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Russian Information Operations Against Ukrainian Armed Forces and Ukrainian Countermeasures (2014–2015)

Edited by Vladimir Sazonov, Holger Mölder, Kristiina Müür and Andres Saumets

ESTONIAN NATIONAL DEFENCE COLLEGE

RUSSIAN INFORMATION OPERATIONS AGAINST UKRAINIAN ARMED FORCES AND UKRAINIAN COUNTERMEASURES (2014–2015)



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SHORT ANNOTATION



Description of the project

This report analyses the information activities of the Russian Federation that were directed against Ukraine from 1 April 2014 until 31 December 2015.

Justification

Since December 2014 the Russian military has adopted a new doctrine, which explicitly states that information superiority is essential to achieving victory on the physical battlefield in modern war. Therefore, the Ukrainian conflict offers useful lessons for NATO member states.

Objectives

The objective of this research is to identify how Russian propaganda targets the Ukrainian military and security structures, including the policies of the Kyiv government and seeks to undermine their ‘collaboration’ with the West. The research group looked into the ways in which messages disseminated in the media were used to construct attitudes and advocate certain behaviours, in parallel to political and military events on the ground in Ukraine.

Methods

During three field trips to Ukraine (Kyiv and Eastern Ukraine) in 2015 and 2016 interviews were carried out with various media representatives, political and military experts, state officials and politicians, as well as soldiers and officers of the Ukrainian Defence Forces who have been involved in the conflict in Donbas.

Outcomes

The interviews help to provide an assessment of the possible impact of the Russian information campaigns. Understanding the nature of Russian information warfare provides NATO, and Europe in general with input that can improve the level of preparedness to respond to the challenges of 21st century warfare. On 22 February 2017, Russian Defence Minister Sergei

Shoigu acknowledged that Moscow has set up special information warfare units, which have been created “for the protection of the interests of national defence and for counter-activities in the information sphere”.¹

¹ **Russia sets up information warfare units** – defence minister. – Reuters, 22 February 2017. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/russia-military-propaganda-idUSL8N1G753J>> (01.03.2017).

INTRODUCTION: RUSSIAN HYBRID AND INFORMATION WARFARE

Vladimir Sazonov and Kristiina Müür



The term “hybrid warfare” was largely unknown to the general public before the EuroMaidan in Kyiv in late 2013 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Despite the recent increased usage of this term, almost to the point of it becoming yet another buzzword, the underlying principles of the phenomenon have been present since the Soviet era. In more recent times, but prior to the events in Ukraine in 2013 and 2014, the concept of hybrid warfare has also been discussed in Western academic and military scholarly work. For example, in 2007 Frank G. Hoffman, described non-linear warfare as a “*fusion of war forms emerging, one that blurs regular and irregular warfare*”¹. This is discussed in greater details by Prof. Dr. habil. Col. (ret.) Zdzisław Sliwa in the current volume.

What caught both the Kyiv government and the West off guard in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine in 2014 was the ‘*highly effective, in many cases almost real-time coordination of the various means employed, including political, military, special operations and information measures*’.² Bettina Renz explains:

*Throughout much of the post-Soviet period the idea that the Russian military was outdated and stuck in Cold war thinking about the utility of military force had dominated Western perceptions, so the pursuit of an approach that relied heavily on non-military armed force and instruments, such as the use of information and disinformation, was particularly unexpected.*³

It is important to note that Russia (especially over the last 10 years under Vladimir Putin) has increasingly adopted not only aggressive and expansion-

¹ **Hoffman, Frank G.** 2007. Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars. Arlington, Virginia: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, p. 7.

² **Rácz, Andras** 2015. Russia’s Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy’s Ability to Resist. Helsinki: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, p. 87.

³ **Renz, Bettina** 2016. Russia and ‘hybrid warfare’. – Contemporary Politics, Vol. 22, Issue 3, p. 283.

ist political strategies, which rely on geopolitical, revanchist and imperialist ambitions, it has also advanced its actual military capabilities and undertaken sweeping reforms to its army. Over the last 4–5 years the modernisation of the military has been Putin's top priority.⁴ In 2015, Russia increased its defence spending by 7.5%, with a Defence Ministry budget of \$66.4 billion.⁵ Percentage-wise, this makes Russia third in the world in terms of the share of GDP spent on defence (4.5%, which is exceeded only by Saudi Arabia and UAE).⁶ Ray Finch places this in a larger context:

*Yet strengthening the Russian military is only one component in the larger Kremlin strategy of building a multi-polar global order, where Russia serves as an opposing pole to the West, especially the US. He understands the importance of a strong ideology, as well as the dangers of inordinate military spending.*⁷

William Neneth adds that, besides diminishing the Western hegemony, especially its alleged influence in the former Soviet space, the “*deeper goal is to ensure the survival of the regime created by Putin – the current Russian kleptocracy and security state*”⁸.

In order to fulfil these ambitions, Russia is waging a simultaneous information war against both the West and its own domestic audience. Although there are certain commonalities, Russia produces separate propaganda narratives for its foreign and domestic audiences. For example, one goal of the information campaign against the West is to divide Europeans by augmenting their fear of refugees. The domestic Russian audience, on the other hand, receives discourse related to the ostensible decadence of the US, the depravity of the West in general, and the failed Western policies in the Middle East, as well as information regarding the fascist military junta ruling Ukraine, and so on. In his speech during the 53rd Munich Security Conference (2017) Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called for a “post-West world order”. Lavrov

⁴ **Finch, Ray** 2015. Vladimir Putin and the Russian Military. – Foreign Military Studies Office Leavenworth. <<http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/Putin's-Russia/Finch-Putin%20and%20Rus%20Mil.pdf>> (accessed on 17.11.2016). [**Finch** 2015]

⁵ **Russian Military Budget**. GlobalSecurity.org, <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/russia/mo-budget.htm>> (accessed on 17.11.2016).

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ **Finch** 2015.

⁸ **Neneth, William** 2015. Russia's State-Centric Hybrid Warfare. – Diplomaatia, 140 (April 2015), <<http://www.diplomaatia.ee/en/article/russias-state-centric-hybrid-warfare/>> (accessed on 14.11.2016).

hoped that “responsible leaders” would choose to create a “just world order – if you want you can call it a post-West world order”.⁹

In the case of Ukraine, Russian information operations have been carried out in parallel with military operations, and the two have often been integrated in order to mutually support each other. At the start of Ukraine’s larger military offensives in 2014–2015, fighting fronts were set up at the cities Debaltseve, Ilovaysk, Mariupol, and the Donetsk Airport etc. Russian information campaigns were also used to respond to the Ukrainian army’s preparations for mobilization. The “information troops” included members of the Russian media, trolls, the FSB and the GRU, whose agents are active in Eastern Ukraine, as well as a myriad of other recruited separatist activists. One common technique was the dissemination of panic stories, which were massively distributed in the vicinity of the frontline. The local population, as well as *Facebook*, *Vkontakte* and *Odnoklassniki* also played an important role in spreading various shocking rumours. As a result, the Ukrainians were compelled to abandon a number of villages without a fight.¹⁰

The purpose of the current report *Russian Information Operations against Ukrainian Armed Forces and Ukrainian countermeasures (2014–2015)* is to provide a better understanding of Russia’s information campaigns against Ukraine.

