VOLUME 9, ISSUE 2, 2019

per Concordiam

Journal of European Security and Defense Issues

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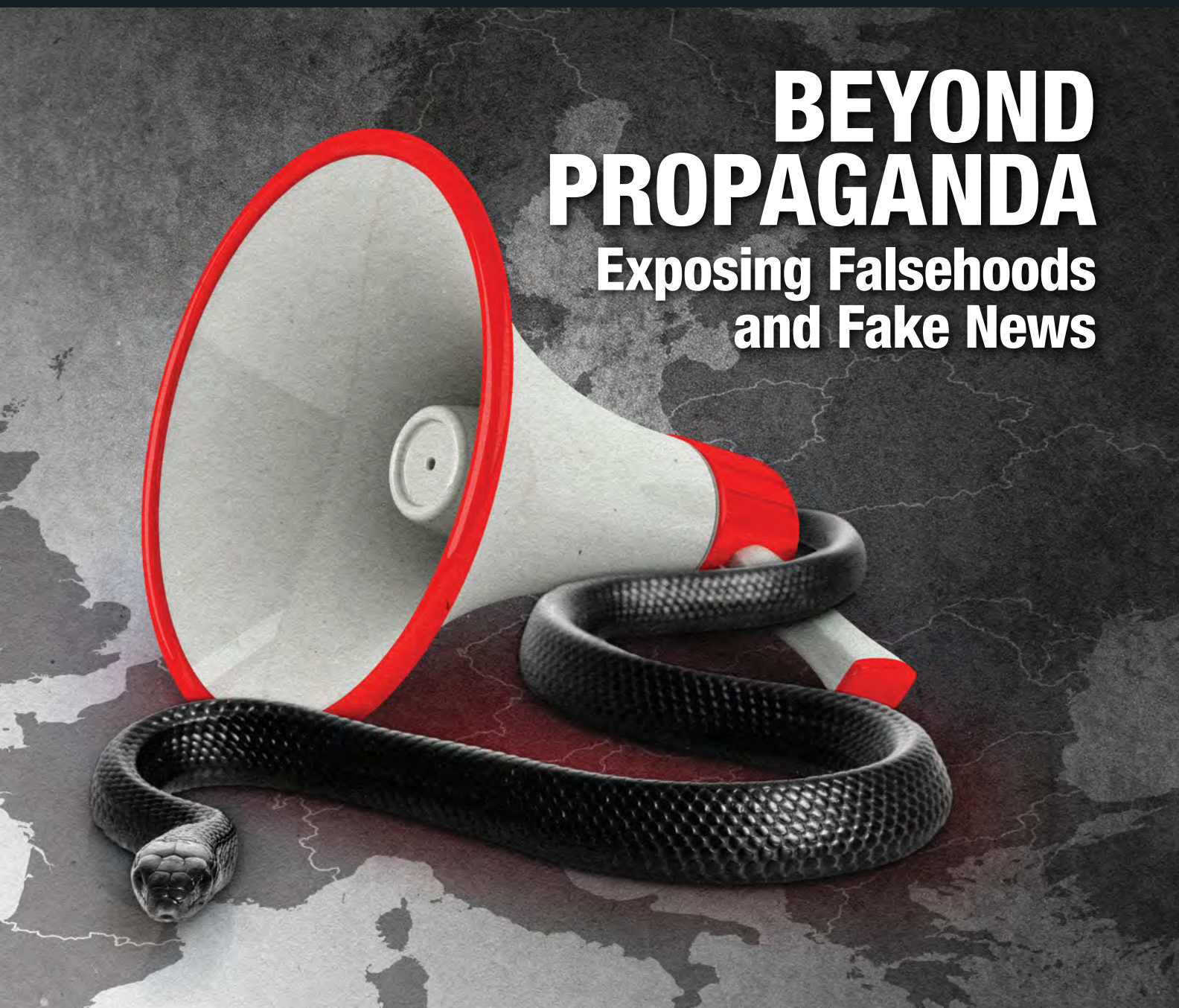

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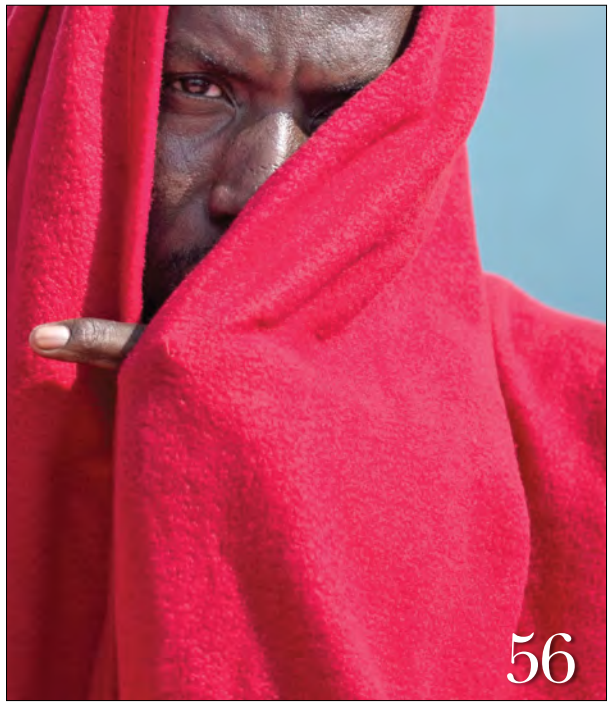

on the cover:

Disinformation spread by malevolent actors presents a complex challenge to democratic states.

PER CONCORDIAM ILLUSTRATION

GEORGE C. MARSHALL
EUROPEAN CENTER FOR SECURITY STUDIES

Welcome to the 34th issue of *per Concordiam*. In this edition, we visit the topic of discrediting propaganda. Our authors explore how to go beyond just countering propaganda, seeking ways to identify hostile propaganda so targeted nations can discredit it before it spreads and possibly before it even arrives. By strengthening government institutions and partnering with the people, democratic countries can warn about propaganda before it circulates. If successful, this proactive discrediting can reduce propaganda's effects to almost nil.

In this issue's Viewpoint, Balša Božović explains how a comprehensive government strategy for countering propaganda should analyze the tools and channels through which propaganda messages are being sent because there is no one way to fight propaganda. He stresses that the most credible method to fight propaganda is with truth, and the most credible manner to communicate the truth is by providing the people with accurate information.

Jetish Jashari examines the two major security challenges that the Western Balkans face in the course of their integration process with the European Union and NATO: Russia increasingly tries to reassert its Cold War-era political and economic interests on Western Balkan countries, and radical Islamist Middle East groups are attempting to spread their ideology in the region, especially in countries with sizable Muslim populations. Jashari points out that the common denominator for both security challenges is the advocation of values and beliefs that are contradictory to European values, and he offers suggestions on how to discredit this propaganda on its own terms.

We also take a closer look at Macedonia's efforts to discredit propaganda and address the influx of propaganda along the broad geographic front of Eastern Europe. Our authors offer solutions for rebutting propaganda targeting Baltic nations and former Soviet republics. Consideration is given for workable solutions to discredit influencing operations conducted by state and nonstate actors.

As always, we at the Marshall Center welcome comments and perspective on these topics and will include your responses in future editions. Please feel free to contact us at editor@perconcordiam.org

Sincerely,

Keith W. Dayton
Director

Keith W. Dayton
Director, George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies

Keith W. Dayton retired as a Lieutenant General from the U.S. Army in late 2010 after more than 40 years of service. His last assignment on active duty was as U.S. Security Coordinator to Israel and the Palestinian Authority in Jerusalem. An artillery officer by training, he also has served as politico-military staff officer for the Army in Washington, D.C., and U.S. defense attaché in Russia. He worked as director of the Iraqi Survey Group for Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq. He earned a Senior Service College Fellowship to Harvard University and served as the Senior Army Fellow on the Council on Foreign Relations in New York. Gen. Dayton has a bachelor's degree in history from the College of William and Mary, a master's degree in history from Cambridge University and another in international relations from the University of Southern California.

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per Concordiam
Journal of European Security and Defense Issues

Beyond Propaganda

Volume 9, Issue 2, 2019

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per Concordiam is a professional journal published quarterly by the U.S. European Command and the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies that addresses defense and security issues in Europe and Eurasia for military and security practitioners and experts. Opinions expressed in this journal do not necessarily represent the policies or points of view of these institutions or of any other agency of the German or United States governments. Opinions expressed in articles written by contributors represent those of the author only. The secretary of defense determined that publication of this journal is necessary for conducting public business as required of the U.S. Department of Defense by law.

ISSN 2166-322X (print)
ISSN 2166-3238 (online)

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DEMOCRATIA PER FIDEM ET CONCORDIAM

Combating PROPAGANDA

A new era of information flow

By **BALŠA BOŽOVIĆ**, National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia

"There has never been a time in our history when there was so great a need for our citizens to be informed and to understand what is happening in the world. The cause of freedom is being challenged throughout the world today, and propaganda is one of the most powerful weapons they have in this struggle. Deceit, distortion and lies are systemically used by them as a matter of deliberate policy."

These words were spoken by U.S. President Harry Truman in 1950. It seems that his words are as vivid today as they were 70 years ago. Although the tools, channels and means of communication have changed dramatically, information warfare and propaganda remain the same. If anything, they have become even more important, since information flow and access to information — be it true or false — can't be compared with the situation just 10 years ago, let alone 50 or 70 years ago.

There are many studies that support this claim. One, conducted by Roger Bon, who led a group of researchers at the University of California San Diego, shows that people receive 34 gigabytes of information every day. During waking hours, the average person receives as many as 105,000 words through mobile phones, television, newspapers, radio, the internet, email and books — the equivalent of 23 words per second. When videos, games, pictures and other media are added, the sum reaches 34 gigabytes of information each day. This information overload inevitably affects attention spans, leading people to modify the way they process information. It impedes reflection and deeper thinking. Faced with a need to process so much information from so many directions, sources, devices and channels, people lose the ability to think clearly and rationally. They treat the information superficially and fail to apply a thoughtful analysis or double-check facts.

In his book *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, Douglas Adams says: "Nothing travels faster than the speed of light, with the possible exception of bad news, which obeys its own special laws." It can be argued that this is even more true when it comes to propaganda, especially with regard to the research findings previously referenced in this article. Studies show that propaganda — especially in its newest form, fake news — travels faster and penetrates deeper than the truth, especially on social media. A comprehensive study conducted by three scholars from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology found that fake news travels and spreads six times more rapidly than real news. The study analyzed more than 126,000 stories shared by more than 3 million Twitter users over a 10-year period. The results show that it takes real news six times as long to reach 1,500 people on Twitter than false news, and that fake news is 70 percent more likely to be retweeted than truthful news. This especially applies to fake news about politics, which is most likely to go viral. But all types of fake news typically reach more people than real news, even on topics such as terrorism, natural disasters, etc. With the increasing attention being paid to fake news, the astonishing number of people it reaches, and its ability to affect politics, economics, security issues and public opinion, it's time to consider it propaganda.

A key research finding is that humans, not computer bots, are primarily spreading the misleading information. In fact, automated bots spread both true and fake stories at the same rate, whereas humans tend to share false stories at a much higher rate. This finding is in direct contradiction to what is usually presumed and may be a key point to reflect upon when considering new and innovative strategies to fight propaganda.

With the influx of new information channels and the increased amount of information being received, it may seem that this new propaganda cannot be fought with old means. But that presumption would not be correct. The best way to fight propaganda is the way it's always been fought — with the truth. It is correct, however, that new means and channels must be created. This calls for developing new strategies that consider every aspect of how these new forms of propaganda are spread and which of those strategies will prevent, counter and stop its spread.

To do that, states and global organizations should conduct a comprehensive analysis of the tools and channels used to spread propaganda. This is the best way to mitigate and marginalize the devastating effects of lies and mistruths. The methods used to spread misinformation have changed dramatically over the past few decades. Although traditional media continues to be the main source of information, even in countries that are technologically literate, special attention needs to be paid to social media. There are clear reasons for this. Before the internet, it was easy to detect propaganda sources. News and propaganda originated from known resources — TV, newspapers, radio, official and unofficial statements, journalists, press releases, speeches and other single-based sources.

It can be difficult to recognize as propaganda or fake news the articles that include credible sources and data and appear to be researched, especially if they appear in media that is considered credible.

This changed when the internet became a main source of information, and even more so when social networks turned ordinary people into creators, sources and/or channels of communicating and spreading news. First, it is difficult these days to determine the origin of propaganda and, subsequently, it is a challenge to classify and detect all the channels through which it is being spread. It also may be hard to distinguish whether the propaganda is being spread through an organized effort or by ordinary people sharing information they find interesting and believe to be true. If the latter is the case, can it be considered propaganda? This poses yet another question that needs to be answered in the light of new methods used to spread propaganda, which the *Cambridge Dictionary* defines as "information, ideas, opinions, or images, often only giving one part of an argument, that are broadcast, published, or in some other way spread with the intention of influencing people's opinions."

Therefore, it is appropriate here to make the distinction between propaganda, as defined above, and fake news and disinformation. According to the University of Michigan, fake news stories "are false: the story itself is fabricated, with no verifiable facts, sources or quotes." Fake news, the same as propaganda, is not a new concept. For example, articles about UFOs and famous quotes such as Marie Antoinette's "let them eat cake" are known to be false. It wasn't until the 2016 U.S. presidential election that the debate over fake news crossing the line and becoming propaganda took the spotlight. It can be concluded, then, that fake news and propaganda share many features, and that sometimes it is easy to consider them one and the same.

Recognizing the differences is important. The *differentia specifica* can be found in the motives behind their use, rather than in any clear or obvious differences. We can say that not all fake news is propaganda because its motives are usually financial, not political, and it is usually not tied to a larger agenda. But when political fake news is created to affect political opinions, positions, affiliations and the feelings of the people, when it is orchestrated and fabricated to influence elections, it definitely can be considered propaganda. Whether those who share and spread political fake news do so intentionally or without knowing the news to be fake makes no difference to the news being considered propaganda.

Another important issue in creating comprehensive strategies to combat propaganda is the distinction between two main sources of propaganda — propaganda coming from nation-state actors and propaganda coming from nonstate actors. Each of these propaganda types has numerous subtypes, and it can be very difficult to differentiate between them. Different strategies for combating these types of propaganda have to be developed and applied with an understanding that nonstate actors can be the instruments of states. Nevertheless, different strategies are needed. It is evident that both state and nonstate actors use propaganda, especially social networks, to influence public opinion. Nonstate actors in this sense include national and international organizations, political parties, lobbying groups, media, as well as violent nonstate actors such as paramilitary forces and terrorist groups.

When it comes to the media, there is one thing that deserves mention. It is often believed that only noncredible, nonmainstream and little-known media are used to spread fake news and propaganda. But the opposite often is the case. It is quite possible that credible, mainstream media can be sources of fake news, propaganda and mistruths. It can be difficult to recognize as propaganda or fake news the articles that include credible sources and data and appear to be researched, especially if they appear in media that is considered credible. It is unrealistic to expect average people to thoroughly analyze the news they are consuming, especially if they have seen or read it from a trusted source. This is why it is important that each malevolent actor be treated separately and on its own merits, with an understanding of the audience being targeted.

It is also important to consider the origin of a propaganda threat when deciding how to respond. For example, it may be more effective, credible and trustworthy to counter state-originated propaganda with messages from nonstate actors such as the media or other organizations. Great care should be taken

U.S. President Harry S. Truman warned in 1950 that propaganda was a threat to freedom in the world. Today, with the rapid advancements in technology, disinformation is an even greater menace. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

when dealing with propaganda spread by violent organizations. That propaganda should be answered in a very stark, resolute and determined way, with as many facts and as much data as possible, and with a combination of state and nonstate answers. State actors should respond to such propaganda in a very official manner, while nonstate actors should play a role in affecting peoples' feelings, opinions, positions and fears.

Furthermore, it is essential to realize that there is no universal way to fight propaganda. It is crucial to develop strategies for respective actors and respective countries. The strategy for each country should be unique and in accordance with the audience that needs to receive the message, the goals that have been set, and the messages that need to be countered. Similar to the political adage that all politics is local, counterpropaganda needs to be local as well — not only geographically, but tailored to specific groups within countries. It is important to note that this is not just a state issue. This also applies to extremist groups or other threats. Counterpropaganda messages cannot be mirror images. Strategies cannot presume that a targeted audience knows what is known by the government, and they must be designed in a way that is plausible and clearly understood by the people who need credible information.

This is where the fact that most of the propaganda on social networks is spread by real people, rather than computer bots, comes into play. People tend to share fake news and propaganda that they find interesting. It is often surprising and immediately draws attention, leading to a snowball effect in the way it is shared. Counterpropaganda strategies should produce content that is as interesting and eye-catching as the propaganda, and that will prompt people to spread the message. Of course, competing with fake news is difficult because stories based on lies are generally more interesting, tempting and appealing and can be more shocking than stories based on truth. Nevertheless, successfully countering fake news can be done when there is an understanding of the message that resonates with the targeted audience and is likely to be shared. This requires a detailed analysis, thorough planning and constant monitoring of the success or failure of counterpropaganda efforts.

Strategies must be realistic in terms of the credibility of the messengers. Oftentimes, the difference between success and failure when countering propaganda lies in the answer to the simple question: To what degree do people believe what we have to say? It's possible that some messengers will be wrong for certain messages but fully credible for others. Although it is tempting to fight fake news with fake news, there are many reasons to reject that impulse. First, there is the considerable risk of being exposed as the source of noncredible information. Once that happens, it is almost impossible to regain the public's trust. It will cause people to question previous instances when the truth was told to combat fake news. It is very difficult to build public trust but very easy to lose it. That is why fighting propaganda with truth always works best and why that strategy might be the only sustainable one.

Finally, not all counterpropaganda has to be organized or orchestrated. Some can spontaneously come from free media, universities, think tanks, various societal actors, etc. Which is why free media is key to fighting propaganda. Breaking news quickly goes viral, and it is up to the free media and other public stakeholders to warn the public if the news is not entirely true or if it is fully based on lies. It is also helpful to teach the public to differentiate between real news and propaganda. This can be done relatively simply, since there are not many questions that need to be answered to distinguish between propaganda and truth. Some have to do with news sources (Where is the information coming from? What sources are being used to back up those claims? Did any other media cover the story? What did they say about it?), and some have to do with the objectivity of the news (Was it clearly intending to sway the audience to one side?), and some have to do with emotional reactions that the news evokes. In other words, the public needs to be educated about fake news and aware of the importance of thinking critically. People should be forming judgments based on an objective analysis and evaluation. Having said that, it is important to consider these questions when consuming news, especially with propaganda getting more difficult to recognize and emanating from all kinds of sources, even those traditionally considered credible and trustworthy.

