

INTELLIGENCE INFO

ISSN 2821 - 8159, ISSN – L 2821 – 8159, Volumul 4, Numărul 1, Martie 2025

Cognitive Hegemony: The True Objective of Russia's New Active Measures

Bogdan-George RĂDULESCU

Rădulescu, Bogdan-George (2024), Cognitive Hegemony: The True Objective of Russia's New Active Measures, *Intelligence Info*, 4:1, pag. xxx, <https://www.intelligenceinfo.org/cognitive-hegemony-the-true-objective-of-russias-new-active-measures/>

Publicat online: 16.11.2024

© 2024 Bogdan-George RĂDULESCU. Responsabilitatea conținutului, interpretărilor și opiniilor exprimate revine exclusiv autorilor.

Cognitive Hegemony: The True Objective of Russia's New Active Measures

Bogdan-George RĂDULESCU¹
georgebogdan32@gmail.com

Abstract

The traditional tactics of Soviet destabilization have evolved under Putin's leadership, taking on new and more insidious forms. Russia's ongoing commitment to the Soviet-era strategy of "active measures"—now employed in subtler ways—remains central to its foreign policy objectives. A destabilized West is less likely to focus on Moscow's political and geopolitical transgressions, or on its military actions that openly challenge the liberal international order. This article examines the covert aspects of Russia's political warfare aimed at undermining Western stability. The Kremlin's priority of fracturing solidarity within the European Union and weakening transatlantic relations—especially in light of the unified economic sanctions imposed on Russia by the U.S. and EU over its aggressive war against sovereign Ukraine—compels Russian security agencies to adapt their "active measures" to new global realities. We explore key tactics and strategies employed by Russia in its covert confrontation with major Western institutions, such as the EU and NATO. Ultimately, we aim to deconstruct how the Soviet concept of "active measures" and the notion of "political warfare" have become nearly synonymous, fitting within the broader and evolving framework of "hybrid warfare."

Keywords: cognitive hegemony, hegemony, Russia, measures, active measures

Hegemonie cognitivă: adevăratul obiectiv al noilor măsuri active ale Rusiei

Rezumat

Gama de tactici tradiționale de destabilizare sovietică a căpătat noi forme sub conducerea lui Putin. Angajamentul actual al Rusiei de a continua strategia din perioada sovietică a „măsurilor active” într-un mod mai subtil și insidios rămâne esențial pentru politica sa externă. Un Vest destabilizat este mai puțin predispus să se concentreze asupra transgresiunilor politice și geopolitice ale Moscovei sau asupra războiului său de agresiune împotriva Ucrainei suverane, care contestă deschis ordinea internațională liberală. Acest articol va analiza aspectele ascunse ale războiului politic al Rusiei, având ca scop subminarea stabilității Occidentului. Prioritatea Kremlinului de a fractura solidaritatea din cadrul Uniunii Europene și de a slăbi relațiile transatlantice—mai ales având în vedere sancțiunile economice unificate impuse Rusiei de către SUA și UE pentru războiul său de agresiune împotriva Ucrainei—împinge agențiile de securitate ruse să își adapteze tacticile

¹ PhD in Communication Science, MA in Global Security, Coventry University

„măsurilor active” la noile realități globale. Articolul nostru va examina principalele tactici și strategii folosite de Rusia în confruntarea sa ascunsă cu principalele instituții occidentale, cum ar fi UE și NATO. Ne propunem să deconstruim modalitățile prin care conceptul sovietic de „măsurile active” și noțiunea de „război politic” au devenit aproape sinonime, potrivit și în cadrul mai larg și încă în evoluție al „războiului hibrid”.

Cuvinte cheie: hegemonie cognitivă, hegemonie, Rusia, măsuri, măsuri active

INTELLIGENCE INFO, Volumul 4, Numărul 1, Martie 2025, pp. xxx

ISSN 2821 - 8159, ISSN – L 2821 – 8159,

URL: <https://www.intelligenceinfo.org/cognitive-hegemony-the-true-objective-of-russias-new-active-measures/>

© 2025 Bogdan-George RĂDULESCU. Responsabilitatea conținutului, interpretărilor și opiniilor exprimate revine exclusiv autorilor.

Reassessing the destabilizing potential of the "active measures" dictated by Moscow

The literature on the Russian concept of *active measures* (активные мероприятия) is extensive (Rid, 2020), (Bertelsen & Goldma, 2021), (Whyte, 2024), (E. Kanet, 2024). There is significant documentation regarding the Soviet Union's strategies for large-scale active measures targeting the West, the methods employed in various national and informational spaces, and the strategic objectives pursued through their implementation. Much of this information has been uncovered through the direct testimonies of former KGB officers and intelligence agents from former communist countries who defected during and after the Cold War. Noteworthy historical accounts from prominent figures in Soviet intelligence—such as Vasili Mitrokhin, Yuri Bezmenov, Oleg Kalugin, and Oleg Gordievsky—offer critical insights into the classical definition employed by the KGB to describe the array of political measures designed to destabilize and eliminate both internal and external ideological enemies of the Soviet Union.