The authors give an overview of the assessments from Ukrainian experts as to the effectiveness and impacts of Russia’s actions and Ukraine’s responses. The research is based on interviews with specialists from Ukraine’s various spheres – e.g. military (officers and retired officers from Ukrainian armed forces), political science (analysts from different institutions and think tanks, e.g. International Centre for Policy Studies), media studies and journalists, officials and advisors from ministries and governmental organizations (e.g. Ministry of Information Policy of Ukraine; Ministry of Defence; Ministry of Culture, President’s Administration; Verkhovna Rada, Committee on National Security and Defence), voluntary activists and NGOs (e.g. Centre

⁹ **Russia’s foreign minister calls for ‘post-West world order’ in speech to global leaders.** – Independent, 18. February 2017. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-post-west-world-order-lavrov-munich-security-conference-nato-trump-putin-ukraine-syria-assad-a7587006.html>> (accessed on 26.03.2017).

¹⁰ **Sazonov, Vladimir; Kopõtin, Igor** 2016. Russian Information War Against Ukrainian Armed Forces in 2014–2015: The Ukrainian Point of View. – *Sõjateadlane. Estonian Journal of Military Studies* 2, 2016, pp. 66–87.

for Military and Political Studies, Information Resistance section).¹¹ The study aims to contribute towards applied research in the field, leaving the theoretical frameworks and a deeper academic analysis in the background. For a more academic approach to the current topic, see the recently published volume “*The Crisis in Ukraine and Information Operations of the Russian Federation*” in the second volume (2016) of the *Estonian Journal of Military Studies* published by the Estonian National Defence College.

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We are very thankful to interviewees, contributors (Prof. Dr. Col. (ret.) Z. Sliwa, Dr. H. Mölder, Capt. A. Šlabovits, I. Kopõtin) and all colleagues (Prof. Dr. T. Vihalemm, Prof. Dr. P. Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt) who helped with the analysis of the materials and the reviewers of chapters.

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¹¹ The members of the research group (V. Sazonov, I. Kopõtin, K. Müür) carried out several field trips to Ukraine in May, June and October 2015, and March and May 2016; visiting Kyiv, Lviv and the ATO region. This volume is partly using the materials published in **Sazonov, Vladimir; Mölder, Holger; Müür Kristiina** (eds.) 2016. *Russian Information Warfare Against the Ukrainian State and Defence Forces: April-December 2014*. Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence.

“HYBRID WARFARE” – THE MILITARY SECURITY DOMAIN’S CONSIDERATIONS

*Zdzisław Sliwa*¹



The term “hybrid warfare” became salient after the annexation of Crimea and as a result of the ongoing war in Ukraine. It is often used to denote the modernization of Russia’s armed forces as it sought to develop ‘muscles’ using methods other than military in order to challenge the West. The concept was also a demonstration that Russian military theory continues to develop and has moved away from the former Cold War type, force-on-force concepts that had aimed to exploit mass and the concentration of forces. The last decade has shown that the country is ready to use all available tools, both conventional and nonconventional, in a well-coordinated and sequential way, in order to achieve a desired end state. The topic has become very popular among military and academics who deal with security issues and the term ‘hybrid warfare’ is now commonplace. This paper covers the theoretical background of the term, establishes its origins, and offers some interpretations. This will be followed by a consideration of the conventional aspects of the concept in the context of Russia’s current activities, and their new means of conducting warfare.

The Perception of ‘hybrid war’ as a security threat

The ‘hybrid warfare’ concept is not new as nations have utilized a variety of tools, and every available option in order to achieve their desired aims and challenge their opponents. Frank Hoffman discusses hybrid warfare in his paper published in *Joint Forces Quarterly* by introducing a historical case study of the wars between Sparta and Athens. He recognizes that wars have always been complex and are more than a simple struggle between armed forces. He adds, however, that these present hybrid wars are quite different in nature and recognizes that:

¹ Opinions expressed by the author are his own views and they do not reflect in any way the official policy or position of the Baltic Defence College, or the governments of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania.

hybrid threats incorporate a full range of modes of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts that include indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder. These multi-modal activities can be conducted by separate units, or even by the same unit, but are generally operationally and tactically directed and coordinated within the main battlespace to achieve synergistic effects in the physical and psychological dimensions of conflict².

Hoffman is emphatic in asserting that hybridity is not limited to non-state actors. Hybrid warfare tactics have been adopted by state actors, which makes them even more dangerous and potentially destructive, as any attack can be preceded by non-military actions, which can be directed at all an opponent's vital functions. This requires the military to be more adaptive and requires complex, Whole-of-Government Approaches toward security as "the political, security, economic and social spheres are interdependent: failure in one risks failure in all others"³. Hybrid warfare has also grown out of the regime changes in the Middle East when the leadership of multiple countries was unable to survive the public's discontent. Such the indirect and non-kinetic approach by local forces combined with external support, has changed the entire security situation in the region and consequently allowed radical movements' to find their 'window of opportunity' and advance their dangerous ideas. The ramifications are still evolving and the situation in the region as a whole remains volatile with increasingly global implications. North Africa is a continuous hot spot full of radical movements, rebels, religious groups and fractions fighting for power. A side effect of this has been a mass migration of refugees to Europe. Among these refugees there are also radicals who are ready to initiate 'hybrid warfare' in Europe and augment the war which is already underway.

'Hybrid warfare' is a general term that denotes the simultaneous and coordinated use of conventional and unconventional means and assets to achieve a desired political – military end state. It gained cachet after the paper published by General Valery Gerasimov⁴, the current Chief of the General Staff

² **Hoffman, F.** 2009. Hybrid Warfare and Challenges. – The Joint Forces Quarterly, Issue 52. 1st quarter 2009. Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, p. 36.

³ **Whole of Government Approaches to Fragile States** 2006. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, p. 7.

⁴ About the concepts of the General *Valery Gerasimov* read in: **Герасимов, В.** 2013. Ценность Науки в Предвидении. Новые вызовы требуют переосмыслить формы и способы ведения боевых действий. – Военно-промышленный курьер, No 8 (476), Moscow, 27 February 2013. <<http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632>> (accessed on 12

of the Armed Forces of Russia. However, in that interesting paper Gerasimov never uses the term of 'hybrid warfare', and instead discusses the changes in, and the new reality of, modern warfare. He recognizes that "the role of non-military ways in reaching political and military goals has increased, and in some cases significantly exceeds the power of armed forces"⁵. The upshot of this argument is illustrated in the series of graphics presented in the paper showing the utilization of both conventional and non-conventional means in a sequence of follow-up phases of an operation. His formulation is also called the 'Gerasimov doctrine'. The role of non-military measures is significantly highlighted throughout all six phases, as presented on figure 1.