To conclude, there seems to be an easy answer to propaganda, and that answer has been the same for centuries. The only way to fight propaganda is with truth. This truth, however, needs to be presented in a way that is understandable, credible and interesting. A lot has been said and written about propaganda. Although at first glance it seems that articles, books and speeches written decades ago are now outdated and not applicable, the essence remains the same. The only thing that has changed is technology and the speed with which information flows. Everything else remains the same. □

TRUTH

IS THE BEST MEDICINE

COUNTERING RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA IN MACEDONIA

By **Aleksandar Nacev, Ph.D.**, executive director, Center for Security Research

Since 1989, one of the constant goals of Russian foreign policy has been to abolish — or at least weaken — the inner cohesion of existing trans-Atlantic and European institutions, such as NATO and the European Union, as well as the influence of the United States in Europe. In recent years, the Western Balkans have emerged as a front in Russia's geopolitical confrontation with the West. Building on close historical ties, Moscow is taking advantage of political and economic difficulties to expand its influence, potentially undermining the region's stability.

Ohrid, Macedonia ISTOCK

Since the 1990s, the Western Balkan countries have dealt with internal vulnerabilities and experienced external influence from state and nonstate actors. These sources of instability have made the region more vulnerable and susceptible to external influence from Russia. Internal vulnerabilities such as the rise of nationalism, historical grievances, corruption, weakened state institutions and media, and unemployment have left these countries unstable, enabling state and nonstate actors to influence them. The Western Balkans are likely to become a significant playing field for the competition between Russia and the West. Russia has played a spoiler role by using information and political, economic and military tools to discredit Western institutions — including NATO and the EU — and the foundations of Western democracy, and to strategically project and alter elements of power in Western Balkan countries. Russia has chosen to intervene in the region by aligning with different elements and interfering in these countries' internal affairs. Over the past decade, Russia has sought to play a larger role. The tools used are not new, but the extent of the involvement certainly is. Russia's tools include not only instruments of soft power, such as cultural, religious and media campaigns, but increasingly, economic intervention. Slowly but surely, Russian state-owned and state-affiliated businesses are taking possession of key sectors of Balkan economies, transforming Russia into a significant power in the region.

PROPAGANDA DOES A DISSERVICE TO ALL CREDIBLE, ETHICAL JOURNALISTS WHO HAVE FOUGHT, AND IN SOME CASES GIVEN THEIR LIVES, TO PRODUCE REAL, HONEST JOURNALISM.

THE MACEDONIAN SITUATION

Russian propaganda in Macedonia has been growing in sophistication, intensity, reach and impact. Russian efforts are carefully orchestrated, thoughtfully targeted, generously funded and professionally produced. These efforts to spread propaganda and disinformation go beyond the fake news phenomenon to a broader campaign to undermine elements of Western democracy. Russian influence has grown to include tools such as television and social media, and today Russia's narrative is much more professional and trust-inducing. One reason why people in Macedonia are so susceptible to Russian disinformation is the speed and volume at which information is spread on social media and other platforms. Russian efforts to influence go beyond spreading propaganda and disinformation, and Kremlin-owned channels are not simply media, but rather weapons in the information war.

As revealed in leaked intelligence documents, Russian spies and diplomats have been involved in a nearly decadelong effort to spread propaganda and provoke discord in Macedonia as part of a region-wide endeavor to stop Balkan countries from joining NATO. The documents provide one of the clearest views yet of Russia's ongoing efforts to increase its influence in the former Yugoslavia and pry the region away from the West. For the past decade, Macedonia has been "undergoing strong subversive propaganda and intelligence activity implemented through the Embassy of the Russian Federation," according to a 2017 briefing prepared for the director of the Macedonian Administration for Security and Counterintelligence. These Russian operations began in 2008, at a time when Greece vetoed Macedonia's bid to join NATO because of an ongoing dispute over the country's name.

The document says: "By using the assets and methods of so-called 'soft power,' as part of the strategy of the Russian Federation in the Balkans, the goal is to isolate Macedonia from the influence of the 'West.'" Moreover, Russia's foreign policy is tightly correlated with its energy strategy, which is aimed at controlling strategic energy resources through partnerships with the Balkan countries. According to the document, the goal of the Russian strategy is to place Macedonia "in a state of exclusive dependency on Russian policy."

Russia's intelligence activities have been conducted from its embassy in Skopje by three agents of the Foreign Intelligence Service, overseen by a station in Belgrade, Serbia, as well as by four agents of the military Main Intelligence Agency, coordinated from Sofia, Bulgaria, the document alleges. Also said to be involved are local representatives of the Russian state news agency Tass and a representative of Rossotrudnichestvo (the name means "Russian Cooperation"), a Russian government aid agency that functions as a Russian version of the U.S. Agency for International Development for the exercise of soft power and is part of their ministry of foreign affairs.

Russian agents have also attempted to influence and offer funds to Macedonian media outlets, including those aimed at the country's Albanian minority, in order to spread "information and disinformation" in support of Russian policy goals, it says.

Although Macedonia has been a partner of the West since becoming independent from Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, Russia has increased its influence in the country in recent years. For example, honorary consulates established in the towns of Bitola and Ohrid function as "intelligence bases," the document says, without providing further details. Like other countries, Russia is tapping into the rise of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in public life in Europe and beyond. NGOs and think tanks based outside Russia play a special role in the country's foreign policy. They are used as tools to legitimize policies and manipulate public opinion abroad. The Balkan states have been subjected to more intensive Russian pressure recently. Russian secret services control most pro-Russian NGOs in Balkan countries. There is a clear link between obscure Russian-funded NGOs and media outlets that spread information with the aim of constructing messages that favor Russian interests.

There are several organizations operating in Macedonia that are funded by the Russian government, whether officially or unofficially. Their number and activities have been growing, but their financing is often complex and hidden from the public. Their goal is to shift public opinion toward a positive view of Russia and its policies and toward respect for its great power ambitions. Russia's efforts appear to be having some effect. For example, the Macedonian government refused to join Western sanctions on Russia over the 2014 military intervention in Ukraine, citing the cost to its economy.

FOUR NARRATIVES

Russia's information war is a massive, multifaceted and coherent operation. Russia denies direct involvement, but different narratives are supported by an active media campaign that tries to undermine Macedonian authorities and their political goals. The narratives range from using anti-Americanisms to emphasizing the common Orthodox faith in the Eastern Balkans. Russia has also drastically increased its cultural outreach in the country, pushing a "pan-Slavic" identity. Russia's embassy has overseen the

THE BALKANS

PER CONCORDIAM ILLUSTRATION

creation of roughly 30 Macedonia-Russia friendship associations, as well as opened a Russian cultural center in Skopje and sponsored construction of Orthodox crosses and Russian-style churches across the country. Russia's four most-used narratives in Macedonia are:

1. **The anti-West:** Stories about Western political and financial corruption, the subservience of Western leaders to shadowy, unaccountable corporations and America's insatiable quest for global domination find resonance across the ideological spectrum, uniting everyone from left-wing anti-globalization activists to right-wing cultural traditionalists. Other widely used themes are: weak societies in the West, disintegration of international organizations (NATO and the EU), corrupted leaders and institutions, conspiracy theories, liberal values, decadence and decline of morality, and the inability to cope with refugees.
2. **The Russian world:** This is an ideological counter to the Western narrative. The Russian world incorporates Russian culture, language, history, a shared heritage and morals. The model of the Russian world is based on conservative values and is attractive to sections of the center-right and right-wing electorate due to their respect for leadership and hierarchy.
3. **Pan-Slavism:** In Slavic countries, including Macedonia, Serbia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland, Russia supports the old, but still somewhat popular idea of pan-Slavism: Russia pushes the notion that "we are all Slavs with the same origin and spirit." That's the purpose of the Forum of Slavic Cultures, founded in 2004 by Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Poland, Russia, Slovenia, and Serbia and Montenegro. The forum wants to become a referential global platform of intercultural dialogue among Slavic

Hundreds of people gathered in front of the Russian Embassy in Skopje, Macedonia, in April 2018 to show support for Russia after the Macedonian government expelled a Russian diplomat. The sign reads "Great glory to Russia" and "Macedonia eternal." Russian propaganda efforts in Macedonia pander to shared Slavic culture and Orthodox Christian religion. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

peoples and a hub for Slavic arts and sciences. It has participated in numerous literary festivals and organized a Slavic film festival and concerts of Slavic ethno music, and it contributes to the preservation and promotion of Slavic cultural heritage, especially in the sense of ethnography, folklore studies, museology and archive studies.

4. **Common religion:** In countries with an Orthodox majority, such as Macedonia, Russian policy builds on the common religion and utilizes the Orthodox Church and connected organizations, such as the International Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Christian Nations. The foundation awards prizes annually to heads of states, governments and parliaments, primates of the Orthodox Churches, and major public figures for contributions to the strengthening of economic and political ties among the states that are formed in the context of Eastern Christian tradition and for the consolidation of noble standards of Christian morals in the life of the Orthodox community.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg speaks in Skopje in January 2018, urging Macedonia to keep up newfound momentum toward solving a 27-year-old dispute with Greece over its name, which will move Macedonia closer to joining the Alliance.
AFP/GETTY IMAGES

RECOMMENDATIONS

Propaganda should generally be exposed and condemned by governments and civil society as inappropriate speech in a democratic world and in the profession of journalism. State institutions should increase their efficacy in countering external attempts to influence their media space and undermine democratic customs and processes, and work to find patient, tolerant and forward-leaning answers. Efforts must be made to help people understand the complexity of Kremlin manipulation of public opinion, how it affects the political, social and business environment in Macedonia, and how the Russian narrative aims to construct attitudes and advocate behaviors, including Macedonian government policy toward and cooperation with the West. The Balkan countries are not fighting this infiltration with the measures used in other EU countries, such as: imposing travel bans on Kremlin activists, banning Russian TV stations (in Latvia and Lithuania), introducing entry bans for Russian journalists (in Estonia), expelling diplomats identified as Russian intelligence officers, implementing stricter NGO disclosure requirements, and not allowing organizations such as Rossotrudnichestvo to open branches.

Governments and political leaders have a crucial role to play in speaking out decisively and promptly against propaganda. They must recognize the existence of disinformation activities and the importance of understanding them. The broader public should be made aware of the existence and power of hostile propaganda in media sources. Political officials and experts should continuously push this issue and cover it on different platforms. These efforts should be systematic and followed by sociological surveys, enabling the development of appropriate counter-propaganda. Discussions should include various examples of disinformation and explicit disclaimers. Among actions that should be undertaken at the national level are:

- **Build resistance to hostile propaganda.** This must start with serious efforts to raise awareness among senior-level decision-makers (members of government and parliament, and journalists) focusing on understanding and recognizing the different types and techniques of propaganda, and learning about the various channels of spreading it and the variety of ways that hostile foreign propaganda may target the cornerstones of democratic systems, including through seemingly harmless topics such as social issues and religion. Such awareness-raising should be followed by social advertising campaigns for the public.
- **Review legislative frameworks.** The regulatory framework should be demonstrably independent and any attempt to tighten the legislative framework should set clear and detailed standards, and be evidence-based and proportionate. Sanctions should be proportionate and graduated. Outright bans should be a last resort.

- **Enhance the public's critical thinking and media literacy.** Long-term efforts are required to enhance public understanding and education on the weaponization of the media, particularly online media. Perhaps providing simple user guides for the public on how to identify trolls (for example, when reading comment sections) would be a good first step toward raising society's awareness of manipulation techniques used on the internet. Media knowledge and source appraisal in social media could be added to school curricula. A special education program on internet security should be tailored to groups most vulnerable to trolling as identified during the study, such as older people.
- **Strengthen the strategic communications field.** Government departments working in strategic communications must have the ability to gather and analyze evidence, and find ways to counter disinformation campaigns. National institutions must find constructive ways to work together with civil society, media and individuals who are involved in media and communication. Funding should be increased to media regulators so that they can closely monitor media content to prevent media outlets from sharing disinformation and propaganda. Also, a strong public diplomacy effort is needed to explain problems with disinformation to friendly states and allies.
- **Governments and political leaders should refrain from funding and using propaganda, especially when propaganda may lead to intolerance, discriminatory stereotyping or incite war, violence or hostility.** Steps should also be taken to abolish media run by the government or its proxies, and government should abstain from sponsoring online trolls or engaging in other covert media operations.

Macedonians protest in March 2018 against a new law making Albanian the country's second official language. Russian propaganda targets subjects that are ethnically or religiously divisive in an effort to create instability and chaos. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NGOS

Civil society organizations should play a meaningful role in exposing disinformation, raising media literacy, monitoring journalistic standards and providing media analysis. They should also help educate government officials, the public and the media on how disinformation is used. They should work on projects and other initiatives to identify and expose disinformation and propaganda; focus on explaining how propaganda campaigns work and how serious the problem is; and find where there are knowledge gaps and look for solutions to fill those gaps. NGOs should also work to establish networks through which they can share their findings and amplify each other's work. Independent researchers and think tanks should also concentrate on these issues.

American diplomat Laura Cooper, left, chats with Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, center, and Macedonian Defense Minister Radmila Šekerinska at the U.S.-Adriatic Charter Defense Ministerial meeting in Ohrid, Macedonia, in December 2017, where advancing the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of the region's countries was discussed. EPA

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEDIA

Cultivating a strong, professional media is very important in the battle against propaganda. However, a weakened media and declining professional standards, including a lack of high-quality reporting, makes this a challenge. Therefore, measures should be undertaken to raise professional standards, including adherence to internationally recognized ethical codes and standards for balanced and objective reporting and news presentation. The following recommendations should be implemented:

- **Follow high journalistic standards in news production.** Analyzing information and checking facts before further dissemination is of the outmost importance in building credibility. In the new information environment where, with the help of social media, an individual can disseminate information as widely as a government institution, the media should exercise its gatekeeping role to separate fact from rumor, rather than becoming yet another unwitting participant in disinformation campaigns. This requires critical thinking and more thorough appraisals of sources.
- **Provide interesting, well-researched and unbiased information.** Don't publish second-hand information, especially when it comes to global issues. Although it is clear that some media, due to limited resources, cannot provide only first-hand data, they should at least research alternative views and opinions.
- **Media should self-regulate.** This, where effective, remains the most appropriate way to address professional issues. Through self-regulation, the media exercises its moral and social responsibility, including counteracting propaganda of hatred and discrimination. Ethical codes and self- and co-regulatory instruments should ensure that cases of propaganda are brought to the public's attention. Media should be a barrier to negative stereotypes of individuals and groups and blatant or veiled expressions of intolerance, and it should raise awareness of the harm caused by discrimination. They should thoughtfully consider whether what they are publishing is conducive to defamation or ridicule based on sex, race, color, language, faith and religion, affiliation with a national or ethnic minority or ethnic group, social differences, or political or other opinions, and promote self-regulation mechanisms that will effectively address any use of hate speech. Journalist organizations, self-regulatory bodies, and the owners and publishers of media outlets have the duty to look seriously at their content. Propaganda does a disservice to all credible, ethical journalists who have fought, and in some cases given their lives, to produce real, honest journalism.

CONCLUSIONS

Key implications derived from this research must be communicated to decision-makers and other stakeholders in a way that encourages them to factor the implications into their work. Only through a holistic approach from all stakeholders can Russian propaganda and its influence in Macedonia be effectively countered and society made more resilient. Government, concerned citizens and journalists must work together to fashion the most appropriate response. In practice, getting in front and raising awareness of propaganda should involve more robust and more widely publicized efforts to drown out propaganda sources and limit or neutralize their success. □

Testing NATO *Vulnerabilities*

Russian Soft Power in the Baltics

PER CONCORDIAM ILLUSTRATION

At a NATO Accession Ceremony in 2004, U.S. President George W. Bush underlined the importance of the day for the new members and for the Alliance. "Today marks a great achievement for each of the nations," he said. "Our seven new members have built free institutions; they've increased their military capabilities in the span of a decade. They are stronger nations because of that remarkable effort, and the NATO alliance is made stronger by their presence." However, NATO's expansion would do little to cease Russia's revisionist policy toward its neighbors. Rather, it marked the beginning of an era of softer confrontation by Russia.

By **Irine Burduli**, Georgia Ministry of Defence

NATO-Russia relations have never been easy. Although there have been times when both sides could agree on topics, there remain several areas where they fundamentally diverge. The most controversial issues are related to NATO's enlargement policy and the buildup of its members' military powers, especially near Russian borders. The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation of 2014 openly names NATO as the country's "main external military risk." Bringing the military infrastructure of NATO members near Russia's borders is considered by the Kremlin to be one of the country's top security threats. Many experts even use the term "New Cold War" to describe the current relationship between the Western and Eastern blocs, and they consider the Baltic states particularly vulnerable to Russia's increasing number of indirect threats.

With its invasion in Georgia in 2008 and illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia re-emerged as a revanchist power with increasing aggressiveness toward its neighbors. Security threats escalated in the Baltic states, which, despite being NATO members, remain an area of Russia's interest and interference. Because there is little likelihood that Russia will engage in direct military confrontation with any of the Baltic states and therefore clash face to face with NATO, many view the Russian threat as exaggerated. Those who set off alarm bells are regarded as fearmongers. However, the threats should be considered seriously and not only in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. By expanding its sphere of influence over the Baltics, Russia aims to restrain their independence, manipulate their political and economic pro-Western choices, and thereby test NATO's stability and unity.

This business center in St. Petersburg, Russia, is believed to house a "troll factory" where propaganda campaigns and social influence tactics are launched as part of Russia's "soft power" warfare efforts. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The challenge for NATO members is understanding how Russia intends to secure its declared interests and objectives in the region. Open military aggression would be resisted by all NATO members, leaving little chance that Russia would send military forces into Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania. Instead, Russian President Vladimir Putin prefers to focus on soft power as a central tenet of his foreign policy. According to Russia's Foreign Policy Concept of 2016, "soft power has become an integral part of efforts to achieve foreign policy objectives. This particularly includes the tools offered by civil society, as well as various methods and technologies — from information and communication to humanitarian and other types." Moscow

French President Emmanuel Macron, left, shakes hands with a British soldier of the NATO Battle Group at the Tapa Army Base outside Tallinn, Estonia. NATO solidarity is key to protecting the Baltics against Russia's military threat and its "soft power" tactics. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

applies various soft power methods, often mixing them with hard power elements and diplomatic and intelligence activities that can make it difficult to distinguish one approach from the other. Moreover, unlike countries that follow Harvard Professor Joseph Nye's classic definition of soft power — the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without force or coercion — Russia doesn't consider another state's legitimacy or act morally; its aim in the Baltics is to intimidate and weaken its neighbors. More broadly, its soft power seeks to influence NATO. Unfortunately, neither NATO nor its members have developed adequate counterstrategies to the Kremlin's endeavors to fulfill its expansionist goals.