Oleg Kalugin, a former general and chief of the KGB's foreign counterintelligence division, in an interview with CNN, described *active measures* as the core of Soviet covert operations in the United States and Western Europe during the Cold War. He stated:” *The heart and soul of Soviet intelligence was subversion. Not intelligence collection, but subversion: active measures aimed at weakening the West, driving wedges between the various Western alliances, particularly NATO, sowing discord among allies, and diminishing the United States' stature in the eyes of Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin*

America. This was intended to prepare the ground in case of a real war, making America more vulnerable to the resentment and distrust of other peoples.” (Kalugin, 1998).

The term *active measures* refers to the Soviet-era strategy of utilizing sophisticated and covert operations aimed at influencing Western societies to advance Moscow’s foreign policy objectives. These operations were executed in parallel with traditional diplomatic activities within the sphere of international relations. The KGB employed a range of tactics, including the deployment of agents of influence and undercover operatives, to infiltrate and manipulate key sectors of Western society. These included leveraging representatives from the Russian Orthodox Church, the media, professional organizations, academic institutions, trade unions, youth groups, and pacifist movements, among others. The overarching goal of these covert measures was not only to sway public opinion but also to destabilize political structures and further Soviet interests abroad. As noted by scholars in the field, “*The Soviet approach to international relations can perhaps best be described as a form of “political warfare,” with the manipulative and deceptive techniques of active measures playing an essential and important role*” (Committee on Appropriations, 1992).

In the Soviet vision there is even a chromatic typology of active measures: *black*, *grey* and *white*. The *black active measures* have top secret statutes. They were coordinated by Service A of the KGB's first chief directorate, involved in foreign intelligence operations. According to KGB Colonel Oleg Gordievsky, who defected for Western democracies' camp, more than a third of the officers working in this direction were covered by Novosti news correspondents. The technical staffs in this Section A of the KGB’s First Directorate has become expert in forging documents. In his book *Instructions from the Centre: Top Secret Files on KGB Foreign Operations 1975-1985*, Gordievsky explains that the peak of operations involving active measures was the 1980s and 1990s. The Soviet Union invested significantly in this department during Mikhail Gorbachev's term. The reason is the influence of Yuri Andropov's group at the top of the Communist Party of the USSR. One of this group's strategic goals was to save the Soviet Union's international image at a historic time when Moscow had lost military technology to the United States under the Regan administration.

While this perception might hold some validity at face value, it fails to consider that these measures were employed by a totalitarian regime pursuing expansionist aims,

COGNITIVE HEGEMONY: THE TRUE OBJECTIVE OF RUSSIA'S NEW ACTIVE MEASURES

the export of communist revolution, and strategic objectives designed to weaken or destroy the West. As Kevin McCauley aptly illustrates in his book *Russian Influence Campaigns Against the West*, there exists a significant semantic distinction between the concept of propaganda as understood in Western and Soviet contexts, which is crucial to understanding the broader impact and intent behind these operations: “*Soviet concept of propaganda differed from those in the West. Propaganda for the Soviets, as with active measures in general, was manipulative and action oriented to mobilize people particularly to build opposition within West countries acting in support of Moscow’s political objectives and against the respective Western governments*” (McCauley, 2016).

Robert Gates effectively captured the conceptual essence of both the Leninist and later the Andropovist (referring to Yuri Andropov, former General Secretary of the USSR and head of the KGB) interpretations of *active measures*. His analysis demonstrated that the very notion of active measures encompasses insidious forms of deception, akin to the strategies described by Sun Tzu in *The Art of War*. These measures are not aimed at large-scale military confrontations, as in traditional warfare, but instead focus on influencing the political and ideological adversary at a psychological level. The objective is to subtly shift the adversary's values, gradually converting them to align with a set of ideals that the manipulator seeks to impose within a given society: “*Soviet active measures are covert operations designed to shape public opinion in foreign countries on key political issues. These measures are targeted at opinion-makers, such as political leaders, the media, and influential businessmen, as well as the public at large. They embrace a range of activity, which include: placing disinformation in the press; surfacing forged documents; planting rumors; promoting causes through parties or front groups; and shaping policy through agents of influence*” (Gates, 1986, p. 21).