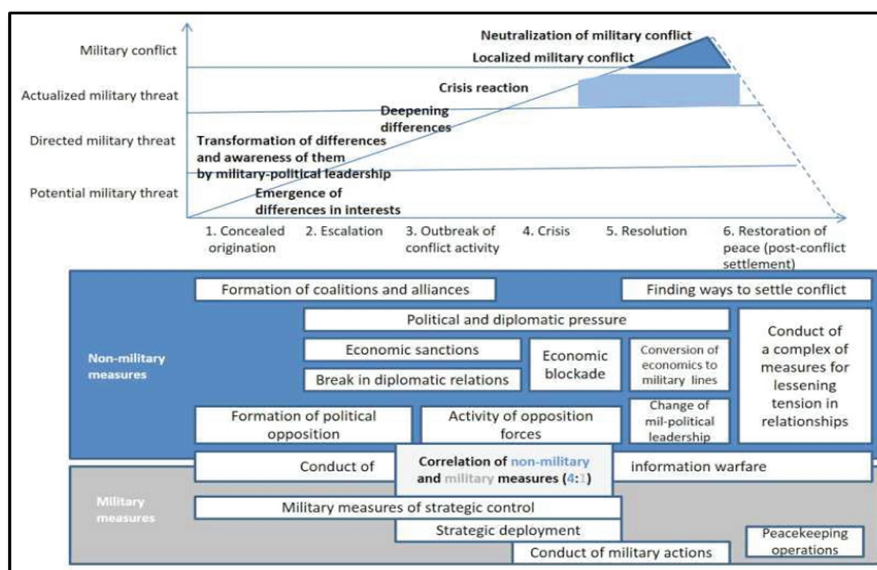


Figure 1. The Role of Non-Military Methods in the Resolution of Interstate Conflicts⁶.

September 2016) [Герасимов 2013] and also in: Thomas, T. 2016. Thinking Like A Russian Officer: Basic Factors And Contemporary Thinking On The Nature of War. April 2016. Fort Leavenworth: The Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO), pp. 16–19.

⁵ Герасимов 2013, *op. cit.*

⁶ Harding J. 2016. Russia's Perception Warfare – The development of Gerasimov's doctrine in Estonia and Georgia and its application in Ukraine. – Wordpress.com, 22 June 2016. <<https://toinformistoinfluence.com/2016/06/22/russias-perception-warfare-the-development-of-gerasimovs-doctrine-in-estonia-and-georgia-and-its-application-in-ukraine/>> (accessed on 3 October 2016). Translated and created by Dr. G. Scott Gorman, School of Advanced Military Studies.

Military measures are only employed during the IVth Crisis phase, after the strategic deterrence and deployment phases, which are supplemented by continuous information operations. Phases I and II include the formation of coalitions and political opposition in relation to the opponent and its nation. Phase II and III, according to the doctrine, includes economic sanctions and diplomatic measures. Based on the graph it becomes apparent that when the non-military tools of phases I to III are taken into consideration, war is an all-encompassing, never ending struggle. As Russia is suffering as a result of the economic sanctions imposed by the west, the Kremlin considers itself to be under attack by the Western powers, which are using economic means in conjunction with political pressure to conduct a war in multiple domains including the information, and cyber realms. External support for opposition parties, and the building of broader coalitions, as well as the expansion of NATO and the EU are all perceived as direct threats against Russia. Therefore when, Gerasimov discusses his concept of ‘new generation warfare’ and ‘hybrid warfare’, although these external threats are never named directly, it is implicit that these measures are considered to be a type of warfare directed against Russia by external powers. This includes the intent to initiate a colour revolution to change the government and weaken the country. Anthony Cordesman explains how this suspicion has influenced Russia’s national military transformation: “Russian military officers now tied the term ‘Colour Revolution’ to the crisis in Ukraine and to what they saw as a new US and European approach to warfare that focuses on creating destabilizing revolutions in other states as a means of serving their security interests at low cost and with minimal casualties. It was seen as posing a potential threat to Russian in the near abroad”⁷.

NATO acknowledges the complexity of ‘Hybrid Warfare’ in its report: “Multiple Futures Project. Navigating Towards 2030”, which was released by the Allied Command Transformation already in 2009. The report explains that security must “identify potential roles within the military realm that NATO could consider emphasizing for 2030”. Among these is the need to adapt “to the Demands of Hybrid Threats”⁸. This has been highlighted as the

⁷ Cordesman, A. 2014. Russia and the “Color Revolution”. Center for Strategic and International Studies, 28 May 2014. <<https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-and-%E2%80%9Ccolor-revolution%E2%80%9D>> (accessed on 20 August 2016).

⁸ **Multiple Futures Project. Navigating Towards 2030.** April 2009. Norfolk: Allied Command Transformation, p. 6. [**Multiple Futures Project 2009**]

primary focus area. The report predicts that this type of warfare will likely be adopted by NATO adversaries as well as those who are

*both interconnected and unpredictable, combining traditional warfare with irregular warfare, terrorism, and organised crime. Psychologically, adversaries will use the instantaneous connectivity of an increasingly effective mass media to reshape or summarily reject the liberal values, ideas, and free markets that characterise the Alliance.*⁹

As a result the enemy will use all opportunities within the engagement space to influence the NATO nations' economy, weaken their political unity, harm their societies, and shape their information domains. Thus the opponent will unconditionally exploit all recognized vulnerabilities. For the adversaries of a nation state the variety of possible tools is vast, and in a worst case scenario could even include the use of weapons of mass destruction. Generally speaking the "risks and threats to the Alliance's territories, populations and forces will be hybrid in nature: an interconnected, unpredictable mix of traditional warfare, irregular warfare, terrorism and organised crime"¹⁰.

Another striking feature of the report is that it does not mention Russia at all, despite the fact that the document was published after the Russian – Georgian war in 2008. However the report does state that it is necessary to "develop a culture where leaders and capabilities are well suited for irregular warfare or the hybrid threat, while simultaneously maintaining NATO's conventional and nuclear competency"¹¹.

It also mentions that there are few individual nations powerful enough to challenge the NATO coalition. Nevertheless one danger that could be exploited concerns the well-known Article V of the Washington Treaty. In certain cases the treaty would be impossible to implement due to the amorphous and indefinite nature of a threat or threats. It is also important to mention that the peculiar nature of hybridity itself creates the need to more closely integrate European nations due to the fact that the primary threat is not military in nature. As any attack could originate from non-military, it compels all European actors to integrate more closely as cooperation among the European Union alliance will be one of key factors to subduing external threats.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁰ **Multiple Futures Project** 2009, p. 33.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

Hybrid warfare is highlighted in the newly released US “Joint Operating Environment JOE 2035” which states that

*a number of revisionist states will employ a range of coercive activities to advance their national interests through combinations of direct and indirect approaches designed to slow, misdirect, and blunt successful responses by targeted states. These hybrid stratagems will be designed to spread confusion and chaos while simultaneously avoiding attribution and potentially retribution.*¹²

In this context Russia is mentioned as a country that seeks to forward its national regional interests and return to its former status as a great power on the global stage. The document also highlights that the US armed forces’ advantage in conventional war has compelled potential adversaries to look for means other than military, as well as the “development of asymmetric, unconventional, irregular, and hybrid approaches”¹³. The threats are categorized within a broader spectrum, also geographically, as the US is directly involved in many regions and each is possessing unique characteristics. Adaptation based on a thorough analysis of the specific dimensions of each of these areas is one of challenges that must be addressed in order to ensure that particular centre of gravity of a respective ‘hybrid war’ is properly recognized and decisively engaged.