Abusing power

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are small countries bordering a huge and aggressive neighbor, and they clearly realize the scale of the threat. With their integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, the Baltic states have received security guarantees that reduce the risk of direct military aggression. But they remain in a region where, as former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev stated, Russia "has its privileged interests." If those interests are ignored, Russia will use power, as it has demonstrated several times against its non-NATO neighbors. In the Baltic states, Russia follows a policy of subversion and propaganda as the main weapon of its soft power. Overall, wisely used soft power may be more effective than open military coercion, which can be countered by the West.

The ethnic diversity of the Baltic states creates a highly advantageous environment for Russia. A sizable Russian ethnic population in Estonia and Latvia represents a strong pillar of support for Russia's influence in the region. Twenty-four percent of Estonia's population, 25 percent of Latvia's, and 6 percent of Lithuania's are ethnic Russians — the main target of Russia's soft power. As Medvedev noted, Russia's "unquestionable priority is to protect the life and dignity of our citizens, wherever they are." This was a declared motive for Russian invasions in Georgia in 2008 and in Ukraine in 2014.

In the Baltic states, Russia implements a government-funded policy that supports projects aimed at maintaining and strengthening cultural, educational and linguistic ties with Russia. It also funds pro-Russian groups active in politics and the economy. While such activities may seem legitimate, the tactics Moscow uses are of great concern. It often exerts influence in politics and business through bribery, corruption and fraud, especially when those worlds intertwine. Russia uses that leverage to intervene in Baltic countries' internal affairs, set political priorities and achieve its policy goals. A very powerful tool in this regard is Baltic energy dependence on Russia, especially in the gas sector.

Using propaganda

Propaganda is another influential tool of Russia's soft power. Through print, broadcast and social media, as political analyst Agnia Grigas outlines, "Russia has been particularly successful in creating a virtual community involving not only the Russian diaspora but also a segment of the Baltic population that remains linked culturally, linguistically and ideologically to Moscow." What separates Russian soft power from the classic definition of the term, and what essentially characterizes it, is

that the Kremlin does not try to attract a target audience with its values, level of prosperity, political ideals and enhancement of Russia's image; rather, it focuses on distraction and manipulation and prefers to discredit opposing forces. There are three dominant vectors of Russian propaganda against the Baltic states: The states are weak, they are trying to deviate from their history, and they discriminate against ethnic Russians. By spreading that disinformation across Europe, the Kremlin aims to tarnish the image of the Baltic states among NATO countries, a disturbing prospect for the Baltics.

Countering complex threats

Integration into NATO has been a necessary shield for the Baltic states. This membership allowed Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to develop as free and democratic countries that respect individual rights and value Western political principles. Considering a history of almost five decades of Soviet occupation, the Baltic states made impressive progress by successfully transforming into European-style, liberal democracies and integrating into the Alliance. On the one hand, this ensured the military security of the Baltics. But on the other hand, it made them attractive targets for Russia. As the American analyst Paul A. Globe underlined in testimony prepared for a 2017 congressional hearing on U.S. policy toward the Baltic states: "If Putin can undermine these countries and their remarkable progress both domestically and internationally, he will not only show all the former Soviet republics that they have little chance of success but that the West is a paper tiger even with regard to those it has committed itself to defend."

NATO does recognize the impact of Russian-provoked threats and has responded by reinforcing defenses and deterrence efforts on its eastern flank. At the 2014 NATO summit in Wales, the Allies agreed to enhance the capabilities of the NATO Response Force to respond to security challenges posed by Russia. At the 2016 summit in Warsaw, NATO continued this approach by increasing its eastern border presence with four multinational, battalion-size battle groups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, deployed on a rotational basis.

While the security of the Baltic states may be high on NATO's agenda, its strategy remains questionable. NATO's presence in the Baltics is a necessity. But it is obvious that Putin understands that invading any NATO member means suicide for Russia. Therefore, he chooses to "attack" softly by applying means that his opponents are not prepared to counter. What modernized approaches and/or nonmilitary counterstrategies could abolish Russia's foothold in the Baltics and promote security for three small states?

- First, neither the Baltic states nor NATO can successfully act independently against Russia, even with regard to soft power. Russia and NATO share a border, thus it is to the Alliance's benefit to promote and support Baltic security and resistance to the highest degree possible. Each NATO member should clearly realize that in this globalized and interconnected world, promoting security in other countries means enhancing the security of their homeland. Taking the current challenges into consideration, the Baltics should proactively cooperate with other NATO members to improve domestic political conditions by strengthening democratic institutions and eliminating existing weaknesses and gaps in the political system. Eliminating corruption and ensuring the transparency of political and business activities are among the essential steps to be taken. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have made good progress in achieving these goals, but still need support from the West.

- One of the most important footholds for Russia's influence, as mentioned above, is the vast number of ethnic Russians in the Baltics. With the assistance and support of NATO, Baltic nations should focus on fully integrating Russian minorities in their countries. They should support national language progression programs and review citizenship regulations. In this regard, Lithuania has achieved more success than its Baltic neighbors.

- Moreover, NATO members should more actively promote educational exchange programs and offer even more scholarships and education opportunities. Simultaneously, more European and U.S. students should be encouraged to study at Baltic institutions, which will enable foreign students to learn more about the eastern NATO allies. This will help counter the false image of weak Baltic states that Russia pushes on the international stage.

"If Putin can undermine these countries and their remarkable progress both domestically and internationally, he will not only show all the former Soviet republics that they have little chance of success but that the West is a paper tiger even with regard to those it has committed itself to defend."

~ Paul A. Globe, U.S. analyst

- Diversifying the energy supply is an essential step in decreasing dependency on Russia. This should be a priority and be implemented through closer ties to Europe and a more diverse gas supply. Although the Baltic states have implemented several projects, more effort is needed in this direction. The less the Baltics depend on Russian gas, the more confident they will become when challenging Russia.

- Russian propaganda is well-financed and ingrained in the Baltic and European media spaces. The Kremlin develops different realities to manipulate its audience and creates narratives that are beneficial for it and disruptive for its opponents. Russia has significantly honed its propaganda tools and today it uses multiple and various sources of

German soldiers secure Marder tanks on trains for transport to Lithuania for a NATO exercise to strengthen the defensive capabilities of the Baltic states. GETTY IMAGES

Lithuanian conscripts practice during a NATO military exercise near Vilnius. Across Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, people fear Russia's intentions after its actions in Georgia, Ukraine and Syria.
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

information to continuously spread fake news and disinformation. This direction cannot be ignored by the West because Russian propaganda is directed not only toward the Russian population, but at NATO members as well. It is not easy to counter Russia's well-organized propaganda machine, which has been operating for years. NATO should reveal the Kremlin's main propaganda forces and the ways they manipulate audiences. To decrease the impact of Russian propaganda, NATO should strongly recommend that members restrict its dissemination and counter misleading and false messages. Most important, the Alliance should enhance efforts to reach the audience first, providing clear and accurate narratives supporting NATO objectives. It should use every possible medium to overwhelm Russian propaganda and reduce its impact to a minimum. The citizens of all NATO members should receive truthful and reliable information, and this information should be provided by trusted channels to influence and persuade target audiences about Russia's real objectives and purposes, and about the threats it poses to its "near abroad" and the entire international order.

- NATO should intensify engagement with its Baltic members. Regular visits from NATO's senior leadership will demonstrate their will and readiness to stand by their Baltic friends. NATO should create a joint strategy document that includes all the countermeasures to be taken when Russia uses soft power toward the Baltics. The document should enable the Baltic states to jointly diminish Russian influence in their countries. Considering the nature of the modern challenges posed by Russia, NATO should incorporate efficient ways of countering indirect threats into its security strategy, and must be ready to adequately respond, deter and prevent all signs of aggression.

Conclusion

Through illegal and subversive tactics, Russia is not just threatening and weakening the Baltics — it is intimidating and undermining the unity and credibility of the NATO alliance and therefore the international order. Russian aggression is not only about its "near abroad," it is also about influence over the world's superpowers. The Baltics are Russia's post-Soviet playground to use as a litmus test to gauge Western responses to its actions and provocations. In Georgia's case in 2008 and in Ukraine in 2014, the West demonstrated its unpreparedness and inability to counter and stop the aggressor. It boosted Russia's self-confidence and caused a "syndrome of impunity." This reality seriously shattered the Baltic states' confidence in their national security. If any of the Baltic states becomes the victim of Russian aggression, and if NATO will not demonstrate its power and willingness to defend its members, the existing rules-based world order faces collapse.

NATO's power is in its members, in their unanimity and solidarity. Thus, a threat hanging over one threatens and challenges all. The fear and sense of panic caused by Russia's actions are justified. The West should not be deluded by the covert nature of those actions. If the progress and success achieved by the Baltic states is undermined, NATO's credibility as an organization responsible for security, in the broadest understanding of this word, will be greatly disrupted. The Baltic states represent the Alliance's most vulnerable flank. Therefore, NATO should focus on reviewing and renewing its strategy for protecting them, and on developing the tools necessary to counter Russia's existing and future "soft" threats. □

Making Russia Great Again?

PER CONCORDIAM ILLUSTRATION

Fake news and the future of the Federation

By **Dr. Drew Ninnis, Ph.D.**, futures analyst, Department of Defence, Australia | Photos by The Associated Press

Russian President Vladimir Putin should be very worried. Sure, he was re-elected with 77 percent of the vote; with 67 percent of the electorate turning out to cast a ballot (slightly shy of the 70 percent he'd hoped for). His rule is unchallenged, with no one political figure or power center strong enough to challenge the influence he's consolidated while governing Russia for 17 years. His modest public servant's salary, ownership of two garages and a few vintage Volgas have miraculously increased his net worth to over $200 billion, according to *The Washington Post*. Even if he falls on hard times, a loyal billionaire friend would likely help. He could be president for life, if he wants. Life would seem to be pretty good.

And yet, for the average Russian, life isn't so good. *The Moscow Times* reports that the average national salary is $6,700 — on par with that of neighboring Kazakhstan. Overall life expectancy is about 70 years, 110th in the world, with an alarming average male life expectancy of 65 years. The sovereign wealth funds set up to capture Russia's resource prosperity and invest it in the future have been drained or swallowed up by ongoing liabilities, according to *The Moscow Times*. Putin's short-term strategic genius — essential in consolidating his domestic position and providing leverage abroad — is slowly unravelling as conflicts in Ukraine soak up more and more resources, while driving that nation closer to partners hostile toward Russia. A foray into Syria to prop up President Bashar Assad holds the real prospect of becoming a repeat of the Soviet Union's disaster in Afghanistan, with the potential to escalate into conflict with the United States and its allies. Interference in various democracies (with an assassination or two to boot) have transformed Russia into an international pariah, on par with North Korea or Iran.

In short, Russia and Putin — the two have become, in the manner of 17th century France and Louis XIV, almost synonymous — are on a downward trajectory. Indeed, the situation is likely to worsen over the coming decades. Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential and congressional elections has rightfully drawn the world's attention. It is only a small piece of a long-term Russian campaign to disrupt democracies around the world. But what has it achieved? Multiple trends suggest Russia is in decline. While its short-term strategic success with global information operations may be temporarily empowering, long-term trends suggest that Russia faces a reckoning — one that, so far, Putin's fake news factories have only exacerbated and accelerated.

A fundamental link here is that the long-term drivers of instability at home have driven Putin's behavior abroad, including the Kremlin's indulgence in a widespread international war of disinformation. This, along with other factors, drives the vicious cycle of Russian policies internally and externally — trouble at home, which drives trouble abroad to divert attention, which (through sanctions and other mechanisms) drives further trouble at home. Further, the doctrine of Putinism creates a stability nexus to justify Kremlin influence abroad while shoring up the political regime at home through the centralization of power. Coming

to terms with Russia's export of propaganda and fake news, and creating strategies to counter it, requires an understanding of the trends that are driving the country's internal instability.

Desperation trajectory

Several trends point the way for Russia's potential downward trajectory. First, Russia is in a devastating demographic decline. The World Bank projects Russia's population will shrink by 15 million in the next three decades. This sharply curtails the possibilities for Russia's demographic and economic future in a global age, when large populations and economic power are considered synonymous.

Further, the structure of Russia's economy spells trouble for its future. It has been stratified into a two-sector system, where a highly productive and profitable resource sector heavily subsidizes an unproductive and inefficient economic sector consisting of all the other essential elements of a modern economic system. Unlike other resource-rich nations, Russia has not positioned itself to be competitive in other economic sectors as its resource boom declines — indeed, it remains reliant on a boom-and-bust economic megacycle as the world slowly transitions away from the resources Russia seeks to export.

Coming to terms with Russia's export of propaganda and fake news, and creating strategies to counter it, requires an understanding of the trends that are driving the country's internal instability.

Socially and culturally, Russia has been shaped by fears of a breakdown in the social compact the public accepted under former Russian President Boris Yeltsin — the sacrifice of political and social liberty for the guarantee of a high standard of living. These days, there are strong signs that the government can't uphold its end of that compact. Living standards are deteriorating, corruption and inequality are growing, and the political response to dissent is growing increasingly more severe. The deadly shopping center fire in March 2018 in Kemerovo, and Putin's chastisements of "criminal negligence" afterward, show just how vulnerable the Kremlin is to a groundswell of Russian popular anger. The sources of dissatisfaction are numerous, and an unexpected event could be the match that sets them alight.

As the stress builds, the regime is employing a foreign policy adventurism and Soviet revanchism to shore up its position at home. Yet, it is becoming clear that Russia is headed toward a serious reckoning. The bargains Putin struck to maintain an unprecedented degree of post-communist control are unravelling. As these bargains become more unstable, Putin resorts more and more to waging a war of disinformation on Russians and on audiences abroad in an attempt to cloak these sources of instability and unrest. Or, at the very least it ensures that other nations experience similar instability so that Putin can maintain that his own brand of "managed democracy" is at least better than the alternatives offered abroad.

Russia is shrinking

In examining Russia's demographic trends, one thing becomes immediately clear: Russia is shrinking. After reaching a peak of 148.7 million in 1992, Russia's population has declined every year since — dropping to 145.3 million in 2002, and to 144.1 million in 2015, according to the World Bank. If this trend continues, Russia's population will fall to 143.4 million in 2020, 139.3 million in 2030, and 129.0 million in 2050. Nicholas Eberstadt, in his landmark work on Russian demographics, writes that "over the course of just under seventeen-and-a-half years, Russia's population had thus fallen by nearly 7 million people, or by close to 5 percent," and "from an economic standpoint, moreover, there is no obvious historical example of a society that has demonstrated sustained material advance in the face of long-term population decline." This has been driven by three fundamental and negative trends: Russia's catastrophically high mortality rate, an aging and unhealthy population, and a low fertility rate.

The economic "drag" attributed to an aging population is quantifiable. A World Bank report on Russia's aging found that the effects of population aging on growth in per capita gross domestic product (GDP) ranges from a negative 1.5 percent to a negative 2.3 percent, leading to significant fiscal and investment consequences. "A possible implication is that aggregate savings will decline as the elderly share of the population rises, thus reducing the funds available for investment, and therefore growth," the World Bank report said. Additionally, Russia's shrinking workforce, plus its fluctuating economy and depleted reserve fund, have already necessitated reductions in state-funded pensions. Several social consequences are worth considering — poor educational outcomes, higher levels of poverty and increasing inequality. As one World Bank report highlights, "in Russia, the evidence is that the circumstances into which a child is born matter for opportunities later in life."

Russia's mortality rate is similarly grim. Eberstadt remarks that "since the end of the Soviet era, Russia's total population has fallen by nearly 7 million," comparable to "China in the wake of the disastrous

Russia's Rosneft oil company sits on the banks of the Moskva River in Moscow. Low oil prices over a sustained period have left the country in a protracted recession.

'Great Leap Forward' campaign." The demographic statistics themselves are sobering: Studies show Russia's death rate is 22nd highest in the world (higher than Mali, Burundi or Cameroon); the gap between male and female life expectancy is 12 years; more Russians have died than are born in the nation every year since 2005. Four factors seem to play a fundamental role in Russia's catastrophic mortality rate: excessive consumption of alcohol, high injury rates, high prevalence of cardiovascular disease, and shrinking public health quality and access.

Migration is unlikely to become a source of population replenishment, particularly as continued economic woes make Russia a less attractive destination for economic migrants such as those from Central Asia. Finally, the combination of these factors means that Russia faces a concurrent problem of rapid population aging, and increasing dependency ratios for working populations to pensioners, just as its population is shrinking.

Economic challenges

When evaluating the consequences of prevailing trends on Russia's economy, it is worthwhile remembering the origins of those trends and why key decisions made sense within the system of Putinism. Putin assumed the Russian presidency amid a prolonged cycle of economic crisis, partially caused by the "shock therapy" policies of the previous government, but also exacerbated by open warfare among the oligarchs who had consolidated private control of Russia's economy for their own benefit.

The Putin government implemented fundamental structural reforms to Russia's economy that made it more productive and competitive, as well as managing to capture larger shares of revenue for public benefit. Added to this, booming oil revenues swelled Russia's reserve accounts and cushioned the impact of the 2008 financial crisis. A World Bank report notes that the "share of the population living in poverty fell by two-thirds, from about 30 percent in 2000 to just under 11 percent in 2012, based on the national poverty line," and the "consumption of the population in the bottom 40 percent of the income distribution rose more rapidly than that of the total population, and the middle class expanded dramatically." As a result, Putin was understandably popular and able to consolidate control of Russia through the promise of continued prosperity. It was a price most Russians were happy to pay. From 2000 to 2013, the World Bank reports, GDP rose by an average of 5.2 percent a year, and by 2008 Putin's government had a financial stockpile of $584 billion.

Protesters in St. Petersburg, Russia, hold a poster depicting Russian President Vladimir Putin that says: "Prices, tariffs and poverty rise, you chose all this." Russia's flagging economy motivates Putin to wage propaganda and disinformation campaigns in other countries.

The role that the price of oil played in this financial windfall was significant — average prices went from $28 per barrel in 2000 to $105 in 2013. One World Bank report observes that "oil and gas exports [increased] from about 40 percent of total exports in 1999 to nearly 70 percent in 2013." During this time, the expenditure of the Russian government grew tenfold, rising "as a share of GDP from 32.8 to 38.2 percent, solely because recurrent spending was going up." Natural resource revenues were fundamental in allowing Putin to guarantee the features of the Russian social contract.

But it did not last. In 2012, this commodity supercycle came to an end. This was due to three factors — commodity prices dropped sharply; very little of the dramatic expansion in revenue was captured and reinvested in sources of long-term, sustainable growth; and complacency let fundamental economic reforms go unimplemented, according to a World Bank report. Growth slowed, and reserves started to drain. In the background, the demographic challenges highlighted above exacerbated the economic impact of these downward trends. These factors — coupled with Russia's aggressive foreign policy — brought the crisis to a head in 2014, and Russia found itself in a weaker position than when it weathered the 2008 crisis.

As Russia's population and economy diminishes, so too does its ability to maintain critical relationships and project power internationally.