In *The Red Phoenix* (Huyn, et al., 1995), Western experts in diplomacy, European relations, and security studies offer a thorough analysis of the post-Cold War transition from the Soviet Union to the Russian Federation. The authors not only demonstrate how the West was misled by Russian propaganda and disinformation in the mid-1990s, particularly regarding Russia's purported “sincere desire” to adhere to the principles of liberal democracies and international law, but also examine why Russia continued to pursue the fundamental strategic objectives of Soviet-era thought, albeit in new forms.

Published in 1994, this book addresses post-communist transitions, with specific chapters dedicated to the true intentions behind Perestroika and Glasnost.

Though it was highly relevant at the time of publication, *The Red Phoenix* remains a valuable testimony to the evolution of Western perceptions of Russian political developments during the immediate post-Cold War period. Hans Huyn, a German career diplomat and esteemed specialist in East-West relations, as well as a national security adviser to several German governments, argues that the strategic objectives of the Soviet Union were not consigned to the dustbin of history but were repurposed by the new international entity that succeeded it: the Russian Federation. Huyn contends that the Western belief in the definitive and irrevocable disappearance of Soviet communism was perpetuated by the Moscow propaganda apparatus to obscure the real phenomenon: the replacement of the old Soviet ideological elite (Lenin-Stalin-Brezhnev) with a new elite from St. Petersburg, which adopted a Gramsci-Andropov-Gorbachev ideological framework. This new elite, many of whom came from the KGB's First Directorate, were directly responsible for the development and execution of active measures against the West. In *KGB: The Inside Story of its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev*, written with Christopher Andrew, former KGB Colonel Oleg Gordievsky noted the Soviet leadership's obsession with three primary objectives for active operations within Section A of the KGB's First Directorate: “*materials to discredit all aspects of US policy, a campaign aimed at promoting conflict between the United States and its NATO allies, support for peace movements in Europe*” (Andrew & Gordievski, 1994).

Resurrecting Soviet Strategies: The Enduring Legacy of Active Measures in Contemporary Russian Tactics

As noted by multiple experts, the strategic doctrines and core methods employed by Russia today are fundamentally the same as those of the Soviet era. The key distinction lies in the way these methods are executed in the present.

Instead of the physical and psychological manipulations typical of the Cold War period, Russia now leverages the digital realm to conduct its operations. This shift to cyber tools and social media platforms has enabled Russia to conduct highly effective disinformation campaigns, influence operations, and strategic destabilization on a global scale, all while remaining far less detectable than traditional Cold War tactics.

COGNITIVE HEGEMONY: THE TRUE OBJECTIVE OF RUSSIA'S NEW ACTIVE MEASURES

In this context, it becomes apparent that the *digital battlefield* is merely the latest iteration of the KGB's long-standing strategy of ideological subversion and interference in foreign political systems, now made more potent and expansive through technological means. What was once a highly labour-intensive operation involving face-to-face influence peddling, propaganda dissemination, and espionage can now be executed with unprecedented speed and reach via digital channels, amplifying the impact of these operations in ways the Soviet Union could only dream of during the Cold War. Thus, while the methods may remain rooted in historical precedents, their contemporary execution in the age of digital information warfare demonstrates the continued evolution of Russia's approach to international power projection (Graph, 2017)

The panoply of old Soviet tactics of destabilizing the West gained a new expression under Putin's leadership. Today's interest in Russia to continue in new, more insidious forms, the Soviet strategy of active measures is vital. Economically weakened by the application of a rather severe economic sanctions regime by the West, due to the war of aggression against Ukraine, in which war crimes were committed by the Russian army, autocratic regime in Moscow continues to face economic and financial difficulties that weaken its military-industrial complex.

After long being guided by the classical doctrine of defending the Soviet Union, Russia discovers and experiences the non-linear nature of war and a range of non-military measures to attack a geopolitical adversary (Schnauffer II, 2017). Non-linear warfare (Russian language “нелинейная война”, “*nelineynaya voyna*”) is the culmination of an endless conflict that no longer involves the military confrontation between the armies of two states, nor that between the army of a state actor and the military force of a non-state actor, but, like nuclear fission, a state of serial multilateral belligerence generated by the convergence of several types of confrontations between various alliances at the same time involving several state actors (Noorman, 2023). The demographic, social and economic catastrophes, generated by such a fusion of multiple military and non-military confrontations of multilateral type, pursue a single goal: the establishment of chaos.