NATO’s *Annual Report 2015* recognizes that the hybrid nature of security challenges, which are increasingly “combining military and non-military means of inflicting damage or creating instability”¹⁴ and further acknowledges that this is not a new phenomenon. However, the scale, speed and intensity of these threats are unprecedented, and require new modes of preparation to face, deter and finally defend against such the evolving threats. This requires a consolidation of all available resources in order to ensure that “a wide range of overt and covert military, paramilitary, and civilian measures are used to disrupt, confuse, damage or coerce – Allies agreed to develop a strategy on NATO’s role in countering hybrid warfare”¹⁵.

For NATO it is imperative that there exists a consolidated strategy that is based on a consensus of all of the member nations as this will allow the

¹² **Joint Operating Environment JOE 2035**. Joint Force Development, J7, Washington, 14 July 2016, p. 6. [JOE 2035]

¹³ **JOE 2035**, p. 15.

¹⁴ **The Secretary General’s Annual Report 2016**. Brussels: NATO Public Diplomacy Division, p. 10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

coalition to develop the proper tools to face the threat. The term 'smart defence' has come to denote the development of increasing interconnectivity between nations in order to complement mutual capabilities in a harmonized way. The report highlights the importance of preparedness of non-military assets as the military sector heavily reliant on civilian transportation, manpower, satellite communication and host nation support¹⁶. It is obvious that without these resources, readiness and support operations cannot be conducted for a protracted conflict, nor will their sustainment be reliable. The report mentions aggressive behaviour, which is manifested in military exercises next to NATO's borders, and further acknowledges that an unpredictable country is challenging Europe's security environment¹⁷. NATO is the main military arm of the Euro – Atlantic community, but close cooperation with the European Union as a strategic partner must be maintained and enhanced in order to utilize the full spectrum of political, economic and civilian instruments of power in conjunction with the military one.

In general, the definitions and perceptions of 'hybridity' differ but the essence remains the same as it is based on the need to utilize all possible tools which are suitable for a successful engagement of an opponent.

Implementation of all available tools is linked with the type of political system of a country. Decision-making and the latitude to use military and non-military means is easier in authoritarian systems, but only if the leadership of that nation is actually aware of the threat and ready to deal with it. This gives non-democratic nations an advantage over democratic nations, as non-military options can be subsumed based on a single authority's, or a ruling elites', decision pursue a course of action regardless of the will of the people. Armed forces and law enforcement troops can be deployed even faster, leaving an opponent no reaction time to face the threat.

The Role of Conventional capabilities

Moscow wields the 'hybrid' approach very skilfully as it makes comprehensive use of both the political and military domains. This is amplified by the constant uncertainty regarding its military intentions and developments. These actions alone account for the partial achievement of their desired ambitions to of destabilize security in the border regions, restrict

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 18, 56.

the Eastward expansion of NATO and the European Union and challenge NATO by exposing its weaknesses and limited capabilities. Nevertheless, the nuclear capabilities of the West certainly continue to be a major deterrence. As of August 2016 the continuation of exercises and large scale mobilizations, has kept NATO guessing about what Russia's real intentions are. This unexpected demonstration of armed forces readiness¹⁸ was a determinant of the outcome of the Warsaw Summit and NATO's decision to deploy four battalions to Eastern Europe. The scale of the snap check exercises was a way of making clear that the West's deployment of multinational battalions pales in comparison to the Kremlin's combat power and confirms its readiness to mobilize not only military but also non-military capabilities in short time frame to conduct large scale operations to achieve a desired end state.



Figure 2. Russian troops during snap readiness test in August 2016¹⁹.

¹⁸ Внезапная проверка объявлена в трех военных округах, Северном флоте, ВКС и ВДВ. – TASS News Agency, 25 August 2016. <<http://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/3565111>> (accessed on September 2016). [Внезапная проверка объявлена в трех военных округах, Северном флоте, ВКС и ВДВ 2016]

¹⁹ Внезапная проверка объявлена в трех военных округах, Северном флоте, ВКС и ВДВ 2016.

From the 25th until the 31st of August, selected units from three military districts (the Central, Western, and Southern MDs), the Northern Fleet, as well as Aerospace Forces and Airborne Troops were put on full combat readiness. This was the precursor to the Strategic level command-staff exercise of the Southern Military District, codenamed "Caucasus 2016" in which some 12500 troops, with air and heavy equipment support, took part. It was followed by another large scale four-day exercise at the beginning of October 2016 to verify the capacities of Russia's civil defence. The involvement of as many as 40 million people nationwide was a test to coordinate a variety of services in emergency scenarios based on each region's threat assessment. This comprehensive approach to operations involving all the national assets is supported by the newly created Russian *National Defense Control Center*²⁰ (NDCC), which could be compared to the war-time Stavka from the past.

Although Russia's large scale 'hybrid' warfare capacity in Ukraine came as a shock to the west, it was not developed overnight. Russian military thinkers have incorporated the lessons from the conflicts that are shaping Iraq, and Libya, and have also learned from the wars in Chechnya and Georgia. The concepts emerging from these conflicts have been used to underpin Russia's political objectives as it attempts to re-emerge as a global player, restore its influence over the so called 'near border' area, and in the long term to ensure a better position in relation to the ongoing changes in the security landscape of Asia. Russia's exercises and interventions have also been a presentation of its military capabilities ahead of the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections in order to gain support for the governing party among the population. The exercises were especially effective as they were held during the vacation season which is never a good time for a political campaign, especially one by the opposition. Thus the leadership was able to gain more support by advancing the perception of a strong and powerful armed force that is ready to challenge any threat. Russia's parliamentary election in September did indeed prove to be successful for the United Russia party as it received some 50% of the votes, and more seats in Duma than it had before. During the election there were no major riots, nor were there any protests as it was important for the ruling party to show that the situation in the country is under control. For now a pragmatic use of the available instruments of power sustains the current leadership, especially in relation to internal challenges. Externally Russia has become more visible as an international actor which now sits at the negotiating table with other Western nations for talks

²⁰ NDCC – also known as National Defense Management Center.

about Ukraine and Syria. The utilization of conventional military assets together with other instruments of power within the 'hybrid warfare' framework again allows the country to be recognized as an important European actor with a broader reach.