The Russian economy now finds itself in a protracted recession, with a sustained period of low oil prices impacting revenues and sanctions limiting access to international markets. This is having a direct impact on the Russian social contract, which is buckling. The fundamental strengths that underpinned Putinism are now key vulnerabilities. While Russia's political economy has been "politically and socially efficient" in times of plenty, it is not efficient in terms of allocating resources and sustaining long-term growth independent of energy exports, according to Dr. Richard Connolly, co-director of the Centre for Russian, European and Eurasian Studies at the University of Birmingham. Further, potential political and economic instability has caused a jump in private capital outflows — those that can are financially fleeing the nation, which does not bode well. This means that "as a result, the Russian economy now appears to be stagnating at best, and heading towards crisis at worst," Connolly writes.

A final, tentative conclusion might also be drawn: Just as the European Union has slowly moved away from its dependency on gas in response to Russian assertiveness, so too might the world look toward other sources of energy and disruptive technologies to power future growth. This would be the worst possible outcome for Russia — being left with a 20th century economy in a 21st century that has moved beyond it.

Putin's disinformation war

The consequences of these trends on Russian geopolitics are profound. Russia's population is shrinking, becoming unhealthier, receiving less vital services and potentially increasing in discontentedness. At the same time, Russia's economy is vulnerable to harsh trends that it cannot control and which may leave it impoverished. This is happening at the same time Russia's main geostrategic competitors are increasing their relative power and influence: China's economy is expected to keep growing to become the largest in the world by 2030, while its population begins to level out and live longer. The U.S. also continues to grow economically and demographically, while entrenching its long-held military advantages. This sets the background for Russia's "desperation trajectory."

Russia's extensive use of propaganda and information warfare comes not from a position of advantage or strength, but rather from a place of fear and great weakness.

Indeed, the greatest geostrategic threats to Russia over the coming decades are not from those that it considers its enemies, but from those it has traditionally claimed as friends. As Russia's population and economy diminishes, so too does its ability to maintain critical relationships and project power internationally. On its periphery, Russia has secured its near-region by setting up a number of client-state relationships and locking these relationships in place through the manipulation of a series of frozen conflicts in which Russia is the indispensable arbiter or actor. These include the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute that keeps both Armenia and Azerbaijan in Russia's orbit, and Russian sponsorship of separatists in South Ossetia, in internationally recognized Georgian territory, and Donetsk in Ukraine.

By having these contested regions remain frozen conflicts, Russia ensures that one way or another the nations concerned must pay close attention to Russian interests and seek help from outside partners at their own risk. Similarly, Russia uses its influence and patronage to try to maintain a tight hold on the Central Asian states, seeking to exclude China and other nations from what it considers its sphere of influence. Russian efforts to weld these diverse captive states into a Customs Union have so far been unsuccessful but point to the overall strategy Russia uses within the region to secure its interests.

Yet, it is highly likely that without significant change Russia is headed for a period of marked decline — and it is just these relationships and frozen conflicts that are likely to explode as many of these nations see their opportunity to finally shed Russia's heavy-handed influence. If that were to happen, Russia would be faced with multiple fires across its periphery — and increase the likelihood of one or more flare-ups weakening Russia's overall security and encouraging others to engage in conflict. The possibility of multiple frozen conflicts reignited — with long-captive states seizing their chance — is not only a bad outcome for Russia, but also for the peace and security goals of the international community.

In the face of such events, it is highly likely that Russia would seek to double down on its war of disinformation — seeking to use a relatively cheap asymmetric tool to weaken its perceived opponents and compromise relationships between actors that could move against Russia's interests. The worse the conflicts became, the more the Kremlin would be tempted to break international norms and engage in a war of disinformation that included escalations such as assassinations of key anti-Russian figures (including former spies), hacking critical infrastructure, and seeking not just to disrupt democratic elections in other nations but actively overthrow them through compromising critical systems. While Putin's current attempts at a war of disinformation haven't been without cost, the unraveling of Russia's carefully balanced security situation would motivate the Kremlin to push these tools and strategies further, no matter the cost.

Fake news and Russia's future

As explained above, Russia's extensive use of propaganda and information warfare comes not from a position of advantage or strength, but rather from a place of fear and great weakness. Putin has looked to election interference, disinformation and a string of assassinations because he has needed to appear strong to a domestic audience that is acutely feeling Russia's gradual demographic, economic and social decline. Yet, only Putin, and his successors, can stem the tide of fake news that they have unleashed to make Russia great again.

A lesson for the international community is contained in Russia's desperation trajectory: Russia is by no means the only nation experiencing a decline at the hands of a changing global economy and longer-term

Nagorno-Karabakh Army artillerymen move away from a howitzer prepped to fire in Azerbaijan in 2016. Russia's manipulation of the dispute keeps both Armenia and Azerbaijan in its orbit.

trends, and when nations decline and become threatened by their own vulnerability, they are increasingly likely to resort to tactics that have been traditionally considered outside the bounds of conventional warfare. This includes the conduct of disinformation warfare to level the playing field by making an opponent just as unstable as the nation that feels threatened.

The response to Putin's desperate adventurism and disinformation campaigns has been more sanctions and a slow squeezing of the Russian economy, creating a vicious cycle where deteriorating internal conditions have pushed Putin to act even more aggressively abroad.

There is sufficient evidence to suspect that Putin and other leaders positively inclined toward his regime seek a grand bargain with the U.S. that will let Russia resume full participation in the global economy and shed its pariah status with parts of the international community. It is also possible that Putin figures that his internal audience — the Russian people and the elites he effectively corrals to maintain control over Russia — won't be as forgiving. Therefore, a strategy of doubling down on adventurism, disinformation and international norm-breaking may be his only workable option until the international pressure relents.

The international community has a key part to play in this dire calculus. It is easy to impose sanctions, carefully calibrated pressure and condemnation when a rogue nation breaks yet another international norm. Previously, the approach has been to apply "strategic patience" in the firm belief that rogue actors will eventually relent to the pressure, even as they engage in more extreme provocations. It's critical now that the international community think hard about what comes next, after sanctions and condemnation. In the past, many regimes have shown themselves able to live with the hardship of sanctions and isolation, provided the cost is borne by their most vulnerable people. And the long-term imposition of this cost courts even harsher crackdowns, worse behavior by the regime, and eventual collapse. Hopefully, the view from 2050 shows us that nobody wins when defaulting to this status quo. The potential result of a "peaceful" weapon such as sanctions is regime change and national collapse. And perhaps the only thing worse than a potential opponent's strength is that opponent's collapse.

Countering propaganda means finding innovative ways to counter the trends causing them — to find new ways of dealing with or breaking through to the actors who are being driven by them. Russia's future may look grim, and the chances slim for Putin to make Russia great again, but perhaps there is no choice but to find new ways to work toward making a better future for Russia. □

PER CONCORDIAM ILLUSTRATION

BALKAN CHALLENGES

Countering disinformation from Russia and radical Islamists

By **JETISH JASHARI,**
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The countries of the Western Balkans, which include Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, have made clear commitments to join the European Union and, with the exception of Serbia, other Euro-Atlantic structures such as NATO. Each of these countries has, to varying degrees, made significant progress in the integration process. The EU — despite internal problems related to Brexit and so-called enlargement exhaustion — continues to support their bids for membership. NATO espouses a similar policy, supporting membership to the Alliance for all countries of the region.

Regional peace and stability issues are factors in the integration process. The EU and NATO have made it clear that resolving all standing bilateral disagreements that might negatively affect peace and stability is a precondition to membership. However, the security challenges facing Western Balkan countries are daunting. These challenges include increased interference from Russia, as Moscow seeks to reassert Soviet Cold War-era political and economic interests in the region, and from radical Islamist groups, originating mostly from the Middle East, which aim to impose radical Muslim ideology on the Balkans' Muslims.

Propaganda and disinformation are major tools in the respective strategies of Russia and radical Islamist groups. The Russians target countries with predominant or sizable Christian Orthodox populations. Countries with predominant or sizable Muslim populations are targeted by radical Islamist groups, espousing rigid and intolerant interpretations of Islam.

HYBRID WAR

Russian propaganda and disinformation activities in the Western Balkans are based on the following factors: First, they are part of a broader campaign orchestrated by the Kremlin under the paradigm of a "hybrid war" aimed at undermining the EU and Euro-Atlantic structures such as NATO. Second, they target the process of democratic transition — including coping with legacies of the interethnic wars of the 1990s — with the aim of destabilizing the region. And finally, the EU's internal problems, due to Brexit and the decreased pace of enlargement, hurt the development of efficient strategies and tools to counter the Kremlin's propaganda and disinformation campaign.

In the Western Balkans, the Kremlin's campaign is part of a broader one aimed at undermining Western institutions and embodied in the hybrid war strategy, which includes an array of military and nonmilitary measures, tools and objectives employed to exploit identified weaknesses and vulnerabilities in targeted countries. For example, in Baltic countries, propaganda and disinformation activities focus mostly on fueling interethnic tensions between Russian minorities and the

majority populations, and supporting anti-European sentiments that might surface there. In addition, the Kremlin influences mainstream political parties, the media and civil society groups in many EU countries in an effort to incite anti-EU policies and sentiments. A January 2018 U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations report, "Putin's Asymmetric Assault on Democracy in Russia and Europe: Implications for U.S. National Security," highlights the true magnitude of Russian meddling in the affairs of EU countries, emphasizing the Kremlin's leveraging of mainstream political parties in many of them. The report lists far-right political parties, such as the Freedom Party in Austria, Jobbik in Hungary, the Northern League in Italy, the National Front in France and AfD in Germany. These parties are believed to be receiving financial support from the Kremlin, including organizational, political and media expertise.

These factors indicate that the Kremlin's propaganda and disinformation efforts in the Western Balkans are part of a widespread campaign targeting the EU and the broader Euro-Atlantic region. Any response that Western Balkan countries might contemplate to counter these activities must take this into account, meaning they must act in a concerted fashion, based on close and sincere cooperation. Individual responses from any targeted country are doomed to failure since the balance of forces favors Russia over any Western Balkans country, or even all Western Balkan countries together, which in turn necessitates the active involvement of the EU and NATO.

This radicalized Bosnian was arrested after firing several shots at the U.S. Embassy in Sarajevo in October 2011. REUTERS

COPING WITH CHALLENGES

The Western Balkans is a diverse region with respect to ethnicity, culture and religion, and political systems and allegiances. Relationships among the region's people are often dominated by deep divisions and tensions, which occasionally escalate into armed conflict and unrest. The wars in the former Yugoslavia that preceded the creation of new Western Balkan states left a lingering legacy of interethnic tensions and unresolved territorial disputes.

The scope of the Kremlin's propaganda and disinformation methods varies depending on the country. These activities are aimed primarily at countries with closer religious and ethnic kinship to Russia, based on Slavic ancestry and Christian Orthodoxy, such as Bosnia-Herzegovina (Republika Srpska), Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

Serbia, the country with the closest political and cultural ties to Russia, is targeted by Kremlin propaganda and disinformation far more than any other. Accordingly, Russia has traditionally been perceived by the Serbian people and governments as Serbia's closest and most trustworthy ally. Despite its formal commitment to join EU structures, the current political establishment in Serbia is for the most part adhering to pro-Kremlin policies, which frequently contradict policies espoused by the EU, the United States and other Euro-Atlantic entities.

The Kremlin's propaganda and disinformation system operates on two levels in Serbia. The first involves Russian media outlets directly sponsored by the Kremlin, such as the Russia Today and affiliated Sputnik Serbia broadcasting agencies. The U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee report highlights methods these agencies use to spread their messages. For example, Sputnik Serbia provides stories and bulletins to 20 radio stations across Serbia free of charge. Russian mainstream print media is also involved in propaganda and disinformation. The Serbian newsweekly *Nedeljnik* carries the monthly supplement *R Magazin*, which is funded by the Russian government, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.

The Kremlin actively targets Serbia and other countries in the region using new technologies of mass communication, such as the internet and social media. A March 2018 report for the German think tank Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, "Propaganda and Disinformation in the Western Balkans: How the EU Can Counter Russia's Information War," by Dr. Sophie Eisentraut and Stephanie de Leon, emphasizes Kremlin efforts such as the Russian government-sponsored news supplement "Russia Beyond the Headlines." According to the report, in 2016 this media organization launched a mobile application for iOS and Android called RBTH Daily. The

Milorad Dodik, president of the Serb-controlled Bosnian entity Republika Srpska, is pictured on a billboard calling for a referendum on Statehood Day, which was ruled unconstitutional by the Bosnian Supreme Court. REUTERS

application is free and by early 2018 it was available in 14 languages, including those spoken in the Western Balkans.

The second level of the propaganda and disinformation system includes homegrown Serbian entities such as media outlets that transmit pro-Kremlin news and programs, civil society groups, humanitarian organizations and the Serbian Orthodox Church. According to the U.S. Senate report, more than 100 media outlets and nongovernmental organizations in Serbia "can be considered pro-Russian." In addition, the Kremlin successfully exploits connections between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church to espouse pro-Russian sentiments among the Serbian public and, at the same time, vilify Western democracies as anti-Serbian.

Republika Srpska, a constitutive entity of Bosnia-Herzegovina, is the main target of propaganda and disinformation activities in that country. The Republika Srpska has a predominantly ethnic Serb population, and its political leadership, heavily influenced by the Kremlin, has for many years pursued policies that are in defiance of the central government, aimed at rendering the country dysfunctional and eventually defunct. In addition, uniting with Serbia — thus dismembering Bosnia-Herzegovina — has been set as the chief goal, to such a degree that a referendum was held in 2016. Kremlin-sponsored media outlets, civil society organizations and Christian Orthodox Church affiliations have all been in the forefront of most activities supporting these secessionist ambitions.

Macedonia is also a hot spot of pro-Kremlin propaganda and disinformation. The primary goal is to incite interethnic tensions between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians to destabilize the country and disrupt its progress toward EU and NATO integration. Serbia-based websites, such as Pravda, Vaseljenska and Webtribune, are renowned as sources of Russian propaganda throughout the region. They target the mostly ethnic Macedonian public with fake news and disinformation alleging that ethnic Albanians intend to break up the country and create a "Greater Albania," partly carved out of Macedonian territory. According to this propaganda, powers such as Germany, the United Kingdom and the U.S. are the main instigators of such intentions.

Montenegro is perhaps the most illuminating case in the context of exposing the threat from propaganda and disinformation as part of a hybrid war strategy. Montenegro has for a considerable time been targeted by a Kremlin-sponsored campaign aimed at thwarting its bid to join

NATO. When it became evident that the campaign was not producing the desired effects, the Kremlin quickly reversed its soft-power strategy in favor of more violent hybrid war methods. In 2016, Montenegrin security services foiled a plot aimed at overthrowing the pro-Western Montenegrin government, a plot that included the assassination of Prime Minister Milo Đukanović. Although the Russian government denied any involvement, Montenegrin prosecutors said the plot was hatched by former Russian intelligence officers with the direct support of a notorious pro-Russian Serbian paramilitary organization, the Serbian Wolves.

THE EU COUNTERSTRATEGY

The EU and EU-affiliated organizations have not been successful in countering Kremlin-sponsored propaganda and disinformation in the Western Balkans. Despite continuous support for all countries in the region in critical areas such as democratic development, the rule of law and economic reforms, the EU has lagged considerably in exposing Kremlin-sponsored propaganda and disinformation. Even NATO, whose presence in the region — most notably in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina — has been critical in maintaining peace and stability, has not been successful.

As a result, societies under the Kremlin's propaganda and disinformation influence, such as Serbia, the Republika Srpska, ethnic Serb communities in Kosovo and Montenegro, and ethnic Macedonians in Macedonia, still view the EU and NATO with distrust. At the same time, Russia is extolled in a majority in these places as a true protector of Slavic and Orthodox Christian communities in the Western Balkans.

The EU and NATO have in fact engaged in some activities aimed at countering Kremlin-sponsored propaganda and disinformation, although with little to show. The Konrad Adenauer Stiftung report emphasizes that the European Council in 2015 established a Strategic Communications Task Force at the European External Action Service, aimed at exposing disinformation and fake news and providing media education in Eastern Europe. However, the initiative's biggest challenge was reaching the local populace since most of the program is available only in English, Russian and German, not in the languages spoken in the Western Balkans.

The EU and NATO also lag in using practices and methods that have proven successful elsewhere in Europe and beyond. For example, the Alliance for Securing Democracy, an initiative sponsored by the German Marshall Fund, has been successfully challenging Kremlin-sponsored propaganda through a monitoring project that tracks Russian propaganda in real time. Projects like this could be adjusted to Western Balkans realities by focusing on Kremlin-sponsored media outlets rather than on Twitter accounts, as is done in Germany and the U.S.

The EU's and NATO's inefficient approach to countering Kremlin-sponsored propaganda and disinformation creates a dangerous void, one that the Russian government is filling aggressively. If Russia is not deterred, the EU and NATO integration process for Western Balkan countries will be left in serious jeopardy.

> Extremist Islamist ideology, which culminated in the creation of the Islamic State, is exerting its negative influence in the Western Balkans.

RADICAL ISLAMIC IDEOLOGY

Extremist Islamist ideology, which culminated in the creation of the Islamic State, is exerting its negative influence in the Western Balkans. As with Russian efforts to expand influence in countries with sizable Christian Orthodox populations, radical Islamists are pursuing similar patterns to achieve their goals through the region's Muslim populations.

Radical Islamist goals converge with Russia's in many aspects. For instance, radical Islamist groups also intend to distract the people of the Western Balkans from the EU and NATO integration process. The core values of Euro-Atlantic democracies, such as the rule of law and civil and political rights, which Western Balkan countries are striving to promote, are prime targets of radical Islamist ideology, which in turn relies on a rigid and intolerant interpretation of Islam, embodied mostly in the Wahhabi and Salafist streams.

Propaganda and disinformation are important tools in radical Islamist efforts to create instability in the region, primarily — as with Russian efforts — by

stirring interethnic tensions, which often coincide with religious differences. In this regard, radical Islamist propaganda and disinformation seeks to portray such tensions as based on religion, rather than ethnicity. To such a purpose, the radical Islamic groups' strategies revolve around efforts to substitute Muslim religious identity for ethnic/national identity in targeted populations with the goal of transforming Muslim-majority societies, such as Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina (ethnic Bosnians), Kosovo and Macedonia (ethnic Albanians), into Islamic societies and ultimately Islamic states.

The current socio-political environment in the region is not conducive to achieving these goals; the odds of transforming Western Balkan countries with sizable Muslim populations into Islamic societies or states are meager, if not nonexistent. Radical Islamist groups cannot easily disseminate their radical views or interpretation of Islam to local Muslims, who traditionally follow the Hanafi strand of Islam, a tolerant and peaceful school of thought.