Antonio Gramsci's Paradigm: Cultural Hegemony as a Strategic Tool for Influence

The concept of active measures aligns closely with Antonio Gramsci's theory of "cultural hegemony" (it. *"egemonia culturale"*), which became influential among Euro-communist intellectuals in the West. Gramsci, a central figure in Marxist thought, was instrumental in shaping the intellectual backdrop that Soviet strategists adopted in their formulation of active measures. In the view of Hans Huyn, the notion that Soviet communism had definitively and irrevocably disappeared was propagated by the Moscow regime in order to conceal the actual phenomenon at play: the transition from an old Soviet elite rooted in Leninist-Stalinist-Brezhnevite ideologies to a new "academocratic" elite that embraced a Gramscian-Andropovian - Gorbachevian ideological framework. This shift, Huyn argues, was driven by former cadres from the KGB's First Directorate—an institution where the strategies for the active measures against the West were meticulously devised and executed (Huyn, Cozier, Menges, & Sablier, 1996). In this context, the Soviet objective was not to engage in large-scale military confrontation with the West, but rather to foster a form of parasitic coexistence—undermining Western political and ideological structures through *covert influence* rather than open warfare.

A notably subtle yet complex method that leverages the nuanced mechanics of intelligence operations is Russia's strategy of "benign penetration" into Western institutions. This tactic involves embedding experts, analysts, and influencers into strategic circles within government agencies, think tanks, and media outlets. These individuals—often appearing as independent specialists—are, in fact, tightly coordinated under a larger framework of *active measures* orchestrated by the Kremlin. This strategy, which merges the traditional Soviet intelligence tactics with modern methods of influence, aims to embed pro-Russian narratives within critical decision-making channels, swaying public opinion and policy subtly but effectively.

The sophistication of this method lies in its inconspicuous nature. Unlike overt acts of espionage, benign penetration uses soft power to establish credibility and influence without immediate detection. Russian operatives cultivate seemingly credible Western experts whose analyses, reports, and public statements mirror Russian strategic interests. These individuals appear in conferences, publish in influential journals, and shape

COGNITIVE HEGEMONY: THE TRUE OBJECTIVE OF RUSSIA'S NEW ACTIVE MEASURES

narratives in ways that incrementally adjust Western attitudes toward issues favourable to Russia, such as sanctions, energy dependency, or military alliances.

This influence network exploits the existing structure of Western institutions, capitalizing on the open, pluralistic nature of these societies, which readily integrate diverse perspectives. The Kremlin's plan typically involves a two-fold mechanism: first, identifying and embedding individuals who hold or can easily adopt pro-Russian stances, and second, gradually positioning them in environments where they can shape policy or public opinion discreetly. This tactic has proven particularly effective in settings like think tanks, where Russian-backed narratives may merge almost imperceptibly with mainstream discourse, lending legitimacy to Moscow's geopolitical aims.

The concept of Russia's "*strategy of benign penetration*" is notably attributed to the Polish political scientist Wojciech Lamentowicz, who used this term to describe Russia's approach to regaining influence in Western and international institutions in the post-Soviet period. Lamentowicz described this as a form of "benign" infiltration wherein Russian agents or sympathizers, often embedded as diplomats, specialists, or analysts, work within Western institutions to shape policy and opinion in ways that indirectly favour Moscow's strategic goals. This strategy, more subtle than direct interference, is aimed at influencing decision-making bodies by placing or aligning individuals sympathetic to Russian interests in roles where they can subtly sway perspectives without the overt markers of interference seen in more aggressive tactics.

This concept of *benign penetration* aligns with broader studies of Russian influence strategies documented by experts in security and intelligence studies, such as John Dziak and Mark Galeotti, who have analysed Russia's use of covert influence operations rooted in KGB tactics. For example, Galeotti has explored how these tactics were adapted to the post-Cold War and digital age environments, highlighting how Russia continues to utilize "active measures" in a new geopolitical context, especially through indirect influence in media, think tanks, and diplomatic channels. One common approach within this strategy is to foster connections with Western think tanks, educational institutions, and policy circles that may provide channels for Russian influence.

The implications of this strategy are profound. As Russia aligns its personnel and ideological allies within influential Western institutions, it gains the ability to subtly

influence, delay, or sway international policy decisions in areas such as energy security, defense cooperation, and even NATO policy. Scholars like John Dziak, in his work *Chekisty: A History of the KGB*, have discussed how the foundations of this strategy, rooted in Soviet intelligence tactics, were adapted to modern contexts, including digital platforms and international diplomacy. This lexicon, Dziak argues, was shaped by Gramsci's ideological framework, which guided Soviet intelligence strategies in influencing both domestic and international public opinion: "a whole new intelligence vocabulary had to be developed to cover the intricate activity inspired by Gramsci's mandate" (Dziak, 1988).

From Cultural to Cognitive Hegemony: The New Battleground

The West witness the sophisticated fusion of old Soviet intelligence tactics with the insights of Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci, applied in a distinctly modern, digital context. This ideological and psychological offensive, often termed "cognitive warfare", relies on reshaping Western perceptions and undermining the social and political cohesion of democracies through insidious, coordinated influence operations. Gramsci's concept of *cultural hegemony*—the idea of controlling society by dominating its intellectual and cultural spheres—serves as an ideological underpinning in these operations, where agents act not by direct confrontation but by inserting divisive narratives and pro-Russian themes into Western cultural, media, and intellectual ecosystems.