Russia has modernized its armed forces and trained them extensively in new modes of warfare. This should be taken very seriously. Russia has proven to other nations that it has new capabilities and is ready to act decisively in a limited timeframe using a very short chain of command and a diminished decision-making cycle to achieve a well-coordinated utilization of all of its available national assets. In this context it is worth mentioning the creation of the National State Defense Coordination Center (NDCC), which maintains the same structure, and has the same number of staff regardless of whether the country is at peace or at war. The Center is staffed has some 1000 military and civilian personnel from various defense related military and non-military state institutions, and can operate 24/7. The structure is comprised of: the Supreme Commander's Cell, the Military Command Cell and the Defense Support Cell. This structuring allows the NDCC to utilize all national non-military and military capabilities with a joint effort ratio of 5:1 (4:1), as was confirmed during the snap exercises, the national mobilization in August, and the civil defense exercises in October 2016, as well as during many other exercises. The system is constantly checked and verified via the 'snap exercises' series, thereby improving its efficiency in all types of operations, including the 'hybrid' approach. This unique assemblage of assets has the potential to facilitate a joint multi-institutional comprehensive approach and "if implemented as planned – should greatly improve Russia's speed of reaction and information exchange, assisting in honing its coordinated capabilities for hostile action still further"²¹. The reforms of the command and control system occasioned the establishment of four military districts, which were tasked with stabilization of the evolving situation after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the re-orientation of the military toward new threats. Russia's singular capabilities are recognized by other nations, so there is no attempt to challenge them in a conventional way. The Kremlin is aware of this and therefore fears non-conventional approaches, such as the initiation of a 'colour revolution'. Additionally, NATO is a defensive security organization in nature and will never attack Russia. This is obvious to both sides and Russia exploits this factor by challenging the alliance.

²¹ **Keir, G.** 2016. Russia's 'New' Tools for Confronting the West Continuity and Innovation in Moscow's Exercise of Power. March 2016. London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs Chatham House, pp. 26–27.

Adjustments to the force structure remain ongoing as the initial focus on the creation of independent and more powerful brigades that were to be subordinated to the military districts was revised. This was demonstrated by the restructuring of the 1st Guards Tank Army in the West Military District, the reorganization of the 20th Army, and decision to create three new divisions based on existing combat, combat support and combat service support units²². It shows that the reform is still ongoing and lessons learned coming from exercises are still being implemented in order to create structures that will meet future requirements and operational needs. One of conclusions reached following the snap exercises was that brigades do not possess enough combat power, and as such are not able to conduct independent operations using separate avenues of approach. Other important changes include the professionalization of the armed forces, which was carried out in order to reduce the reliance on conscripts and to shift the military towards the use of contract non-commissioned officers, more time spent on training soldiers during exercises, and the consolidation of units. Large scale exercises, such as *Zapad* or *Caucasus*, have been well suited for that purpose. Nevertheless, the issue is still whether there are enough qualified candidates for military service. There is also competition with the newly created Russian National Guard (NG) which has similar needs. The snap exercises and their scale have surprised Western observers due to both their size and the possible scenarios, which include even nuclear strikes and the rapid deployment and concentration of forces not only within a single military district but also dispersed over a huge expanse of the country. Moreover, the deployment of air and land force units to Syria has proved that force projection capabilities are growing, although they are still limited when compared to the US, yet are still superior to smaller European nations. Despite Russia's economic situation these developments are provided with constant funding and sustained by the dedicated efforts of the national leadership to keep pace with the modernization the armed forces. The National Guard was created to supplement the concept of nonlinear war or hybrid warfare because it was recognized that if hostilities were to be directed against Russia, the entire territory would be under attack using a variety of capabilities.

The consolidated grouping of military and internal security forces within the NDCC is better suited to providing internal security and will allow the

²² Read in details in: **Carik, J.; Sivinskij, A.** 2016. Беларусь в контексте противостояния Россия–НАТО. Центр стратегических и внешнеполитических исследований [Center for Strategic and Foreign Policy Studies]. Minsk 2016, pp. 5–9.

conventional forces to focus on fighting decisive engagements and battles. The National Guard (NG) can secure the critical political, military and economic infrastructure and will be ready to significantly contribute to territorial defense in the case of any attempt to endanger the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation. Already this structure is being used as an instrument to support the internal security in Crimea as the OMON is already very active there and oversees tasks related e.g. to border and critical infrastructure security. In the same fashion private security companies could also supplement the overall security as they possess trained personnel and a variety of special units that allow real support for internal security. They could be possibly a source of reserve soldiers/servicemen to enhance manpower of armed forces and the NG. Russia has a great deal of experience in uniting its society and using all of its available resources to defend its sovereignty, as has been proven by history. Even now the national effort of the Second World War is often referred to and celebrated as a testament to the country's role as a global player. It is also used to inculcate a certain mind-set among the younger generation and make them ready to dedicate their life to the country if necessary.

Private military companies as a tool of hybrid warfare

The theory of 'hybrid warfare' is continually practiced abroad by the Russian military in order to gain more experience in dealing with any threat, whether it be external or internal. The internal threats include terrorist organizations operating inside and an internal 'colour revolution'. Combat units in Syria practice Hybrid warfare operations as do private military companies (PMC). The latter are still not legal in Russia, but nevertheless have Russian leadership and recruit Russian citizens. According to Foreign Policy magazine, already in 2013 Russian mercenaries from the "Slavonic Corps" were fighting the Islamic State in Syria. Also its successor, the PMC 'Wagner' "has been fighting major battles in both Ukraine and Syria – including battles of Palmyra"²³ with some 900 mercenaries who were paid 240,000 roubles a month (around \$3,500). They are equipped with not only small arms, but

²³ **Miller, J.** 2016. Putin's Attack Helicopters and Mercenaries Are Winning the War for Assad. – The Foreign Policy, 30 March 2016. <<http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/30/putins-attack-helicopters-and-mercenaries-are-winning-the-war-for-assad/>> (accessed on 12 September 2016). See also: **Они сражались за Пальмиру.** – Fontanka, 29 March 2016. <<http://www.fontanka.ru/2016/03/28/171/>> (accessed on 12 September 2016).

also heavy equipment and have also coordinated artillery fire and airstrikes. Compared to other nations, the PMC organizations linked with Russia are well armed and possess a variety of heavy weapon systems. Sky News has released a report and a video claiming that Russian mercenaries were deployed to Syria and according to military analyst Pavel Felgenhauer "the deployment of military contractors is consistent with the Russian take on 'hybrid-war'"²⁴. The PMC units were sent to support the Syrian government Army, which was suffering significant losses. The report also highlights the close link between the Syrian government PMC's and the Russian Ministry of Defense. It is mentioning that PMC recruits are trained at Molkino, a Special Forces base in Krasnodar Russia. The commander of the Hong Kong-based company 'Wagner' was Dmitri Utkin, a retired lieutenant colonel and former Commander of the special unit of 2nd separate GRU Specnaz brigade in the Pskov oblast. Utkin has good connections within Russia's armed forces. Currently he is affiliated with the PMC Moran Security Group²⁵.