With regard to ethnic Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), such an assumption is supported by polling data. According to a 2015 poll by the Pew Research Center, "the majority of Bosnian Muslims — nearly 60 percent — believe that Islam and Christianity have shared values, and nearly a fifth of Bosnian Muslims polled — 18 percent — said they engage in interfaith meetings." In addition, the collective identity of ethnic Albanians is based on ethnic/national foundations, not religion, primarily owing to the fact that their religious faith is spread among three major religious denominations: Islam, Roman Catholicism and Christian Orthodoxy.

However, security challenges remain, and they are serious. The radical groups' propaganda and disinformation in the Western Balkans has grown significantly in recent years. In addition, their recruitment of Islamist fundamentalists from the region to fight in Syria or Iraq has reached disturbing proportions. In "De-radicalizing the Western Balkans" by Tatyana Dronzina and Sulejman Muça in the New Western Europe online magazine, approximately 900 of about 4,000 Europeans who joined the ranks of the Islamic State originated from the Western Balkans. Such a high percentage puts the region "on the top of the list in the ranking of the number of foreign fighters per capita."

Such results suggest the existence of a broad and well-functioning network capable of coordinating such activities. A closer examination indicates that networks of radical Islamist groups, operating in all countries of the region and supported mostly from Middle Eastern countries, are behind these jihadist recruitment campaigns. To achieve their goals, they rely on diverse societal strata, including Muslim clerics operating within and outside Muslim societies in the targeted countries, nongovernmental organizations and social media.

Bosnia-Herzegovina has been especially affected by radical Islamist propaganda and disinformation, which targets the 1.5 million Muslim population, about 40 percent of the country's total population. As a result, according to Dronzina and Muça, as of June 2017 at least 330 Bosniaks had gone to fight in Syria. As with the Russians, radical Islamist groups use both foreign and domestic means to spread propaganda and disinformation.

Kosovo police escort a man to court in Pristina, where he and 39 others were charged with fighting alongside extremists in Syria and Iraq.
AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Russian soldiers train near Kovin, Serbia, during Slavic Brotherhood, a joint Serbian-Russian military training exercise. Russia and Serbia maintain close ties based on culture and religion.
REUTERS

Radical Islamist groups mostly use social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. With the aim that such messages have a closer appeal to local populations, video messages are frequently disseminated in local languages and feature IS fighters originating from the region. In addition, domestic propaganda and disinformation are best exemplified by two genuine entities in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sharia villages and unofficial mosques, called *paradzemati*. Sharia villages are populated by Muslim families who wish to live according to strict Islamic rules. These villages, according to Dronzina and Muça, are frequently "locations where illegal activities are conducted in support of the jihadist movement, such as stockpiling of arms and military training."

The radicalization of Bosnian society is also carried out through the paradzemati, which operate outside the official and legally recognized Islamic community, or Islamska Zajednica. These unofficial mosques are often used by extremist imams to disseminate extremist messages to their congregations. According to "Balkan Jihadists: The Radicalization and Recruitment of Fighters in Syria and Iraq," by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, 64 paradzemati operate in Bosnia.

Bosnia-Herzegovina has felt the effects of such propaganda and disinformation. Radicalized people or groups have carried out terrorist attacks, such as a bombing near a police station in Bugojno in 2010, and three separate attacks by gunmen, one on the U.S. Embassy in Sarajevo in 2011, another on a police station in Zvornik in 2015, and the third on a betting shop in Rajlovac in 2015. Collectively, these attacks resulted in four police officers being killed and a dozen people being wounded.

Kosovo, a country of about 2 million inhabitants, the majority of whom are ethnic Albanians of the Muslim religion, is also experiencing the effects of radical Islamist ideology. Until two years ago, Kosovo led European countries in per capita participation in the Syrian war, but the number has dramatically decreased, owing primarily to the robust actions of Kosovo authorities to forestall radical Islamist propaganda and disinformation.

Radical Islamist propaganda and disinformation, which preceded the flux of Kosovar jihadist fighters to Syria, still represent a serious security threat to Kosovo society and the state. The modes of operation are multifaceted and hark back to 1999, when the United Nations Interim Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) assumed the role of primary governing body in postwar Kosovo. Disguised mostly as humanitarian and charity organizations, many radical Islamist groups — supported by sources in the Middle East espousing radical Islamist ideology — took advantage of the situation to set up contingents throughout Kosovo. In a 2016 article in *The New York Times*, Carlotta Gall found that, owing to the activity of radical Islamist groups disguised as humanitarian organizations, the Wahhabi and Salafist interpretations of Islam became enrooted in Kosovo.

The dissemination of Wahhabi and Salafist teachings is carried out through a diverse set of methods and tools. Since the onset of the UNMIK administration, Kosovo has seen many Saudi-style mosques constructed, with the aim of providing an ambience in which congregations would find themselves more receptive to the new extremist messages and become further alienated from the Hanafi teachings predominant in Kosovo's traditional Ottoman-style mosques. This architectural enterprise was augmented by former Kosovar students, who returned from their studies in Saudi Arabian universities imbued with radical Wahhabi and Salafist ideas and began propagating them as imams in the mosques. When the moderate Islamic Society of Kosovo began expelling such radical imams, they continued with a semi-clandestine campaign. According to Gall, the goal of these radical Islamist groups was "to create conflict between people [because] this first creates division, and then hatred, and then [war] starts because of these conflicting ideas."

As with the isolated terrorist attacks that occurred in Bosnia-Herzegovina, propaganda and disinformation from radical Islamist groups in Kosovo must be taken seriously. An attempt in 2015 by a homegrown radical Islamist group to poison the main dam supplying drinking water to Pristina — foiled by the Kosovo police — stands as a warning that such propaganda and disinformation are producing the intended effects.

Macedonia is also experiencing radical Islamist propaganda and disinformation activity. According to data from its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as of March 2016 about 140 Macedonian soldiers had joined the Islamic State in Syria. Twenty were killed. As in the case of other Western Balkan countries, propaganda and disinformation is geared toward exploiting the grievances of ethnic groups of Muslim faith by adding a religious ingredient. The ethnic Albanian population, along with some smaller ethnic groups such as Bosniaks, Turks, Roma, Egyptians and Pomaks, constitute most of the Muslim population in Macedonia. Ethnic Albanians alone are about 25 percent (509,083) of the country's total population, and as such have been the main target of radical Islamist groups.

Radical Islamist propaganda and disinformation was initially carried out by leveraging mosques and other Muslim religious entities, which were part of the Islamic Community in Macedonia (Bashkësia Fetare Islame e Maqedonisë, or BFIM, in Albanian, or Islamska Verska Zaednica na Makedonija, or IVZM, in Macedonian), a legal entity representing the Muslims in the country. As such, Wahhabi groups have engaged in infighting with moderate imams in a bid to take control of the BFIM/IVZM and leverage it for propaganda purposes. This strategy has resulted

in keeping the effects of radical Islamist propaganda and disinformation in Macedonia constrained within Muslim society and less influential in the socio-political developments of the country.

The situation in **Albania** is similar to that in other Western Balkans countries with a sizable Muslim population. It is estimated that about 90 fighters from Albania joined the Islamic State and that many of them were killed or went missing. As is the case with other countries of the region and their respective nationals, the number of Albanians going to war in Syria and Iraq has decreased dramatically over the past two years; no Albanian is known to have joined an Islamic terrorist group fighting in that region during this time.

The phenomenon of dissemination of Wahhabi and Salafist teachings in Albania is explained through socio-political developments during the transition from communist rule to democracy, dating to the early 1990s. According to Dronzina and Muça, the anti-religious policy of the Albanian communist regime, which in the 1960s culminated in the banning of all religions in the country, making it the first officially atheist country in the world, was key to enrooting Wahhabi and Salafist ideology among religious Muslim Albanians. They cite Ylli Gurra, a prominent Muslim cleric and mufti in Tirana, who stated: "Islam in Albania remained 'exposed' after a majority of the old Muslim clerics had passed away and no younger ones came to replace them. This spiritual vacuum was taken advantage of by foreign powers, such as religious organizations from Saudi Arabia, which invested in infrastructure and education of young Albanian Muslims in the spirit of Wahhabism."

The influence of radical Islamist groups' propaganda and disinformation is proving detrimental to Albania's security, as indicated by a foiled terrorist attack in the city of Shkodra in 2016 aimed at the Israeli national football team, which was playing Albania in a World Cup qualifier. In a coordinated action, police from Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia arrested 19 Kosovar and six Albanian and Macedonian nationals in connection to the planned attack.

COUNTERING PROPAGANDA, DISINFORMATION

Western Balkan countries affected by the propaganda and disinformation of Russia and radical Islamist groups must find ways to thwart these efforts to stay on course for EU and NATO integration. Taken together, Russian- and radical Islamist-sponsored propaganda and disinformation — fueling existing interethnic tensions and/or seeking to add a religious ingredient — constitute a dangerous cocktail that, if not countered, could seriously disrupt the fragile regional peace and stability. Given that this is a threat to the Western Balkans as a whole, devising a comprehensive strategy based on close and full regional cooperation is a necessary precondition. In addition, substantive and proactive engagement from the EU and NATO would be extremely beneficial.

Countering Russian propaganda and disinformation will require the creation of clear and well-elaborated objectives and goals, based on joint multilateral efforts by Western Balkan countries, and the EU and NATO. Each Western Balkan country must make an unequivocal commitment to full and unconditional EU and NATO integration. Some regional governments — Serbia, the Republika Srpska in Bosnia-Herzegovina and until recently, Macedonia (during the government led by the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-People's Party, or VRMO-NP) — espoused the "two-seat" policy, but it has to be abandoned. It entailed maintaining close relations with Russia while declaring support for integration with the EU.

Both the EU and NATO must take a more proactive role in supporting Western Balkan countries in thwarting Kremlin-sponsored propaganda and disinformation. In this regard, successful EU and NATO efforts to counter Kremlin activities should be used in the Western Balkans in close cooperation with regional governments. Platforms akin to the European Center of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, launched by Finland in 2017 with the support of the EU and NATO, might be introduced in the Western Balkans to provide training and research to respond to propaganda and disinformation, including cyber attacks. Such platforms could be extended to include nongovernmental organizations and think tanks, such as the Kremlin Watch Monitor, launched in 2015 and headquartered in Prague, Czech Republic, which engages in fact checking and analysis of Kremlin-backed propaganda and disinformation.

Countering radical Islamist propaganda and disinformation requires a strategy that employs both punitive measures and the reintegration of radicalized individuals. Enacting laws that criminalize the participation in foreign armed conflicts, augmented by harsher sentencing of violators, is the right approach. Following enactment of such laws in 2014-15, every affected country in the region experienced a dramatic decrease in citizens leaving to fight in Syria and Iraq.

Punitive measures must be augmented by awareness campaigns exposing the true nature and intentions of radical Islamic ideology, tailored according to the specifics of each affected Balkan country. Such campaigns must include all levels of society, down to the grassroots, by focusing on the younger generation, who are the main target of Islamist radicalization. Interviews, public speeches and public discussions with repentant former radicals, carried out by civil society groups, could be a powerful tool in exposing the true nature of jihadist ideology and how it is disseminated. □

The Scourge of FAKE NEWS

PER CONCORDIAM ILLUSTRATION

Inoculating societies against propaganda

By **Judith Reid, Ph.D.**

The Zika virus sneaked into the United States as a stowaway in the saliva of a common mosquito. Similarly, seeds of public dissent and discord are spreading through American social media, carried by Russian trolls and bots. Negative information campaigns are not new. The tactic was used by Adolf Hitler to justify the Austrian Anschluss, and more recently by Russian President Vladimir Putin regarding the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in eastern Ukraine. How do Central and Eastern European countries keep these "mosquitos" at bay and, if bitten, develop antidotes to the toxins?

The U.S. has been under a misinformation siege for several years. The Russians manipulated public opinion through all facets of social media to influence the 2016 national elections and even the 2018 gun control debate after a mass school shooting in Florida. Ukraine's loss of territory was preceded for years by a well-executed false information campaign.

How does society guard against this plague? Not just from large nations with a taste for territorial expansion, such as Russia, but also from smaller bands of nonstate actors with desires for power and control? Are there clues in the cultural bodies of would-be victims that could be used to repel this negative media onslaught?

This article delves into the cultural paradigms of the U.S., Russia and numerous Central and Eastern European countries to identify the vulnerabilities that can open countries to outside influences and to explain how countries can guard against disinformation attacks.

Propaganda and culture

The U.S. is perpetually open to disinformation campaigns because free speech is a key tenet of its government and society. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution ensures the right of free speech for everyone. Any citizen or guest can spread truths, beliefs, rumors and fake news with relative impunity. Social media platforms now tailor news feeds according to the tracked reading habits and interests of the individual. In business, this is called micro-marketing to the individual. In public discourse, it reinforces existing opinions.

How can a country's cultural profile, such as the core value of free speech, be used to illuminate vulnerabilities to propaganda's bites and stings? How can understanding the cultural underpinnings of a society guide leaders to preventive measures and post-infection ointments? Propaganda mosquitos are pervasive throughout the world. How do leaders and citizens keep from getting bitten?


UCABISTA
The Man

Hofstede's paradigm

In his book, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind, Intercultural Cooperation and Its Importance for Survival*, Geert Hofstede presents six underlying pillars of every culture: power distance index, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance index, long-term orientation versus short-term normative orientation, and indulgence versus restraint. Whether it's a country's sense of nationalism, a business's organizational culture, or a private club's way of doing business, all established groups develop and maintain a culture that can be arrayed using these indices. Understanding these pillars for any society can illuminate potential strengths and weaknesses against foreign influences.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

0 — 100

Low Power Distance	- PDI +	High Power Distance
Collectivistic	- IDV +	Individualistic
Feminine	- MAS +	Masculine
Low Uncertainty Avoidance	- UAI +	High Uncertainty Avoidance
Short-Term Orientation	- LTO +	Long-Term Orientation
Restraint	- IVR +	Indulgence

Source: www.geert-hofstede.com

For example, the power distance index (PDI) highlights the use of hierarchy in a country. If a country has a rigid class system with numerous layers, then it has a high PDI. If societal layers are more fluid and the hierarchy flat, then it has low PDI. In high-PDI countries, separation between the elite and the proletariat is almost complete. Centralized management, rigid inequality and formal rules mark the world of governance. There are seemingly unending chains of superiors without decision authority, and relations between subordinate and superior are based on emotion. Might trumps right, the leaders have privilege, power and status, autocratic and oligarchic governments are based on co-optation, and the elite are protected from the consequences of scandals. Hierarchies can be deep and rigid, like military organizations, or have only a few impermeable layers, as seen in poorer countries with a small middle class. According to Hofstede, countries with a high PDI quotient include Slovakia, Russia, Romania and Serbia.

University students protest in Caracas in 2010 after Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez shut down a television station critical of his government. An independent media is essential to combating fake news.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Hofstede arrays countries by their individualism versus collectivism (IDV). Countries high on the IDV index are known for their individualism, rights to privacy, merit promotion and equal treatment under the law. The U.S. and United Kingdom are two of the most individualistic countries in the world. More collectivist countries honor the group over the individual and seek harmony and consensus over self-actualization. In low-IDV groups, prevailing opinions are determined by group membership, the state plays a key role in the economic system, and rights differ by group. In these countries, relationships trump tasks, the social network is the main source of information, and people are born into families that protect them throughout life in exchange for loyalty. Countries with a high IDV quotient include Hungary, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland and the Czech Republic. Romania, Slovenia and Serbia represent countries that are more collectivist.

The masculinity versus femininity index (MAS) distinguishes a society's sense of competition versus cooperation and assertiveness versus modesty. In a highly masculine society, importance is placed on earning, recognition, advancement and challenge versus a more feminine society, where the goal is to have good working relationships, a desirable living situation and employment security. In more masculine societies, gender roles are separate and distinct. Men are responsible, decisive and ambitious; women are caring, gentle and support the success of their men. In highly masculinized societies, men are subjects and women are objects, sexual harassment is an issue, and homosexuality is seen as a threat to society. In feminine government, politics is based on coalitions, government aids the needy, and international conflicts are best settled through negotiation and compromise. According to Hofstede, highly masculinized countries include Slovakia, Hungary and Poland, whereas more feminine societies include Latvia, Slovenia and Lithuania.

The uncertainty avoidance index (UAI) measures the extremes to which a society's people will go to avoid encountering the unknown. "The evil that I know is better than the good that I don't" could be their slogan. In high UAI countries, uncertainty is a constant threat that should be avoided. Ambiguity and unfamiliar situations cause stress, and what is different is considered dangerous. Rules and laws are important, precision and formalization are desired. There is an inherent belief in experts and technical solutions. Citizens are not interested in politics, and civil servants tend to have law degrees. There is a preponderance of precise laws and unwritten rules. Xenophobia, nationalism and protecting the "in group" are important facets of

high-UAI countries. Russia, Poland, Serbia, Romania and Slovenia score high on the UAI scale. There are no low-UAI Central or Eastern European countries.

In the long-term orientation versus short-term normative orientation (LTO) scale, persistence, thrift, ordered relationships and a sense of shame are important versus reciprocation, respect for tradition, protecting face and personal stability. In high-LTO societies, work values include honesty, accountability and self-discipline. What is good or bad is situationally determined, and adaptiveness and learning are important. The focus is on market position and profits in 10 years. Countries high on the LTO scale include Ukraine, Estonia, Lithuania, Russia and Belarus.

Indulgence versus restraint (IVR) measures happiness, life control and the importance of leisure. In restrained societies, gratification is curbed and controlled by strict social norms. These societies exhibit a sense of helplessness, moral discipline, cynicism, pessimism and a lower percentage of happy people. Here, freedom of speech is not a main concern, though maintaining order is. There are no Central or Eastern European countries high on the IVR scale. Those gathered on the extremely restrained side include Latvia, Ukraine, Albania, Belarus, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Estonia.

With these six pillars of cultural paradigms, Hofstede provides clues to societal vulnerabilities and natural defenses from metaphorical tsetse flies disguised as online friends.

The U.S. versus Russia

Viewed through Hofstede's cultural indices (and graded on a scale of 0-100) Vladimir Putin comes from an overarching culture that believes strongly in inherent hierarchy, and Putin wants to be at the top (PDI-93), which he sees as for the greater global good (IDV-39 and MAS-36). He has a strong need to control (UAI-95) and is willing to play the long game (LTO-81 and IVR-20) to achieve his vision of success. By contrast, U.S. President Donald Trump was born of a culture of flat hierarchies (PDI-40) and very high individualism (IDV-91), where anyone with a dream and enough gumption can succeed. The overarching culture of the U.S. is fairly competitive (MAS-62), risk taking (UAI-46), with little restraint (IVR-68) and very short attention spans (LTO-26).

It would be fair to suspect that Putin sees the U.S. as a very easy mark to influence through propaganda. He likely sees Americans as narcissistic children with short attention spans who can be easily hooked through social media. He can appeal to America's sense of superiority and to its inherent optimism and future focus to undercut public messaging through a thousand mosquito-like bites on the internet. Those bites will irritate and cause some scratching, but are just enough under the pain threshold to be ignored as attention stays riveted to phones and computers, to "likes" and "shares."