In the postmodern era of global digital communication, the concept of *cultural hegemony*, as initially articulated by Antonio Gramsci, has evolved into what could be termed *cognitive hegemony*. This shift reflects the growing importance of controlling not just material resources or institutions, but also the very ideas and beliefs that shape collective consciousness in a hyper-connected world. While Gramsci's cultural hegemony focused on the domination of social and cultural spheres by the ruling elite, cognitive hegemony in the digital age expands this to the strategic manipulation of knowledge, emotions, and identity across global networks.

In this new age, *cognitive hegemony* is exercised not just through state-run media, as Gramsci might have anticipated, but through the vast influence of social media platforms, algorithmic systems, and digital narratives that dictate how people perceive the world. Governments, corporations, and ideologically motivated groups now have the

power to mold public opinion on a scale and with an intensity that was previously unimaginable, by shaping the very frameworks through which people understand truth, history, and justice. In this sense, the battle for minds has transcended national borders, making it a truly global conflict.

As theorists like Manuel Castells (Castells, 2011) and Zeynep Tufekci (Tufekci, 2017) have noted, the internet functions as both a tool for democratization and a mechanism for manipulation. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter allow for the rapid spread of ideas, but they also enable the mass dissemination of disinformation, reinforcing echo chambers and deepening ideological divides. *Cognitive hegemony*, therefore, is not simply about influencing what people think—it's about shaping how they think, dictating the very cognitive structures that inform their decisions, preferences, and sense of identity in an increasingly fragmented and polarized world. This power, wielded effectively, can alter the course of politics, economics, and society itself.

Today's "cognitive warfare" adapts these strategies for the digital age, using social media platforms, disinformation campaigns, and cyber interference to amplify the Kremlin's reach across borders and into Western political discourse. The GRU (Russia's Main Military Intelligence Directorate) and the FSB (Federal Security Service) deploy cyber operatives who coordinate with state-controlled media and troll farms to create and amplify these narratives online. Such efforts aim not just to promote Russia's image but to degrade the credibility of Western institutions by targeting existing social fractures—racial tensions, political divisions, public health debates—and exploiting them to foster distrust and division. By blending the tactical precision of GRU operations with Gramsci-inspired ideological tactics, the Kremlin effectively executes a 21st-century cognitive warfare strategy. The effects of these operations are deliberately slow, designed to mold and reframe Western thought over time rather than seeking abrupt shifts, making their insidious nature both difficult to detect and formidable in their impact on public trust and democratic resilience.

Narrative "Nuclear Strikes" Against Ukraine and the West

In the third year of Russia's war in Ukraine, amid intensifying destruction, mass civilian casualties, and persistent breaches of Ukrainian sovereignty, Russia's nuclear

rhetoric introduces a dual-edged threat. The Kremlin's occasional threats to employ nuclear arms serve not only to project raw power but also as psychological warfare against the West. This nuclear brinkmanship is strategically layered with a sophisticated *cognitive assault*, leveraging disinformation, propaganda, and ideological subversion to fragment Western resolve and reframe perceptions about the legitimacy of the war itself.

The narrative that seeks to rationalize invasion, occupation, and war crimes as “defensive necessities” in a “multipolar world” is as devastating in its influence as physical weaponry. These “narrative nuclear strikes” aim to erode the moral and axiological structures of Western societies, ultimately making territorial aggression and mass violence appear as acceptable or inevitable outcomes in international affairs. Through controlled disinformation channels, Putin's regime disseminates messages that subtly validate its actions, casting its violent expansionism as forced responses to Western hostility or security needs, thereby weakening both international condemnation and domestic support within Western nations.

In this context, the threat of nuclear warfare is inseparable from the ideological campaign designed to soften the West's stance on Russian transgressions. By normalizing the concept of “necessary aggression,” Russia seeks to destabilize the normative frameworks that support democratic unity and mutual security. This dual strategy—threatening nuclear force while deploying psychological manipulation—constitutes a profound and multifaceted danger to global stability, capable of deeply restructuring the values and geopolitical stance of Western societies without a single missile launch.

Narrative warfare, which operates on the principles of disinformation and manipulation, has become a modernized form of the Soviet-era *active measures*—the covert operations historically executed to influence foreign perceptions and destabilize opponents. However, unlike traditional active measures that relied on slower channels, today's digital environment, especially the ubiquity of social media, amplifies the reach and immediacy of these efforts, making narrative warfare a formidable extension of Russia's strategic toolkit.