Mark Galeotti reports that "Moran is run by FSB veterans, and FSB officers were involved in recruiting for the corps"²⁶. Galeotti also reports that "the Donbas has been a testing ground for new state-controlled but notionally private initiatives, ranging from the Vostok Battalion, deployed in 2014, to a variety of other groups drawn from Cossacks, veterans, and adventurers, largely mustered by the FSB – or more usually, military intelligence, the GRU"²⁷. If they were to be legalized, PMCs could become very effective within the 'hybrid warfare' sphere by circumventing the involvement of regular units of the armed forces for certain missions. However there is also the chance that they could be considered subject to Russian legislation, which would link them officially to the government. Such a status is not desired, as indirect control is the more comfortable option. This scenario has already been realized in Ukraine with the passage of the law 'Regarding the State Service of the Russian Cossacks', wherein the Cossack units have been

²⁴ **Sparks, J.** 2016. Revealed: Russia's "Secret Syria Mercenaries". – Sky News, 10 August 2016. <<http://news.sky.com/story/revealed-russias-secret-syria-mercenaries-10529248>> (accessed on 12 August 2016).

²⁵ The Moran Security Group is also managed by former military officers. See Website: <<http://moran-group.org/en/about/index>>.

²⁶ **Galeotti, M.** 2016. Moscow's Mercenaries in Syria. – War on the Rocks, 5 April 2016. <<http://warontherocks.com/2016/04/moscows-mercenaries-in-syria/>> (accessed on 12 June 2016). **FSB** – The Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

tasked with²⁸: the prevention and amelioration of emergency situations and natural disasters, civil and territorial defense; the protection of public order, the protection of borders, and the fight against terrorism. Russian Cossacks have already been used in Ukraine and the same approach would be applied to the PMC's if they were to be legalized. In Russia there are already multiple companies such as: 'RSB-Group', 'Anti-Terror', 'MAR', 'Center R' and others, which are under the hidden control of state despite not being legal.

Conclusions

Sun Tzu recognized that "Hence to fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting"²⁹. This is the current strategic thinking in Russia. The old type of thinking related to the Cold War period is over, and Russia no longer has the capabilities to conduct such large scale operations and conquer vast territories. This is understood by the Kremlin. Thus they attempt to challenge the leadership of their opponents, such as NATO and EU by using non-military means in order to weaken them, destroy their internal cohesion, and augment internal divisions within societies. These efforts, combined with the continuous build-up of the armed forces, the establishment of the National Guard, and the rise of private security and military companies ensures that Russia remains secure from an external attack. It also ensures that the Kremlin retains close control over the internal situation, by neutralizing any opposition, managing terrorist threats and obviating any 'colour revolution' that could be incited by external powers. The Kremlin strategy is partially linked with the recognition that popular movements hold power over, and are capable of changing, any government. Historically there have been instances when Russian citizens were able to effectively change the entire political system.

The parallel developments of military and law enforcement capabilities facilitates the control over other instruments of power, which are merged through the skilfully utilization of the information and cyber domains. The 'hybrid' approach is conceptualized in the 'Gerasimov doctrine' and its

²⁸ Review of article by V. Gusarov, a security expert of 'Information Resistance' group. See: **Russian Private Military Companies As Licensed Tool of Terror**. <<https://informnapalm.org/en/russian-private-military-companies-as-licensed-tool-of-terror/>> (accessed on 12 June 2016).

²⁹ **Sun Tzu**. The Art of War. Translated by Lionel Giles, Part III: Attack by Stratagem. <<http://classics.mit.edu/Tzu/artwar.html>> (accessed on 12 September 2016).

capabilities are certainly apparent. The challenge is how long these policies can be sustained in light of the economic situation. In the short term, until 2020–2022, it is feasible but in the long term the economic situation must be improved in order to avoid the implosion of the current system.

The answer from Western nations must be decisive and must include all possible tools that will place continuous pressure on Russia. The members of European and Euro-Atlantic communities must be united and unwavering in their efforts, as any indication of a lack of cohesion or hesitation will be exploited. The 'hybrid' threat requires the intensive consolidation all of the available resources and security assets of each individual nation. NATO recognizes that in order to face these threats it too must adopt „a hybrid strategy to cope with the fast-moving challenges posed through a range of military and non-military means“³⁰. The economic sanctions that were imposed by the West are having their effect on the Russian economy, albeit slowly. In the long term they will continue to affect the country and force it to make some difficult decisions. There is the danger that some of these decisions might entail hostilities. In order to effectively prepare for such a contingency the West must have a comprehensive array of 'new generation warfare' options.

³⁰ The Secretary General's Annual Report 2016, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

WHY DID RUSSIA ATTACK UKRAINE?

Vladimir Sazonov and Holger Mölder



Why Ukraine? Why did Russia start a war against Ukraine? Why does Russia need Ukraine? These questions are still fundamental to understanding the nature of the military conflict, which broke out in early 2014.

Russia's antagonism towards Ukrainian statehood is manifested in operations against Ukraine's security and military domains, and started in a latent fashion after Ukraine became independent in 1991. These aggression escalated over time and has been developed into Putin's hostile response to the EuroMaidan protest actions of November 2013 – February 2014. Russia's resistance to closer relations between Ukraine and the West is geostrategically explained by Zbigniew Brzezinski, who describes Ukraine an *"important space on the Eurasian chessboard"*, the control over which is a prerequisite for Russia *"to become a powerful imperial state, spanning Europe and Asia"*.¹

Without a doubt, Ukraine's sovereignty would be a terrible shock for Russia's patriotically-minded politico-economical elite. As it means a major defeat of Moscow's historical strategy of exercising control over the geopolitical space around Russia's borders. According to Zbigniew Brzezinski², the loss of Ukraine diminishes Russia's possibilities to exercise influence over the Black Sea region, where Crimea and Odessa have historically been critical strategic access points to the Black Sea and from there to the Mediterranean. Throughout the centuries, Ukraine and the Kyivan Rus have historically been an important part of the Russian nation-building narrative. Ukraine holds a special place in Russian national myths, and Kyiv has traditionally been regarded as the "mother of all Russian cities". Therefore, Ukraine does not play just a pivotal role in Russian geopolitical strategic thinking, but it also holds a symbolic value for Russian civilisation, which influence should not be underestimated. As Hugo Spaulding points out:

¹ **Brzezinski, Zbigniew** 1997. *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*. New York: Basic Books 46.

² *Ibid.*, p. 92.