Russia's high uncertainty avoidance was noted in a front-page article in *The Washington Post* titled "The Putin Generation," in which a young journalist is quoted as saying: "What the Russian soul demands is that there be one strong politician in the country who resembles a czar." Even though Putin controls the main television channels, the security services and the judiciary, most of the country supports him. They feel that he will stand up to U.S. aggression and that he can keep everything in balance. One 18-year-old is quoted as saying that open government corruption is upsetting, "but this is no time for an untested leader ... making change could lead to the collapse of the country."

Even though Putin controls the main television channels, the security services and the judiciary, most of the country supports him.

Fake news swarms the American information space like Zika-infected mosquitos. When the U.S. finally wakes up to this danger, how much damage will have been done, and will it be possible to repel further invasion? On the positive side, the very cultural bias that can be exploited to Putin's advantage is also the saving grace that can pull the U.S. out of the trap. IDV and IVR wrapped in patriotism and love of freedom will eventually awaken to the irritation and will resist the invasion with every antibody in its being.

European cultural frameworks

What clues can culture provide on the vulnerabilities of European countries? Germany is more like the U.S. than Russia, with a lower PDI (35), mid-IDV (67) and MAS (66) and a UAI (65) that is between the U.S. (46) and Russia (95). Both Germany and Russia are long-term oriented and more restrained than not. It would be interesting to study the profiles of Georgia and Ukraine, but there is not enough data to be of assistance in this model. Ukraine is very long-term oriented and very restrained. Georgia falls in the

A shop assistant in Moscow arranges T-shirts bearing images of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Despite a realization among Russians that their government is authoritarian, Putin enjoys strong popular support.
AFP/GETTY IMAGES

low- to midrange on both LTO and IVR, but the other four criteria have no data.

In another article, this author discussed the combination of high PDI and high UAI and how environments with those characteristics were ripe for dictators, because the population honored rigid hierarchies and were so averse to uncertainty as to do almost anything and suffer almost any circumstance just to know the likely outcome of any daily transaction. The countries that still have that cultural profile include Russia (PDI-93/UAI-95), Romania (PDI-90/UAI-90) and Serbia (PDI-86/UAI-92). The danger here is the acceptance by the common person that inequity is normal, coupled with the willingness to do anything to maintain the status quo. In this environment, a bully could force his way in through media or force and declare a new order with a fair chance of success.

Other countries that have a midrange PDI with high uncertainty avoidance include Croatia (PDI-73/UAI-80), Slovenia (PDI-71/UAI-88), Bulgaria (PDI-70/UAI-85) and Poland (PDI-68/UAI-93). These countries still cling to the status quo, but give less credence to a rigid hierarchy. Collectivism is the norm in Croatia (IDV-33), Slovenia (IDV-27) and Bulgaria (IDV-30), with Poland more individualistic (IDV-60). What this means in terms of an aggressive, negative strategic communications plan is that outside forces would want to target elements of uncertainty avoidance. How could outsiders upset the sense of predictability to make segments of a population cling to malicious messages? They would not have the advantage of high PDI, meaning a recognition that rigid hierarchy is normal, so the combination of high uncertainty avoidance (the world as we know it is changing fast) with high collectivism (and we are all in it together) would be the key approach to propaganda — less "strong man" and more "every man is in danger."

Hungary has an interesting profile. It shows a midrange PDI (46), high individualism (80), high masculine (88) and high uncertainty avoidance (82). Its long-term orientation (58) and indulgence (31) are both midrange. With high IDV, MAS and UAI, it is vulnerable to messages of inadequacies of the male ego.

Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia each have low PDI scores (44, 42, 40) and midrange uncertainty avoidance (63, 65, 60), but they vary some in individualism (70, 60, 60) and in masculinity (9, 19, 30). A low PDI and midrange UAI would signal that negative messaging should address a general sense of unease and exploit an uncertainty that is common to most people within these countries, such as a sense of safety or scarcity.

Activists, some wearing masks depicting Russian President Vladimir Putin, perform a tug of war in front of the Dutch Embassy in Kyiv, Ukraine, in March 2016. The activists called on Dutch citizens to ignore Russian propaganda against Ukraine in advance of a vote on Ukraine's association agreement with the European Union. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Cultural vulnerabilities are most often opaque within one's own society, which can easily make a simple walk through the woods become a dengue-infected nip on the neck.

Outsider cultural clues

At its root, propaganda is an exaggeration of collective emotions, Jason Stanley writes in his book, *How Propaganda Works*. How does an outsider pull emotional strings inside another country?

- **Time orientation:** Cultures are oriented to the past, present or future, according to work by anthropologist Edward T. Hall. Leaders should pay attention to outside messages that pull public emotions into the time orientation that corresponds to the culture at risk. In Venezuela, Hugo Chávez's method of gaining the middle-age vote was to conjure up a past when the government was "mired in corruption, incompetence, and poor management," William J. Dobson writes in *The Dictator's Learning Curve: Inside the Global Battle for Democracy*.
- **Rational language:** According to Stanley, language is a mechanism that allows negative strategic messaging to work. It presents an idea as rational, when upon closer examination, it is not. The negative statement is not exactly lying; rather it presents an element of truth while encouraging the reader to fill in the details to create an emotional message that can override rational judgment. For example, shortly after the mass shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, online stories claimed that some victims were really "crisis actors," and Russian bots engaged in the gun control debate to sow chaos and confusion.
- **Over simplification:** In *Red Scared!: The Commie Menace in Propaganda and Popular Culture*, Michael Barson and Steven Heller note that "propaganda is based on the creation of recognizable stereotypes that oversimplify complex issues for the purpose of controlling mass opinion." Using this approach, the U.S. government encouraged anti-communist "red-baiting" in the media during the Cold War.
- **Snowball conspiracy:** Lisa-Maria Neudert of the Oxford Internet Institute's computational propaganda project notes that Facebook's and Google's advertising technologies target specific groups and individuals with misleading and conspiratorial content since that content generates the most engagement and keeps readers

"on the page," a key metric used by social media companies. Guillaume Chaslot, a former Google engineer, says the algorithms used in social media are designed to keep people engaged. For example, a conspiracy video that is favored by the algorithm encourages others to upload similar videos corroborating the conspiracy, which increases the retention statistics and continues the snowball effect until the conspiracy appears to be somewhat credible. This creates what Neudert calls an "environment that maximizes for outrage."

Like the West Nile virus hijacking a ride on a mosquito, outside agents can ride in on a hot summer evening to infect the information flow within any country.

Reinforcing authoritarian rule

Fear is the emotional tool of choice for dictators to control their populations through strategic messaging. Chávez's leadership provides useful insights into the use of fear as reflected in Venezuela's uncertainty avoidance.

- **Chaos and division:** After Chávez won the support of the general population in Venezuela, he championed chaos and division. He disallowed dissent, calling those who questioned his brand of revolution "traitors, criminals, oligarchs, mafia, and lackeys of the United States. Although he originally promised to break the political parties in order to return power to the people, Chavez … centralized nearly all power in his own hands," Dobson writes.
- **Fear:** María Corina Machado, co-founder of a Venezuelan election watchdog group, noted that Venezuelans did not believe their ballots were secret. About 5.6 million Venezuelans depended on government income and believed that their votes could be seen by the government, so they perpetuated the public adoration of Chávez to protect their livelihood. As Machado notes in Dobson's book, "Fear does not leave fingerprints. … It has been Chávez's biggest and best-used instrument from day one."
- **Uncertainty:** In 2009, Chávez closed 34 radio stations for supposed administrative infractions and announced it was investigating hundreds more. The government never identified the other stations under investigation, which kept the entire industry in check. In this way, Dobson notes, the media could exist, but the content was self-censored by those very radio stations for fear of retaliation.
- **Political apathy:** According to Dobson, "Widespread political apathy is the grease that helps any authoritarian system hum. And in the smoothest-functioning authoritarian systems, the regimes have gone to great lengths to turn disinterest in political life into a public virtue."

Like the insidious Anopheles mosquito, the risk of "informational malaria" is constantly looming in the background.

Protecting society

How can a nation inoculate itself to the effects of fake news or negative messaging campaigns?

- **Open discussion:** Free and open discourse in the public arena is key to uncovering fake news and other messages streaming into online and public consciousness. People should counter political apathy by discussing current events with a wide variety of other people with differing views.
- **Freedom of the press:** News and information feeds should remain free of bias and come from many differing viewpoints. An independent media is essential for exposing wrongs, conspiracies and corruption. Free TV and public media help disseminate a wide variety of political and social viewpoints.
- **Critical thinking:** According to Stanley, "the antidote is to retain a core of critical thinking, to question emotional messages and to fact check anything that smacks of fake news. Deconstruct the message to uncover the fixed truth (assumed) versus the variable that takes the message into falsehood. Think of what facts are omitted, ponder the inverse of the message. Reset the conversation to focus it appropriately."
- **Humor:** In Chávez's Venezuela, the opposition created a public communications campaign featuring a farcical Miss Venezuela, who refused to give up her crown and was now old and ugly, as a way to suggest that Chávez should relinquish his position. As Dobson notes, humor undermines the other's authority and is the best cure against fear.

Open discussion, freedom of the press, critical thinking and humor have roots in the cultural paradigms of power distance, individualism and uncertainty avoidance. Studying how these cultural elements impact an open society can illuminate key antidotes to protect countries against the scourge of fake images and fake news.

Conclusion

Information warfare is widespread throughout the world. Those who cultivate it and release the swarms of propaganda against other nations have studied the cultural vulnerabilities of their targets. They use emotional language, irrational logic, oversimplification and snowball conspiracy to soften their enemy's defenses. To keep from getting bitten or infected, Central European leaders and citizens should encourage open discussion, freedom of the press, critical thinking and humor. □


RUSSIA
OCCUPANT
RUSSIA
STOP
Black
Sea
GEORGIA

PER CONCORDIAM ILLUSTRATION

Defending Against HYBRID THREATS

Georgia needs institutional resilience in its national security decision-making

BY TAMAR BAZGADZE

The term "hybrid warfare" has become a cryptic buzzword in the Euro-Atlantic security community. Yet its analytical-added value lies in its usefulness in achieving conceptual clarity regarding the complex security environment and in refining national security decision-making.

The term emerged in the context of Hezbollah's fight against Israel, where it exemplified how a nonstate actor could use a tool kit of conventional and unconventional means to face off against a modern state. Hybrid warfare, in defense analyst Frank Hoffman's words, constitutes a "blend of the lethality of state conflict with the fanatical and protracted fervor of irregular war." However, the term achieved mainstream usage after Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula and initiated an offensive in eastern Ukraine, where the Hezbollah-Israel paradigm was turned on its head. Russia, a powerful nuclear-armed state, used hybrid tactics against a sovereign country and in the process shook the foundations of the European security architecture to its core.

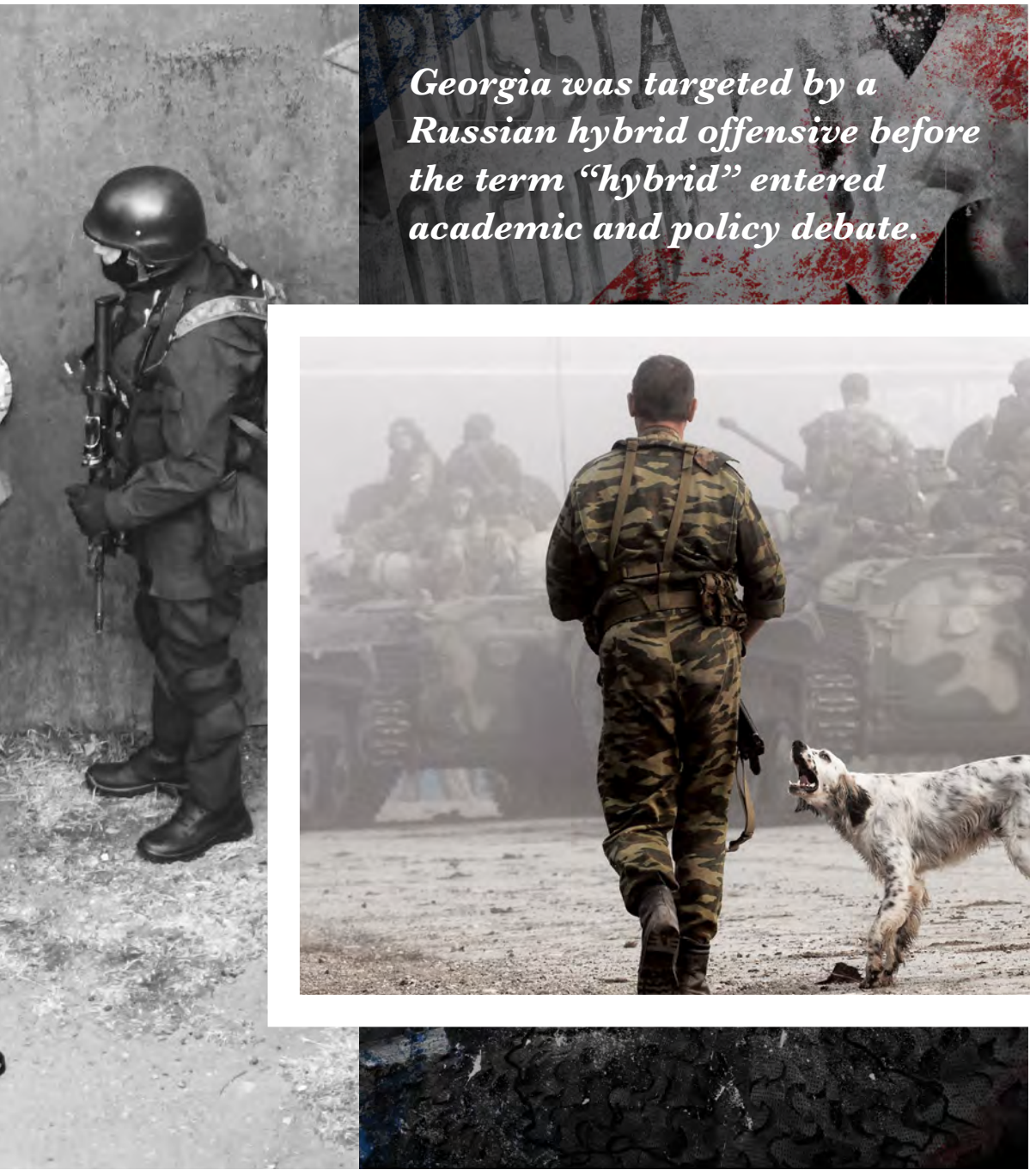
The concept behind the term hybrid warfare seems to lack underlying consensus due to an atomization of the conceptual framework and a failure to embrace strategic linkages within holistic phenomenon serving a strategic end state. The modus operandi of a hybrid offensive incorporates a wide range of overt and covert military, paramilitary and nonmilitary means that are employed

Georgian security forces prepare to apprehend terrorism suspects in Tbilisi in November 2017. REUTERS

in a highly integrated way while staying below the threshold of formally declared warfare. By blurring the lines between war and peace and eroding *casus belli*, these nonlinear attacks target vulnerabilities to destabilize states, distort situational awareness and create ambiguity to hinder decision-making. Targeting decision-making processes is a major aspect of hybrid warfare. Igniting contradictions, ambiguities and uncertainties can buy time to establish facts on the ground and gain strategic advantage long before the opponent can identify and categorize a threat.

Interfering with an opponent's decision-making process was integral to Russian military thinking well before the hybrid war era. It was embedded in the Soviet's reflexive control theory, which can be used against either human- or computer-based decision-making processes. Reflexive control is about influencing the decisions of an opponent by shaping its perceptions. Perception is an active process, which constructs rather than records reality. Soviet military scholar Vladimir Lefebvre, who developed the reflexive control theory, put it this way:

"In making his decision the adversary uses information about the area of conflict, about his own troops and ours, about their ability to fight, etc. We can influence his channels of information and send messages which shift the flow of information in a way favorable for us. The adversary uses the most contemporary method of optimization and finds



Georgia was targeted by a Russian hybrid offensive before the term "hybrid" entered academic and policy debate.

A dog barks at a Russian soldier in the Georgian city of Senaki after Russia invaded the country in August 2008.
REUTERS

the optimal decision. However, it will not be a true optimum, but a decision predetermined by us. In order to make our own effective decision, we should know how to deduce the adversary's decision based on information he believes is true. The unit modeling the adversary serves the purpose of simulating his decisions under different conditions and choosing the most effective informational influence."

Russian hybrid warfare, incorporating reflexive control measures, creates plausible deniability intended to neutralize the opponent's operational thinking. This brings up the central question: How does a state think and how does it institutionalize the process of thinking? When the decision-making process is targeted, how does the state secure its strategic function? Cultural, structural and normative impediments in Georgia's national security decision-making expose how internal institutional dysfunction can be the biggest threat to the country's hybrid defense.

RUSSIA'S HYBRID OFFENSIVE

Georgia was targeted by a Russian hybrid offensive before the term "hybrid" entered academic and policy debate. After the Soviet Union came apart in 1991, Moscow started to experience phantom pains for its lost empire, with Russian President Vladimir Putin later declaring that the Soviet Union's dissolution was "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century."

The war, as part of Russia's "salami-slicing" strategy, didn't start in 2008 and it didn't end there.

Georgian, British and American soldiers ride in armored vehicles during the joint Noble Partner training exercise at the Vaziani Military Base near Tbilisi. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Georgians rally in Tbilisi against Russian actions in South Ossetia, where Russia placed border markers, leaving part of an international oil pipeline in territory under Russian control. REUTERS

An up-close-and-personal look at Russia's historical and cultural fabric exposes the internal drivers of Russian foreign policy offensives in the post-Soviet space and beyond. The linkages between internal drivers and their external projection play out in Moscow's quest for spheres of influence. Russia's internal vulnerability, caused by its historical evolution, its model of governance and the internal contradictions of its systemic legitimacy, leads to the securitization of its identity and sets imperatives and constraints on Russia's foreign policy options. Russia's strategic culture pushes for expansion in order to prevent internal implosion. It partially reflects the fear that the successful transition of its former satellite republics into prosperous, pluralistic, democratic polities might stir demands for similar transformation inside Russia.

To reassert its status as a great power with global reach, Russia needs to secure its buffer zone, infamously declared a "sphere of privileged interests" by former President Dmitry Medvedev in 2008. To do so, since 1991 Russia has been leveraging multiple pressure points to exercise negative control on the foreign and security policies of the countries falling under that umbrella.