In the digital age, narrative warfare takes advantage of online platforms to construct and propagate alternative realities swiftly. The objective is often to blur truth and fiction, allowing hostile actors to influence mass opinion without immediate detection. Russia's

COGNITIVE HEGEMONY: THE TRUE OBJECTIVE OF RUSSIA'S NEW ACTIVE MEASURES

use of this tactic in its conflict with Ukraine is illustrative: pro-Kremlin narratives are seeded online to undermine support for Ukraine internationally, legitimize Russia's actions, and even justify potential escalations. Through targeted narratives portraying Ukraine as a threat, these efforts aim to erode Western unity and challenge support for Ukraine's sovereignty.

The mechanisms of online narrative warfare align closely with the Soviet principles of active measures, which sought to exploit internal divisions and ideological rifts within Western societies. In the current landscape, however, narratives can be customized, rapidly disseminated, and globally amplified. Using bot networks and coordinated inauthentic accounts, narratives are reshaped continuously in response to public reactions, making the campaign adaptive and persistent.

Academic experts, such as those studying strategic influence campaigns, argue that narrative warfare relies on "cognitive hacking"—the manipulation of how individuals process information (Cybenko, 2002). This type of warfare, while non-physical, has destabilizing effects that mirror kinetic conflict by sowing distrust, promoting divisive content, and undermining institutional credibility (Waltzman, 2017). The current form of narrative warfare has thus evolved to function as an "active measure" specifically tailored to the instantaneous, borderless nature of the digital world, allowing states like Russia to exert ideological influence on a scale and at a speed previously unimaginable (Adamczyk, 2017). In sum, while rooted in Cold War tactics, narrative warfare's digital evolution offers a nuanced, insidious approach to influence and destabilize, posing a new form of threat for democratic societies dependent on transparency and trust in public institutions.

The metaphor of a "nuclear strike" in this context refers to the intense and disruptive power of modern narrative warfare. Just as nuclear weapons have the potential to cause massive, irreversible damage, so too do these narratives—often disseminated via digital platforms—target the core values and perceptions of Western societies. These narratives distort facts, erode trust in democratic institutions, and fuel division, all while undermining the moral and ethical frameworks that guide Western foreign policies and public opinion.

As Russia continues its war of aggression in Ukraine, it has made the manipulation of information a central pillar of its strategy. This includes not only the traditional forms

of disinformation and propaganda, but also more subtle forms of cognitive warfare aimed at destabilizing societal cohesion within NATO and EU countries. The "nuclear strike" in this case is not a literal detonation but an ideological one, where the West's commitment to principles such as sovereignty, justice, and international law is slowly but surely corroded through carefully crafted disinformation campaigns. These campaigns, amplified by state-sponsored trolls and bots, utilize modern social media and internet platforms to reshape the discourse, foster polarization, and legitimize actions like the annexation of Crimea and the ongoing war crimes in Ukraine.

This shift towards "narrative nuclear strikes" reflects a broader strategy of undermining the ideological underpinnings of the West, one that does not rely solely on military might but on the potent influence of information. It's a form of warfare where the battlefield extends beyond physical territories and into the very minds of the global audience, with devastating consequences for public opinion and policy.

In my view, even if the ongoing war of aggression in Ukraine reaches a military stalemate, achieved through diplomatic channels and arduous negotiations, Russia will persist in its cognitive warfare against the West. The pressing issue is not solely the acceptance of the Kremlin's illegal annexation of Ukrainian territories. More crucially, the true problem lies in the geopolitical consequences of an autocrat like Putin, who has sanctioned the deaths of hundreds of thousands of innocent lives. His actions will generate a series of symbolic retributions that will shape history: the erosion of Western resolve, the fraying of transatlantic alliances, and the continuation of a cognitive war aimed at undermining liberal democracies. This war, fought not on the battlefield but within the minds of citizens, is likely to persist as long as the autocratic regime in Moscow seeks to destabilize the values and unity of Western societies.

References

- Andrew, C. & Gordievski, O., 1994. *KGB-Istoria secretă a operațiunilor sale externe de la Lenin la Gorbaciov*. București: ALL.
- Andrew, C. & Mitrokhin, Vasili, 2000. *The Mitrokhin Archive - The KGB in Europe and the West*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bagge, D., 2019. *Unmasking Maskirovka: Russia's Cyber Influence Operations*. New York: Defense Press.
- Beaumont, R., 1982. *Maskirovka: Soviet Camouflage Concealment And Deception*, Texas: s.n.