Russia's strategic interest in controlling Ukrainian political affairs reflects Russian President Vladimir Putin's belief in the need to maintain a buffer between NATO, the European Union, and Russia. The collapse of former President Viktor Yanukovich's pro-Russian regime in February 2014 forced Putin to re-evaluate his strategy for controlling Ukraine, particularly as it became clear that Ukraine's new government was likely to be pro-Western and eager to join the EU and even NATO. Unable to rely on a proxy government any longer, Putin replaced his policy of economic coercion with one incorporating military coercion through successive operations.³

Viktor Yanukovich, the former president of Ukraine, originally from the Russian-influenced Donbas region, who supported closer cooperation with Russia, was expected that he would allow Russia to achieve its strategic goals in the Black Sea region. Robert R. Leonhard, and Stephen P. Phillips, members of the Assessing Revolutionary and Insurgent Strategies (ARIS) group, assess the goals of Yanukovich:

Yanukovich sought to balance growing popularity for closer relations with the EU on the one hand with the very real pressure he felt from Moscow and his ethnic Russian constituency on the other hand. He sought to negotiate a more advantageous natural gas deal with Russia, and to that end he signed an agreement extending Russia's lease of Ukraine's Black Sea port facilities, including Sevastopol, in 2010. The deal split the nation's political spectrum into two camps – one championing closer ties to Moscow and the other touting nationalism and independence from Russian domination.⁴

This split reflected trends in the Ukrainian society, as well as in the governing, political, economic, military and security spheres, which were targeted by Russian information and psychological operations.

After the fall of President Yanukovich on 22 February 2014, the Ukrainian government embarked on a more determined path towards integration with the West. In Moscow, the possibility of losing Ukraine from its geopolitical sphere of influence was seen as a catastrophic defeat in their dream to restore the glory of the Russian Empire, possibly worse than the collapse of the Soviet imperial system in 1991. In order to prevent

³ **Spaulding, Hugo** 2015. Putin's next objectives in the Ukrainian. – Backgrounder, February 2015. Institute for the Study of War. <www.understandingwar.org> (accessed on 24.08.2016), p. 1.

⁴ **Leonhard, Robert R.; Phillips, Stephen P. and the Assessing Revolutionary and Insurgent Strategies (ARIS) Team.** "Little Green Men": a primer on Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013–2014. The United States Army Special Operations Command, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, p. 27. [**Leonhard, Phillips and ARIS Team**]

the European integration of Ukraine and to keep at least the strategically important parts of the country under its control, in February and March of 2014 Russia occupied and annexed Crimea.⁵ Simultaneously Russia implemented various measures to destabilise the predominantly Russian-speaking and Russian-influenced areas of Eastern Ukrainian, including the Donbas, by using tools of asymmetric warfare – e.g. information and psychological operations, economic measures, cyber warfare, and psychological warfare on all levels. Since the outbreak of the crisis, the Russian Federation has not taken any initiative towards resolving the crisis or mediating peace between the Ukrainian government and rebellious Peoples Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk. Russia's passive involvement in the OSCE-led Minsk negotiations indicates that Moscow is not interested in peace, and rather intends to use the current crisis in advancing its strategic interests as an alternative power to the West. By destabilising Eastern Ukraine and undermining the peace process, Russia also avoids taking any responsibility for the security and well-being of the mostly Russian-speaking populace living in the conflict area.

It should be noted that Russia's information's operations⁶ against Ukraine are only one part of a greater non-linear⁷ war being waged by Russia against

⁵ Concerning the annexation of Crimea see **Mölder, Holger; Sazonov, Vladimir; Värk, René** 2014. Krimmi liitmise ajaloolised, poliitilised ja õiguslikud tagamaad: I osa. – Akadeemia, No. 12, pp. 2148–2161; **Mölder, Holger; Sazonov, Vladimir; Värk, René** 2015. Krimmi liitmise ajaloolised, poliitilised ja õiguslikud tagamaad: II osa. – Akadeemia, No. 1, pp. 1–28.

⁶ **Darczewska, Jolanta** 2014. The Anatomy of Russian Information Warfare: the Crimean operation, a case study'. – Point of View, No. 42 (May 2014), Warsaw: Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia; see more **Sazonov, Vladimir; Mölder, Holger; Müür, Kristiina** (eds.) 2016. Russian Information Warfare against the Ukrainian State and Defence Forces: April-December 2014. Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence.

⁷ Non-linear or hybrid war. The term hybrid war was first time used in his thesis by **Nemeth, William J.** 2002. Future War and Chechnya: A Case for Hybrid Warfare. Thesis. Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, June 2002. <http://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/5865/02Jun_Nemeth.pdf?sequence=1> (accessed on 20 June 2016). A. Rácz remarks that „Although the concept of hybrid warfare was not new, the way Russia implemented it was indeed a novelty“ (**Rácz, A.** 2015. Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy's Ability to Resist. Helsinki: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, p. 13.). A. Rácz explains the term hybrid war in following way: „All in all, the term 'hybrid warfare' in Nemeth's work basically signified a society-specific way of warfare, which combined irregular and regular tactics with modern information measures“ (ibid., 30). According to Jānis Bērziņš “one of Putin's closest advisors, Vladislav Surkov (under the pseudonym of Nathan Dubovitsky), coined the term 'Non-Linear Warfare' in an article describing what would be the Fifth World War, the one where all fight against all. The idea is that traditional geo-political paradigms no longer hold” (**Bērziņš, Jānis** 2015. Russian New Generation Warfare is not Hybrid Warfare. – The War in Ukraine: Lessons for Europe. Pabriks, A.; Kudors, A. (eds.). The Centre for East European Policy Studies, Rīga: University of Latvia Press, p. 42).

the Ukrainian state.⁸ Information operations form an important part of non-linear war strategies performed by Russia. Dr. Yevhen Fedchenko⁹ has pointed out that

*As a component of hybrid war, information war is especially alarming because its influence is spreading, and it is having more of a global impact as an increasing number of countries are finding traces of Russian active measures occurring in their territory.*¹⁰

The increasing role of information warfare in Russia's military strategy has received special attention not only amongst the Russian political *élite*, but also among Russian military authorities. The current Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia, and first Deputy Defence Minister Army General Valery Gerasimov¹¹, in early 2013 emphasized the importance of information warfare in the postmodern high-tech era, especially in relation to military conflicts. Gerasimov writes that "*information warfare opens a wide array of asymmetric possibilities for decreasing the fighting potential of the enemy*".¹² The research of the ARIS team explains the Gerasimov model in following way:

*Modern war, Gerasimov argued, focuses on intelligence and domination of the information space. Information technologies have reduced the "spatial, temporal, and information gap between army and government." Objectives are achieved in a remote contact less war; strategic, operational, and tactical levels, as well as offensive and defensive actions, have become less distinguishable. Asymmetric action against enemy forces is more commonplace.*¹³

⁸ Howard, C.; Puhkov, R. (eds.) 2014. *Brothers Armed. Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine*. Minneapolis: East View Press; Pabriks, A.; Kudors, A. (eds.) 2015. *The War in Ukraine: Lessons for Europe*. The Centre for East European Policy Studies. Rīga: University of Latvia Press.

⁹ Director of the Mohyla School of Journalism in Kyiv and co-founder of the *StopFake.org*.

¹⁰ Fedchenko, Yevhen 2016. *Kremlin Propaganda: Soviet Active Measures by Other Means*. – *Sõjateadlane, Estonian Journal of Military Studies*, Vol. 2, pp. 141–169.

¹¹ Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia.