Among those critical pressure points are the so-called frozen conflicts — Abkhazia (Georgia), the Tskhinvali Region (also called South Ossetia, Georgia), Nagorno-Karabakh (Armenia and Azerbaijan), Transnistria (Moldova) and most recently Donbas (Ukraine) — which have been stoked and modulated by Moscow using proxy forces. These conflicts are not frozen; however, their peace processes are. Continuing to use the term "frozen" creates a false sense of stability and security when the reality is that unresolved differences and protracted tensions are fueling animosities, entrenching and strengthening hostile narratives, and pushing confrontational policies, making these conflicts easily susceptible to flare-ups. The situation on the ground is aggravated by the complete lack of international arms control and security mechanisms (the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty is practically useless). That leads to the militarization of the region and grants Russia escalation control.

Along with these protracted conflicts, Russia has used a wide spectrum of economic, political, energy, social and informational pressure points in Georgia to facilitate the collapse of critical state institutions and functions needed to successfully transition from a totalitarian to a democratic state. In sum, Russia has been targeting Georgia's independent development as a sovereign state and the way of life it chose to pursue. To halt Georgia's strategic rapprochement with the West and its integration into the trans-Atlantic security community, the Kremlin orchestrated a full-scale military invasion in August 2008, defying international law and the European security order.

The war, as part of Russia's "salami-slicing" strategy, didn't start in 2008 and it didn't end there. To secure and advance its gains, Russia started to employ multidimensional hybrid tactics — measures short of war — including the recognition and militarization of Georgia's breakaway regions, setting in motion a process of creeping occupation, using what some analysts inaccurately refer to as soft power tools. "Soft power is," as defined by the political scientist Joseph Nye, "the ability to get what you want through attraction and persuasion rather than threats and coercion."

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, left, and then-Georgian Prime Minister Georgy Kvirikashvili speak to the press after a NATO-Georgia Commission meeting in Tbilisi in September 2016. REUTERS

Real soft power rests in culture, political values and foreign policies seen as legitimate and carrying moral authority. In Russia's case, information warfare and narrative culture are used offensively to discredit Western values and to undermine the credibility of liberal democracy and Western institutions without putting forward any viable alternative model of development.

ADDRESSING HYBRID THREATS

The Georgian Strategic Defence Review 2017-2020 acknowledged hybrid warfare as a threat to Georgia's sovereignty and national security, though there are no "silver bullet" strategies, or purely military, diplomatic or economic solutions to this threat. For starters, it is critical to consider how we think about sustainable security, and whether existing models and approaches are relevant for the complex security environment. The broadening of the concept of security now entails a qualitatively different, comprehensive approach to security policy that integrates all the instruments of national power. The philosophy of comprehensive security was adopted by Georgia and incorporated in SDR 2017-2020 as a "total defense" approach to defense policy. Total defense — requiring total commitment to security — should rest upon the coherent and efficient interaction of all security stakeholders (military and civilian), on different levels, ensured by a carefully designed national security policy process. Yet, in Georgia's case the execution of a comprehensive security approach might be hindered by a lack of systemic infrastructure for decision-making.

With the constitutional changes adopted in 2010, Georgia shifted from a presidential to a parliamentary model of governance. Constitutional amendments and ensuing structural reforms significantly affected Georgia's security sector, its organizational setup and its strategic decision-making pattern. Today, the government takes the lead with considerably increased authority in national security. Even though the mandate to conduct foreign and security policy has transferred from the president to the prime minister, the president remains the head of state and commander in chief of the Armed Forces, as well as the guarantor of the country's territorial integrity and national independence.

Executive roles in national security come with strategic functions and a system of decision-formulation and implementation. Strategic functions are based on how a state defines national interests, understands notions of security and defense, and how it secures their adequate and efficient execution. Initially, according to the Constitution, the National Security Council (NSC), under the president, served as the main advisory body in security policy formulation. After responsibility transferred to the prime minister, the State Security and Crisis Management Council (SSCMC) was set up to provide the chief executive with a national security decision-support system. Cohabitation of the two security councils in adapting to a dynamic security context sparked a harsh debate about the efficiency of national security decision-making. But according to the new round of constitutional amendments and structural reforms initiated in 2017, both councils as we know them

will cease to exist. The SSCMC has already been succeeded by an emergency management center that is tasked to perform operational and tactical functions only. The NSC will be replaced by the National Defence Council, which will function only during war and will be chaired by the president. The emerging status quo for strategic-level policy and decision-making leaves the comprehensive approach to national security in Georgia hanging in the balance.

Policymakers often refer to institution building as the main policy approach to security sector reform, which is not a one-off act, but rather a complex adaptive process. And institution building is more than simply organization building; establishing new entities without the means and capacity to generate institutional memory, can lead to pseudomorphism and institutional mutation. If there is no mechanism to provide vertical coherence between macro and micro policy levels, and changes are attempted locally without taking into consideration the global systemic context, reform efforts are doomed to fail.

Georgia's National Defence Council could fall into this trap. Within the ambiguity of hybrid warfare, deciding what constitutes an act of war can be a complex political decision, and it is still not clear, in a situation approaching that threshold, how accurate informational and analytical support will be provided for the decision-making process, especially considering that modern democratic practice requires institutional checks and balances on decision-making. To partially address the structural vacuum, a permanent interagency commission on state defense policy planning, chaired by the minister of defence, was set up to discuss national-level defense policy concepts, submit national defense readiness plans to the government, and ensure the coordination of national defense policy planning and implementation. Though the commission is not authorized to carry out the national security review process, which is a key function defined by the National Security Concept of Georgia.

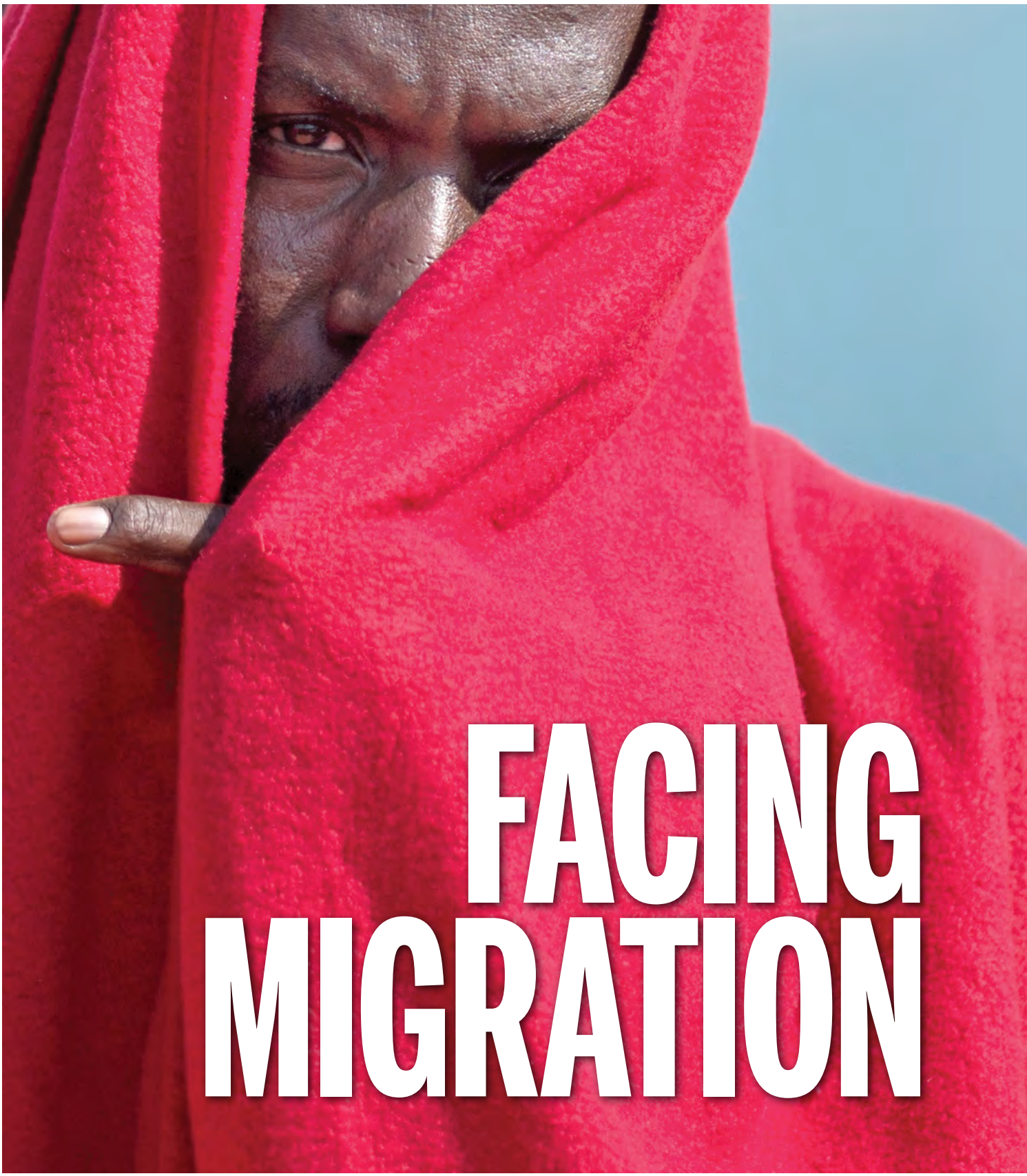
The lack of a complex, adaptive security system, with a systemic approach to decision-making and a supreme interagency coordination body at the highest political level, manifests itself in a grand strategic deficit and could leave Georgia in a perpetual state of reactive policymaking, only fighting the symptoms of hybrid warfare locally. Georgia unequivocally needs an effective security and development strategy. But strategies are shaped by the processes that produce them. A product-oriented culture of national security, ignoring the importance of the process, risks devitalizing national-level strategic and conceptual document development practices. Eventually, sectoral strategies might emerge without an overarching strategic umbrella and checks and balances, diminishing the self-confidence of the entire security sector.

INSTITUTIONAL RESILIENCE

Political will is fundamental to promote self-confidence in Georgia's governance system. Systemic security sector transformation should ensure the adaptive capacity of the state. Adaptive capacity is shaped by institutions; therefore, building institutional resilience into the national security policy process is fundamental to the complete whole-of-government cycle from awareness to recovery. Resilience is a system's capacity to withstand stress and recover. Therefore, Georgia needs to design a holistic system that would actuate interagency, cabinet-level planning and oversight toward creating early warning, strategic assessment, strategy making, crisis response and policy development mechanisms — in other words, to create a complex adaptive security system designed to cope with the interconnectedness and complexity of a fast-paced hybrid threat environment. This is how a state can institutionalize a culture of strategic thinking in a national security decision-making process.

To bring this vision to life, Georgia needs to identify the conditions at the national, governmental, agency and individual levels that are required for successful interaction among security stakeholders from basic consultations to advanced collaboration. Those interactions are the keystone of whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches. Implementing them requires shifts in governance culture and institutional structures, in interagency processes and practices, and in leadership styles and individual skills. Fundamental steps for Georgia may be as follows:

- Promoting an inclusive national conversation and shaping a strategic narrative on the conceptual and practical aspects of whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches to security and defense, especially as Georgia is set to implement its Total Defense doctrine.
- Strengthening the comprehensive strategic culture and, more specifically, building institutionally secured capacity for professional policymaking in Georgia's political system. Thoughtful approaches for systemic transformation must be the starting point. It should be cultivated through local ownership, taking into consideration local context, and converting the findings into an intellectual foundation for institution building, rather than relying only on policy advice from abroad.
- Establishing a structured and sustained system of multilevel, interagency policymaking, including coordination, cooperation and collaboration within the wider security and defense policy community, ensuring that strategic communications can be truly strategic. The system should ensure that the gap between the decision-makers and professionals is reduced, horizontal integration of efforts is stimulated and a bottom-up approach to policymaking is also enabled. These structures and processes should be underpinned by a normative base carrying the force of law and demanding adherence.
- And very importantly, developing and strengthening the institutions that provide analytical support for top national security decision-makers. Their capacity to jointly perform round-the-clock multidisciplinary strategic analysis on internal vulnerabilities and external threats, develop strategic assessments and alternative policy recommendations should facilitate creation of a knowledge-based security system. Cultivating analytical and strategic planning capabilities will contribute to resilience in national security policymaking, and promote Georgia's hybrid defense. □



FACING MIGRATION

MAINTAINING COHESIVE SOCIETIES AND COUNTERING FALSE NARRATIVES

By Rosław Jeżewski

Recent years have seen a significant increase in displaced people, primarily due to conflicts, sectarian violence and environmental changes. In 2016, there were 40.3 million internally displaced people (IDPs) worldwide and 22.5 million refugees, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre's "2017 Global Report on Internal Displacement." Most fled to Europe. Yet, because of Europe's aging workforce, labor and skill shortages are expected to challenge the European Union's employment and economic growth prospects over the next four decades. For instance, an estimated 19 million fewer people will be in the EU workforce between 2023 and 2060.

In that context, migrants can make important economic contributions when they are integrated into the receiving population in a timely manner, starting with education and continuing into the labor market. If left alone, migrants are likely to face periods without realistic prospects for a durable solution. Refugees are more exposed in urban settings, where it is difficult to assist and supervise them and to monitor their possible interaction with extremist groups. In a 2015 paper for the Geneva Centre for Security Studies, Christina Schori Liang wrote that radical groups are targeting young, vulnerable men in environments such as refugee camps.

These factors will affect the cohesion and resilience of many countries and create permissive environments for hybrid threats and derogative messaging. To prevent genuine refugees from becoming vulnerable to radicalization and hostile propaganda, it is essential to provide a full spectrum of counterradicalization responses.

This process, to be successful, should start well before opening the borders. But how long before? This article introduces a model for the acceptance and integration of immigrants into a society while maintaining the societal cohesion of the receiving nation. This model engages the receiving country on three levels: national (requiring cooperation among government agencies), local (i.e., districts/communities), and familial (people bonding with family first, then neighbors, friends and others).

A migrant keeps warm at the Port of Málaga in Spain in April 2018 after an inflatable boat carrying 80 men, six women and four children was rescued by the Spanish Coast Guard. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

HOW IT CAN WORK

The process of receiving immigrants/refugees/asylum seekers is presented on the chart below. The vertical line labeled "0" marks the moment when the immigrants start their journey into a receiving country. Also, there are five "Lines of Effort" (LoE): Ministry of Finance (MoF), Ministry of Interior (MoI), Counterpropaganda, Defense and Assistance/Supervision. As a whole, they reflect the way the country prepares for newcomers. For example, the ministries of Interior and Finance LoEs need to start their activities much sooner than, for example, the LoE providing assistance and supervision. And they all have respective "Decisive Points" (yellow marks): MoF — when the required funds have been accumulated; MoI — when the infrastructure (housing) is ready; Assistance/Supervision — when the required personnel have been educated and employed; Counterpropaganda — when the cohesion of the nation has not been undermined by the derogative propaganda; and Defense — when the population of the country is so cohesive that it can recover quickly after an unexpected impact. The following paragraphs offer insights into how these LoEs might function.

MINISTRY OF INTERIOR

The MoI would carry the main burden of providing a soft landing for migrants in their new country. It will be critical to the integration process because placing the newcomers into refugee/immigrant camps is to be avoided. Ideally, migrants would go directly from their countries of origin into a small, compact society such as a village or small town. Designated communities would receive a set, but limited, number of families and children.

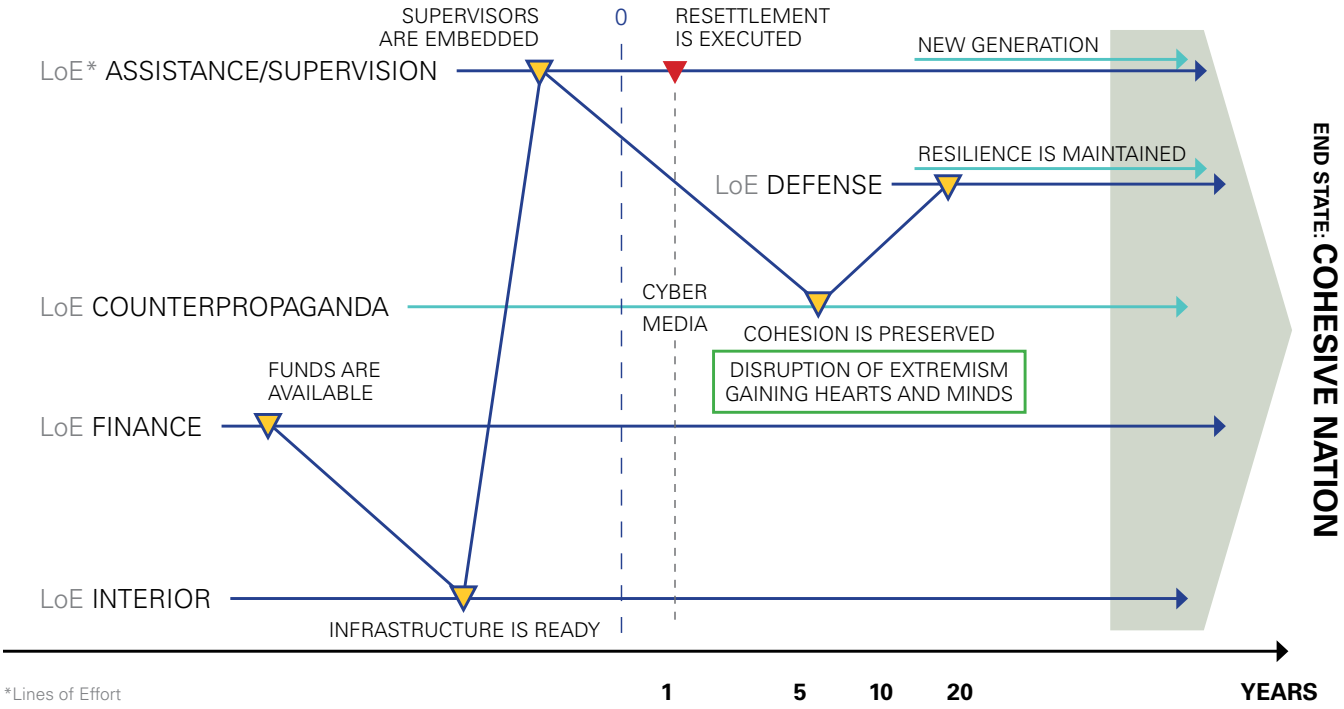
The MoI would be responsible for:

- registration
- public administration
- emergency management
- support for local administration

The MoI would also be responsible for providing accommodation and care for new arrivals by coordinating the activities of local administrations. The desired path would incorporate the "sustainable livelihoods approach" for developing resilient communities in which all groups coexist and create a unified society.

This comprehensive approach, if introduced properly and supported by the refugees, would allow for smooth integration while helping maintain the cohesion of the receiving society and reduce the risk of radicalization among the refugees. For example, in the West the Islamic State is targeting people from diasporas who have never acclimated and who have been exposed to Islamophobia. According to the

WORKING TOWARD A COHESIVE NATION



*Lines of Effort

Source: Rosław Jeżewski, 2018

Existing literature highlights three conditions that foster radicalization to violent extremism in refugee camps: poor education, especially where the gap is filled by extremist religious indoctrination; lack of work; and the absence of freedom of movement.