COGNITIVE HEGEMONY: THE TRUE OBJECTIVE OF RUSSIA'S NEW ACTIVE MEASURES

- Benkler, Y., 2018. *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press..
- Bertelsen, O. & Goldma, J., 2021. *Russian Active Measures: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*. ISBN-13: 978-3838215297 ed. s.l.:ibidem Press.
- Casey, W. J., 1985. Soviet Use of Active Measures. *Current Policy*, 18 September.Issue 761.
- Castells, M., 2011. *Communication Power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Committee on Appropriations, U. S. I. A., 1992. *Soviet Active Measures in the "Post-Cold War" Era*, Washington, D.C: http://intellit.muskingum.edu/russia_folder/pcw_era/index.htm#Contents..
- Crone, M., 2020. Post-Liberal Visions: Memory, Virility, and Geopolitics on the French New Right. *Danish Institute for International Studies*, 24 June.
- Darczewska, J., 2017, June. *Active Measures-Russia's key export*. Warsaw, Centre for Eastern Studies.
- de Marenches, A., 1990. Gorbachev et les autruches. *Le Figaro*, 10 January.
- Dmitriev, M., 2015. *Putin's Russia: How It Rose, How It Is Maintained, and How It Might End*. 1st ed. Washington: American Enterprise Institute.
- Dziak, J., 1988. *Chekisty: History of the KGB*. New York: Free Press.
- E. Kanet, R., 2024. Moscow and the World: From Soviet Active Measures to Russian Information Warfare. *Cybersecurity & Internet Governance*, 3(1), pp. 34-57.
- Fotyga, A. E., 2016. *Report on EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties*, Brussels: Committee on Foreign Affairs of European Parliament.
- Fridman, O., 2018. *Russian "Hybrid Warfare". Resurgence and Politicisation*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Galeotti, M., 2019. *Russian Political War – Moving Beyond the Hybrid*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Gates, R. M., 1986. *Hearings Before The Subcommittee On European Affairs Of The Committee On Foreign Relations United States Senate -First Session On United States Policy Toward East Europe, West Europe, And The Soviet Union*, Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Gioe, D. V. G. M. S. a. F. D. S., 2019. Unforgiven: Russian Intelligence Vengeance as Political Theater and Strategic Messaging. *Intelligence and National Security*, 34(4).
- Gioe, D. V. & Lovering, R. & P. P. T., 2020. The Soviet Legacy of Russian Active Measures: New Vodka from Old Stills?. *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, pp. 1-26.
- Golitsyn, A., 1984. *New Lies for Old*. San Pedro, California: Gsg & Assoc.
- Graph, G. M., 2017. A Guide to Russia's High Tech Tool Box for Subverting. *Wired*, 13 August.
- H. Shultz, R. & G. R., 1984. *Dezinformatsia: Active Measures in Soviet Strategy*.. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press..
- Hamilton, R. E. M. C. S. A., 2020. Russia's War in Syria: Assessing Russian Military Capabilities and Lessons Learned. *Foreign Policy Research Institute*.
- Helmus, T. C., 2018. *Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.

- Henderson, J. & M. T., 2020. Implications of the Global Energy Transition on Russia. In: S. Publishing, ed. *The Geopolitics of the Global Energy Transition*. New York : Henderson, J., & Mitrova, T. (2021). Implications of the Global Energy Transition on Russia, In book: *The Geopolitics of the Global Energy Transition* (pp.93-114), June 2020, DOI:10.1007/978-3-030-39066-2_5, pp. 93-114.
- Hénin, N., 2016. *La France russe: Enquête sur les réseaux de Poutine.*. Paris: Fayard.
- Hill, F. & C. G. G., 2015. *Mr. Putin (Geopolitics in the 21st Century)*. Washington: Brookings Institution Press.
- Hill, F. & Clifford, G. G., 2015. *Mr. Putin (Geopolitics in the 21st Century)*. 1 ed. Washington: Brookings Institution Press.
- Huyn, H., Cozier, B., Menges, C. & Sablier, E., 1996. *Fenixul roșu –KGB*. București: Editura Agni.
- Iakovlev, A., 1989. Wer sich verteidigen kann, beliebt politilfähig. *Rheinscher Merkur, Koln*, 17 February.
- Information, C. o. A. b. t. U. S., 1992. *The Use of Alarmist Arguments, June 1992*. Washington, s.n.
- Jamieson, K. H., 2018. *Cyberwar: How Russian Hackers and Trolls Helped Elect a President: What We Don't, Can't, and Do Know*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jankowicz, N., 2020. *How to Lose the Information War: Russia, Fake News, and the Future of Conflict*. London: I.B. Tauris..
- Jonsson, O., 2019. *The Russian Understanding of War. Blurring the Lines between War and Peace*. 1st ed. Washington: Georgetown University Press.
- Kalugin, O., 1998. Inside the KGB – An interview with retired KGB Maj. Gen. Oleg Kalugin. *CNN interviews: Cold War Experience, Spies in their own words*, January, p. <http://www3.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/episodes/21/interviews/kalugin>.
- Kartopolov, A. V., 2015. Lessons of Military Conflicts and Prospects for Development of Means and Methods of Conducting them. Direct and Indirect Actions in Contemporary International Conflicts. *Bulletin of the Academy of Military Science of Russia*, Issue 2, pp. 26-36.
- Kowalewski, A., 2017. *Disinformation and Reflexive Control: The New Cold War*. [Online] Available at: <https://georgetownsecuritystudiesreview.org/2017/02/01/disinformation-and-reflexive-control-the-new-cold-war/> [Accessed 5 Decembre 2020].
- Lucas, E., 2014. *The New Cold War. Putin's threat to Russia and the West*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Lucas, E., 2018. *Spycraft Rebooted: How Technology is Changing Espionage*. Washington: Amazon Publishing..
- Lucas, E. a. P. P., 2016. Winning the Information War: Techniques and Counter-Strategies to Russian Propaganda in Central and Eastern Europe. *Center for European Policy and Analysis*, August.
- Malachi, M., 1990. *The Keys of this Blood - The Struggle for the World Dominion Between Pope John Paul II, Mikail Gorbachev and The Capitalist West*. New York: Touchestone.

