study, 2016). NATO should rebuild a credible conventional deterrence-by-denial through a cost imposition strategy (Nopens 17 June 2016). Followed by the conventional deterrence-by-denial ought to be the re-establishment of bilateral ground for political dialogue. Since the INF treaty appears all but dead, there must be a replacement of some sort to provide ground for re-establishing mechanisms capable of preventing unintended escalations to the nuclear realm. The Russian nuclear military modernization program in Kaliningrad cannot be ignored.

Conclusion

Compared to the success of the Russian hybrid tactics in Crimea, the Romanian case appears less definitive but equally disturbing, particularly if it reflects a broader pattern of Russian behaviour. To this date, there has not been any investigative effort to unveil any Russian involvement or other foreign interference comparable to the Mueller investigation that took place in the U.S., but perhaps there ought to be. The Russians indeed applied a hybrid framework in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. However, it is important to note that they did so in combination with use of conventional/special forces – an actual traditional combat capability.

When Gerasimov wrote of using “political, economic, informational...and other non-military measures applied in coordination with the protest potential of the population,” he was referring to the new evolutions of the instruments of information to

destabilize the enemy state and to provoke regime change without the instigators admitting to any involvement. When Russia employed this method in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, its “success” raised the stature of the “Gerasimov doctrine,” making the Russian general to be perceived as a mastermind of hybrid warfare. For him, state mobilization and the future military operational environment will witness the employment of “hybrid war” through the use of “information.”

Russia did indeed wage a hybrid war in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, especially on attracting local support. However, one must not overlook Russia’s existing capability to mobilize and deploy conventional force on large scale, which was what ultimately made Crimea a feasible strategic option. We argue, therefore, that the “hybrid” domain is not a field so alienated from other conventional military practices. Rather, it should be seen as a three stage plan where the use of information operations came first to disinform or misinform a targeted population for the purpose of gaining public support for the Kremlin, quickly followed by the mobilization and deployment of conventional weaponry and the army without which the “hybrid” success would not have happened. We argue that this three stage plan of action codifies the Gerasimov doctrine most accurately in full consideration of his 2013 argument.

In a world increasingly sensitized to fake news, narratives and counter-narratives, it is challenging to know what to believe. But how we come to believe what we believe is a central function of political socialization and the transmission of national values and societal norms. Rest assured, Russia does have a strategy to attack these processes and structures—and it is employing it both in its near abroad and against the U.S. The power of algorithms and computer driven messaging makes the phenomenon of the confirmation bias all the more troubling—and deserving a serious response.

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