Emergency workers respond to a suicide bomb attack in Ansbach, Germany. A Syrian migrant killed himself and wounded 12 others in the attack. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

2018 Rand Corp. report, "Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe," mitigating the risk of radicalization among refugees goes beyond providing humanitarian assistance — it requires an approach that lets refugees make decisions about their future.

MINISTRY OF FINANCE

Funding immigration personnel, infrastructure, financial assistance, refugee care and administration/supervision requires money, and these financial needs should be planned for in advance. The MoF would manage the flow of funds so that the system has the potential to operate smoothly.

It is necessary to plan well in advance all issues related to accepting migrants, such as hiring personnel in local communities and acquiring and preparing infrastructure. The MoF may also be involved in assisting immigrants/refugees by helping them send monetary remittances back home — for example, many families in Africa depend on remittances sent from emigrant children or spouses in Europe, according to the International Organization for Migration.

ASSISTANCE/SUPERVISION

Irregular migration can be perceived in receiving countries as a threat to culture, the economy and internal security, according to the book *Fortress Europe?: Challenges and Failures of Migration and Asylum Policies*, edited by Annette Jünemann, Nikolas Scherer and Nicolas Fromm. Therefore, it seems necessary for a host country to execute a robust media campaign and comprehensive preparations for the arrival of its future citizens. To this end:

1. Host countries should assign professionally educated personnel to assist each family/group of families for a projected period of time.
2. Immigrants should not be concentrated together.
3. Newcomers should be assisted in everyday life, such as dealing with administrative issues; for example, applying for official identification.
4. Migrants of working age should be interviewed for job preferences and qualifications.
5. Heads of families should sign a contract declaring that

German-Russians protest in Berlin against sexual harassment by migrants after the spread of a false story about the rape of a Russian-German girl named Lisa. The signs read, "We say 'no' to violence," "Hands off me and my child!" and "Lisa, we are with you." REUTERS

they will obey national laws, with a resettlement clause for those who violate the agreement.
6. Migrants with sufficient language skills will be offered employment.

As these points make clear, the desired end state of the assistance process is that refugees merge into their new societies without sanctuary locations such as shelters or refugee centers and that economic assimilation is successful. This is mentioned by David Miliband in his book *Rescue - Refugees and the Political Crisis of our Time*. Miliband cites the four keys to successful integration: Get people employed, integrate housing, don't ghettoize immigrants, and underscore the importance of learning the local language and culture.

However, a clear and unfiltered picture of the situation is necessary, especially regarding antagonistic groups of immigrants. This is where supervision is crucial. Existing literature highlights three conditions that foster radicalization to violent extremism in refugee camps: poor education, especially where the gap is filled by extremist religious indoctrination; lack of work; and the absence of freedom of movement. These three conditions are prevalent in many of today's underresourced and overcrowded IDP and refugee camps, and the risk increases the longer such situations continue. Equally, they point toward intervention opportunities that may reduce the risk of violent extremist radicalization in such settings: Somebody who does not want to live peacefully, or disseminates radicalization propaganda, should be removed/resettled. By doing so, the receiving country will protect the host nation and its citizens, maintain societal cohesion and inhibit the spread of radicalization propaganda.

CASE STUDIES

Case Study I: Fake news — the "Lisa" case

In 2016, a Russian-born 13-year-old girl claimed that she was raped in Berlin by asylum-seekers, sparking huge protests from Germany's large Russian community. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accused the German government of trying to cover up the incident, but it was later determined that it was an act of Russian propaganda. This incident is a perfect example of how migration can be used to create false propaganda. In a 2017 paper on migration and propaganda for the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Budapest, Attila Juhász and Patrik Szicherle wrote:

"The topic of migration also has geopolitical significance. It is exploited and used by anti-immigration and pro-Russian propaganda to support the Kremlin's geopolitical objectives. Pro-Russian propaganda media is in large part responsible for the dissemination of migration-related fake news, which fits the pattern of anti-immigration propaganda in general and represents Russian interests in particular. The topic of migration is suitable to disrupt European unity and shake EU citizens' confidence in European institutions. Fake news and anti-immigrant propaganda underpin the European far right's political vision on immigration: cultural war, the impossibility of integration and all immigrants being public security threats are all views featured both in anti-EU parties' rhetoric and the articles on pro-Russian propaganda sites."

Case Study II: Syrian refugees

In September 2016, authorities in Germany arrested a 16-year-old Syrian refugee for planning to carry out a terrorist attack. He was arrested at a refugee center near Cologne, where he was living with his parents since fleeing the civil war in Syria in 2015. The authorities discovered bomb-making materials and evidence of internet chats with ISIS members. An investigation revealed that this boy was a perfect example of radicalization through propaganda: He was lonely, with no friends/relatives at the refugee center. Through frequent internet browsing, he was exposed to and poisoned by jihadi propaganda.

COUNTERING ADVERSARIAL NARRATIVES

The primary objectives of counterpropaganda are to win immigrants' hearts and minds and to disrupt extremist propaganda, which together help create conditions conducive to societal cohesion and resilience.

It's no surprise that terrorist groups use cyberspace and the dark net to spread vicious propaganda, but the latest trend has become a serious headache for security services. ISIS, which has mastered online applications, now uses the secure Telegram app to convey hostile propaganda, making it difficult to track by counterterrorism officials, Joby Warrick wrote in *The Independent*.

Efforts to censor and remove extremist messaging have proven ineffective, because radical propaganda is still present in the media. This battle must be fought by other methods:

1. Disruption — preventing the propaganda from reaching the target audience, especially in social media. To be effective, this must be executed in a comprehensive manner, not leaving empty space that can be exploited by radical groups. To effectively prevent radicalization of migrants and refugees, disruption should start before they reach the host country.
2. Redirection — redirecting users to websites that counter or discredit extremist messaging.
3. Campaign and message design — providing backup to nongovernmental organizations to create campaigns undermining hostile propaganda.
4. Synchronizing government messaging and

Miliband cites the four keys to successful integration: Get people employed, integrate housing, don't ghettoize immigrants, and underscore the importance of learning the local language and culture.

A teacher coaches young Syrian refugees at the Sigmund-Jähn primary school in Fürstenwalde, Germany. Language training and education are critical for refugees to successfully integrate into the societies of their host countries. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Migrants learn how to make leather bags at the Lai-Momo vocational training program in Lama di Reno, Italy. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

action — messages that relate to everyday life and actual events increase societal trust in government and its actions.

Knowledge of the target audience is crucial and determines the course of a campaign. For example, a government campaign oriented to young immigrants will not be the same as a campaign directed at returning foreign fighters.

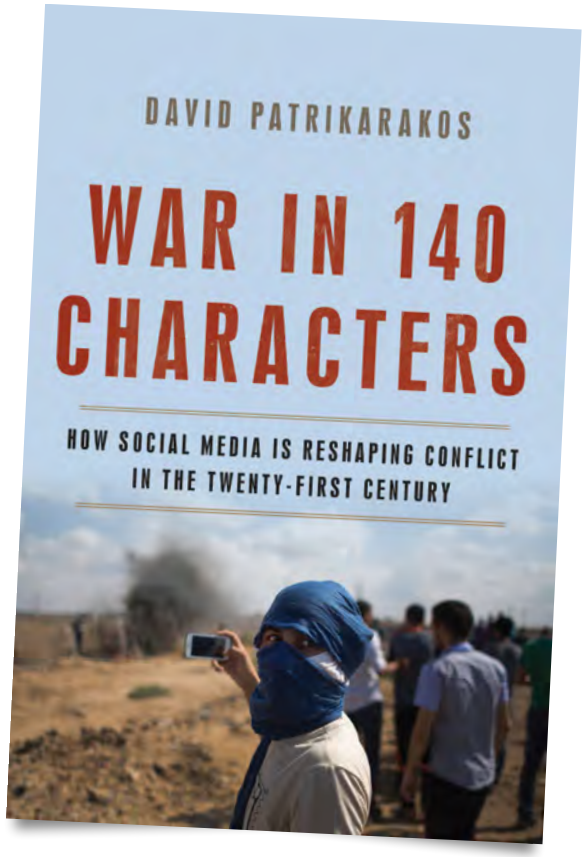
CONCLUSION

Giulio Meotti of the Gatestone Institute asserted in a 2016 report that Europe will be unrecognizable in one generation. Does that mean demographic trends will shape the global security situation in coming years? Most probably, yes. It is the governments and people of the destination countries that will decide how to prepare for the newcomers. Immigrants with different backgrounds — or returning foreign fighters — will hardly be able to communicate. Many are unwilling to integrate with the receiving population and disobey the law. Samuel Huntington, in his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, quoted his colleague Myron Weiner: "Westerners increasingly fear that they are now being invaded not by armies and tanks but immigrants who speak other languages, worship other gods, belong to other cultures and, they fear, will take their jobs, occupy their land, live off the welfare system and threaten their way of life."

If radicalized, they can be directed into hostile attacks, and their presence can be used to disrupt a nation's unity. Also of concern is that hostile migrants from adversarial nations or nonstate factions could spark conflict in a receiving country. The "Lisa" and "Syrian refugee" cases are evidence that this potential "weapon of mass migration" is powerful and can be activated from afar or from cyberspace. R.T Howard is his article "Migration Wars" in *The National Interest* magazine stated that migration has been weaponized — and can itself become the cause of war and destabilize whole regions. This drives home the point that the immigrants' desire to obey the law, and integrate into society, is crucial. Without this, the efforts of the receiving countries can be wasted, and many people can be hurt.

This model of accepting migrants into a host country is not perfect, for sure. It deliberately formulates questions without clear answers. But it clearly states that efforts to preserve the cohesion and resilience of a nation are paramount when facing migration. □

THE BATTLE FOR *digital supremacy*



BOOK AUTHOR:
David Patrikarakos

PUBLISHED BY:
Basic Books

REVIEWER:
per Concordiam Staff

Social media has made a mockery of the old saw that a lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes. Today, thanks to the ubiquitous and instantaneous social media natures of Twitter, Facebook, Google and YouTube, a falsehood can define an event's narrative before the truth even knows there is a narrative.

David Patrikarakos outlines the disturbing implications of this in *War in 140 Characters: How Social Media Is Reshaping Conflict in the Twenty-First Century*. Nations, interest groups and even individuals have at their fingertips the technological means to shape how the public perceives a given event as it happens and even before an outcome is decided. In today's social media climate, people learn immediately on personal devices each element of a battle or campaign, along with reports or commentary from "on the scene" protagonists spinning the fighting favorably to their cause. A weak aggressor can portray his side as victorious, just for surviving a punishing onslaught. One thinks of Saddam Hussein in 1991 and the Palestinians in the 2000s. Patrikarakos quotes Harvard strategist Joseph Nye, who said it is no longer most important whose army wins, but whose story wins.

Patrikarakos views social media in its various machinations as the shaper of conflict this century. Using it to further one's cause is not propaganda per se, but rather, a "reinvention of reality." *War in 140 Characters* is a book about stories, the narratives of conflict and the conflict of narratives. When an individual with a cellphone and Twitter account can provide more up-to-date information than the communication resources available to major national newspapers and broadcast entities, the balance of power has shifted in the individual's favor. "As social media makes almost every action visible through a share or a tweet (especially in wartime)," Patrikarakos writes, "both governments and the traditional media have seen their role as the gatekeepers of information recede in favor of wildly differing interpretations of events — and the spread of outright falsehoods." Translation: If one can offer a credible alternative to the government's storyline, one that places doubts as to the truth in the public's mind, then one "wins."

According to Patrikarakos, the meaning of truth itself is changing in contemporary politics and, more dangerously, in conflict, at a number of levels. First, the death of the idea of "objective truth" allows Russia — through the use of its propaganda — to erode trust in all sources of truth, allowing for so-called fake news to infect real news. In addition, social media has catalyzed the forces shaping information: Stories go viral, but you also have endless versions of events and information overflow, both of which stretch truth like an elastic band. In turn, the definition of a story is changing: Now a tweet can itself be the story, not just a means to tell it. Last, social media creates new rules to which the state must adapt or perish. One thinks here of the Arab Spring and the rise of the

Islamic State terror group, which Patrikarakos maintains would have been simply impossible to begin and sustain without the wide reach of social media.

Almost as a successor statement to Samuel B. Morse's first telegraphic message — "What hath God wrought?" — Patrikarakos asks what social media has birthed. His answer is a new type of human, which he dubs "Homo digitalis," a hyper-empowered, networked, globally connected and exceptionally potent individual whose actions have irretrievably changed the way that wars are fought, reported on and consumed. In the recent armed conflicts he has covered, Patrikarakos said he found himself caught between two types of adversaries — Homo sapiens fighting on the ground with tanks and artillery, and Homo digitalis, fighting an information war largely, though he notes not exclusively, through social media. Almost counterintuitively, he says he discovered that "victory" in the war of words and narratives mattered more than who had the most potent weaponry. "At its center, one thing shone out: the extraordinary ability of social media to endow ordinary individuals, frequently noncombatants, with the power to change the course of both the physical battlefield and the discourse around it." Recruiting — or simply accepting — social media noncombatants into the fray has evolved into a form of virtual mass enlistment for one side in a conflict.

Patrikarakos asserts that after his experiences covering war in Ukraine and his study of the Gaza conflict, together with the rise of the Islamic State terrorist group, he now perceives a seismic shift in war's character. Whether social media is prevalent or not, in recent years, most modern conflicts exist between the boundaries of war and peace and are more often a battle between state and nonstate actors. The shift has been not in firepower, but rather in communicative power: Power has swung from hierarchies or institutions to individual citizens and networks of citizens. Through social media waged by such citizens, war narratives are arguably more important than the actual fighting.

The author bolsters these claims with a series of vignettes from 21st century conflict zones. These range from a Palestinian teen providing a myopic heart-tugging view of her family's and neighbor's suffering from Israel's response to Gazan terrorism, to freedom fighters in Ukraine seeking to turn back Russia's "little green men" infiltration of their eastern provinces, to a British computer techie who crowdsourced his online open-source investigation to show conclusively that, despite Russian claims to the contrary, the anti-aircraft missile that downed a civilian airliner over eastern Ukraine had come from Russia. He chronicles how Russia employs young, idealistic writers to man its social media propaganda factory, generating false narratives, not necessarily to persuade, but mainly to confuse the global audience as to what the truth is. He also shows how Israel employs young, idealistic soldiers to use social media to counter Palestinian propaganda tweets.

Of greatest interest to *per Concordiam* readers is Patrikarakos' assertion that in Ukraine, Russia could easily have militarily defeated that nation to annex its eastern provinces. Instead, Moscow seemed "most concerned with getting eastern Ukrainians to subscribe to a political narrative" of a government persecuting Russian-speaking Ukrainians, which would create a narrative of a benevolent Russia welcoming its native Russian speakers back into its territorial embrace. Russia used electronic mass media, distributed over social media networks, to achieve its political goal in a war of words, supplemented by a war of arms. "Whereas in war as it is traditionally understood, information operations support military action on the battlefield, in Ukraine it became clear that military operations on the ground were supporting information operations on TV and in cyberspace," Patrikarakos writes.

A large entity such as Russia having such capability and reach may present a grim picture for democratic nations and free peoples. This great ability cuts against Russia's own strength, however. "Web 2.0 has endowed people with two crucial abilities to disrupt [authoritarian] power: first, they can actively produce [low or no-cost] content on social media platforms with almost no barriers to entry, and second, through the use of these forums they can form transnational networks," Patrikarakos writes. "Both of these abilities enable them to fill roles traditionally occupied by nation-states and to shape events around the globe. [Thus] homo digitalis is especially dangerous for authoritarian states, which rely even more than liberal democracies on controlling information flows. Without near monopolies on these flows, it is impossible for states to project power (especially in war or protest situations) the way they once could. And because these new social media forums are structurally more egalitarian, many delight in holding up the internet as the ultimate tool against tyrants."

Social media effects are neither inherently evil nor good, but as the saying goes, people make them what they are. One can decry the use of social media to shape armed conflict or one can recognize social media is here to stay and it behooves a nation, group or individual to learn its facets and employ them en masse to counter falsehoods. Lies may still travel quickly around the world. Yet, the job of democratic governments and their citizens is to greet the lies when they arrive with a bodyguard of truth that cracks the credibility of fast-talking and fast-walking lies. The tools to do this are sharp and easily used. Anyone who seeks a primer on how they work best should read Patrikarakos' well-researched and well-argued book — or suffer the consequences of inaction. □

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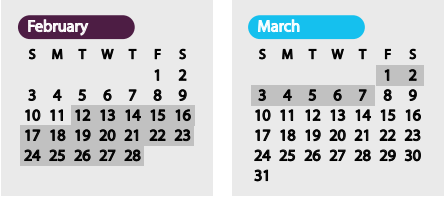
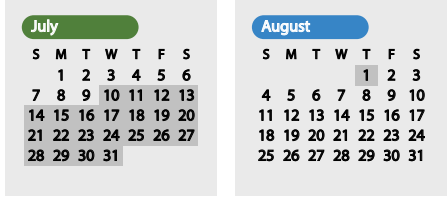
CTOC 19-6
Feb. 12 -
Mar. 7, 2019



CTOC 19-15
July 10 -
Aug. 1, 2019



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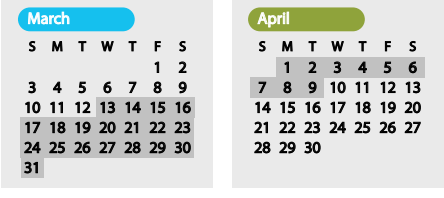
This program is designed for government officials and military officers employed in midlevel and upper-level management of counterterrorism organizations and will provide instruction on both the nature and magnitude of today's terrorism threat. The program improves participants' ability to counter terrorism's regional implications by providing a common framework of knowledge and understanding that will enable national security officials to cooperate at an international level.

PTSS 19-7
Mar. 13 -
Apr. 9, 2019



PTSS 19-17
Aug. 7 -
Sept. 4, 2019

PROGRAM ON CYBER SECURITY STUDIES (PCSS)

The PCSS focuses on ways to address challenges in the cyber environment while adhering to fundamental values of democratic society. This nontechnical program helps participants appreciate the nature of today's threats.

PCSS 19-2
Dec. 4 - 20, 2018

December

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SEMINAR ON REGIONAL SECURITY (SRS)

The seminar aims at systematically analyzing the character of the selected crises, the impact of regional actors, as well as the effects of international assistance measures.

SRS 19-8
Apr. 24 -
May 17, 2019

April

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This intensive seminar focuses on new topics of key global interest that will generate new perspectives, ideas and cooperative discussions and possible solutions. Participants include general officers, senior diplomats, ambassadors, ministers, deputy ministers and parliamentarians. The SES includes formal presentations by senior officials and recognized experts followed by in-depth discussions in seminar groups.

SES 19-14
June 24 - 28, 2019

June

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