- McCauley, K. N., 2016 . *Russian Influence Campaigns against the West: From the Cold War to Putin*. North Charleston: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.
- Mitrokhin, V., 2002. *KGB Lexicon: The Soviet Intelligence Officers Handbook*. London: Routledge.
- Nardelli, A., 2019. The Explosive Secret Recording that Shows How Russia Tried to Funnel Millions to the European Trump. *BuzzFeed.News*, 10 July, pp. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/albertonardelli/salvini-russia-oil-deal-secret-recording>.
- Polyakova, A. & P. B., 2018. *The future of political warfare: Russia, the West, and the coming age of global digital competition*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Pomerantsev, P., 2014. How Putin Is Reinventing Warfare. *Foreign Policy*, 5 May, pp. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/05/05/how-putin-is-reinventing-warfare/>.
- Rid, T., 2020. *Active Measures: The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare*. s.l.:Farrar, Straus and Girou.
- Romerstein, H., 2001. Disinformation as a KGB Weapon in the Cold War. *Journal of Intelligence History*, 1(1).
- Rychlak, R. J. & L. P. I. M., 2016. *Disinformation: Former Spy Chief Reveals Secret Strategies for Undermining Freedom, Attacking Religion and Promoting Terrorism*. Medford Oregon: WND Books.
- Rychlak, R. J. & Lt.Gen. Pacepa, I. M., 2016. *Disinformation: Former Spy Chief Reveals Secret Strategies for Undermining Freedom, Attacking Religion and Promoting Terrorism*. s.l.:WND Books.
- Schick, N., 2020. *Deep Fakes and the Infocalypse: What You Urgently Need To Know*. New York: Twelve.
- Sciutto, J., 2020. *The Shadow War. Inside the Russia's and China Secret Operations to defeat America*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Sciutto, J., 2020. *The Shadow War. Inside the Russia's and China Secret Operations to defeat America*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Stengel, R., 2019. *Information Wars: How We Lost the Global Battle Against Disinformation and What We Can Do About It*. London: Grove Press.
- Subcommittee on Oversight Committee on Science, S. & T., 2017. *New Tools: A Review of Russia's Soft Cyber Influence Operations*. s.l., s.n.
- Thomas, T. L., 2017. *On Russia's Information War Concepts*. s.l.:s.n.
- Tiede, P., 2014. Putin greift nach der AfD. Wie Der Kreml Einfluss Auf Europa Nehmen Will. *Bild*, 24 11, pp. <https://www.bild.de/politik/inland/wladimir-putin/russlands-praesident-greift-nach-der-afd-kreml-netzwerk-38690092.bild.html>.
- Torbakov, I., 2004. Russia's Eastern Offensive: Eurasianism Versus Atlanticism. *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 24 June.1(38).
- Tufekci, Z., 2017. *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*. London: Yale University Press.
- Vaissie, C., 2016. *Les Réseaux du Kremlin en France*. Paris: Editions Les petits matins.
- Van Herpen, M. H., 2015. *Putin's Propaganda Machine: Soft Power and Russian Foreign Policy*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Weiner, T., 2020. *The Folly and the Glory: America, Russia, and Political Warfare 1945–2020*. New York: Henry Holt and Co..

- Wheaton, J. K., 2010. *Active measures: A very Short History*. Hustonville: Golgotha Press.
- Whitmore, B., 2018. Putin's Dark Ecosystem-Graft, Gangsters, and Active Measures. *Centre for European Policy Analysis*, September.
- Whyte, J., 2024. Soviet Active Measures and the Second Cold War: Security, Truth, and the Politics of Self. *International Political Sociology*, 18(3).