¹² Герасимов, В. 2013. Ценность науки в Предвидении. – *Военно-Промышленный курьер*, No. 8 (476), 27 February. <www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632> (accessed on 23.11.2016), pp. 2–3; see also Müür, Kristiina; Mölder, Holger; Sazonov, Vladimir; Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, Pille 2016. Russian Information Operations against the Ukrainian State and Defence Forces: April-December 2014 in Online News. – *Journal of Baltic Security*, Vol. 2, Issue 1, 2016, pp. 32–33. [Müür et al. 2016]

¹³ Leonhard, Phillips and ARIS Team, p. 18.

In the West various experts have only recently started to discuss about Russia's new hybrid warfare doctrine and often quote from Gerasimov's 2013 article, referring to it as ground breaking concept? Roger N. McDermott disagrees with the majority of experts that the doctrine is something truly new or innovative:

*The policy differences between Moscow and NATO have long been known and explicitly contained in Russia's public security documents. However, since the onset of the Ukraine crisis, analysts and Western governments have largely sought to understand Russia's political-military leadership and its motives, as well as how Russia conducts war, through their own historical, cultural, psychological and institutional prism, and thus essentially mirror imaged an interpretation of Moscow's actions. It may well mark a modern example of blue assessing red, and seeing a reflection of blue. Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of the current chasm that divides Russia and NATO is the mythical interpretation that Moscow has devised a lethal and new hybrid warfare doctrine. If this is, in fact, in error, then NATO and its governments eventually will have to correct it.*¹⁴

Nevertheless, the new Russian military doctrine from the end of December 2014 states that information superiority is essential to achieving victory on the physical battlefield in a modern war.¹⁵ Without a doubt, Russia devotes special attention to information security and has put a great deal of work into this sphere. Only recently (2016), Russia prepared a draft version of "Information Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation".¹⁶ Vadim Shtepa points out that:

In general, this draft document is rife with doctrinal contradictions. For example, it recognizes that "information technologies have a global cross-border nature." But at the same time, the main task of the Doctrine is

¹⁴ **McDermott, R.** 2016. Does Russia Have a Gerasimov Doctrine? – Parameters 46(1) Spring 2016. <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/Parameters/issues/Spring_2016/12_McDermott.pdf> (accessed: 12 March 2017), p. 105.

¹⁵ **Российская Газета** 2014. Военная доктрина Российской Федерации, 30 December. <<http://www.rg.ru/2014/12/30/doktrina-dok.html>> (accessed on 03.05.2016); **Müür et al.** 2016, p. 32.

¹⁶ E.g., **Shtepa, Vadim** 2016. Russia's Draft Information Security Doctrine at Odds With Realities of Modern Information Environment. The Jamestown Foundation, 15th July 2016. <http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=45637&cHash=b4ddf217d48b5af96c4b86c52db172b5#.V52JQvI9672> (accessed on 30.07.2016) [**Shtepa** 2016]; **Доктрина информационной безопасности Российской Федерации (проект)** 2016. – Российская газета. <<https://rg.ru/2016/12/06/doktrina-infobezobasnost-site-dok.html>> (accessed on 25.03.2017).

formulated as follows: “to ensure the sovereignty of the Russian Federation in the information space” – in other words, this is an attempt to set state boundaries within the cross-border information space. The goal of this document is explicitly defined in military terms: to ensure “the stable and smooth functioning of the national information infrastructure [...] in peacetime, during the direct threat of aggression, and in wartime.”¹⁷

The intensified attention that Russia gives to developing its concepts of information warfare confirms that they still consider it to be an important tool for supplementing their military strategies. The crisis in Ukraine appears to have been a testing ground for information warfare methods, and the lessons learned from it could be further applied to other areas that Russia considers strategically important.

¹⁷ Shtepa 2016.

OVERVIEW OF THE POLITICAL EVENTS OF 2014–2015 IN UKRAINE

Holger Mölder



The current chapter gives a short overview of political events that played major role in Russia's information war against Ukraine during the ongoing conflict.

Political Events of 2013-2014

The political developments in Ukraine in late 2013 and in 2014 after the Vilnius Summit (28–29 November 2013) can be summarized as follows:

21 November 2013–21 February 2014. EuroMaidan in Kyiv¹

On 21 November 2013 the Ukrainian government suspended preparations for signing the Ukraine–European Union Association Agreement.² This decision resulted riots, civil unrest and demonstrations in Kyiv. At the same day the Independence Square (Maidan Nezalezhnosti) in Kyiv was occupied by anti-government protesters.³ On 27–28 November 2013 the third Eastern Partnership Summit took place in Vilnius.⁴ During the EuroMaidan protests from November 2013 to February 2014 hundreds of protesters were killed. On 21 February 2014 President Yanukovych signed the “Agreement on the

¹ See more about Euromaidan – **Мухарьский, А.** 2015. Майдан. Еволюція духу. Київ: Наш формат; **Кошкина, С.** 2015. Майдан. Нерасказанная история. Киев: Брайт Стар Паблшинг. [Кошкина 2015]

² Кошкина 2015, pp. 22–23.

³ **Kiev protesters gather, EU dangles aid promise.** – Reuters, 12.12.2013. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/12/12/us-ukraine-idUSBRE9BA04420131212>> (last accessed 24.08.2016).

⁴ **The Third Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius** 2013. Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2013, 2.12.2013. <<http://www.eu2013.lt/en/vilnius-summit>> (last accessed on 24 August 2016).

settlement of the political crisis”.⁵ After that Viktor Yanukovych left Kyiv and moved to Kharkiv. A few days later he appeared already in Moscow.

22 February 2014–1 April 2014. Annexation of Crimea⁶

On February 21st, 2014 President Viktor Yanukovych departed the country. The Ukrainian Parliament took over the power in the country and removed Yanukovych from office on 22 February 2014. On 23 February, the Crimean crisis erupted with demonstrations staged against the new Ukrainian government. Russian support to separatist policies materialized in March of 2014 with the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation. On 21 March 2014 Vladimir Putin ratified the inclusion of two new areas into the Russian Federation: the Republic of Crimea and the City of Federal Importance of Sevastopol.

1 April 2014–30 June 2014. The Pro-Russian offensive

This phase saw the transition into an armed conflict. On 7 April 2014 the so-called People’s Republic of Donetsk was declared. The militants took control of the SBU offices in Donetsk and Luhansk. On 27 April People’s Republic of Luhansk was declared. Armed conflict between the Ukrainian armed forces and pro-Russian militants of so-called People’s Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, who were supported by Russian volunteers, was launched. On 27 May 2014, Petro Poroshenko was elected the President of Ukraine.

1 July 2014–1 September 2014. Ukraine’s offensive

During the offensive, Ukrainian forces were militarily successful and retook significant parts of territory controlled by separatists. On 5 July, Slavyansk was retaken by Ukrainian forces. In July 2014, the Malaysian civil airliner was shot down most probably by separatist forces or Russian volunteers who fought on behalf of them. At the end of summer 2014 pro-Russian separatists initiated counteroffensive. The battle of Ilovaysk (10.08–02.09.2014), became a turning point of the war in Donbas, and ended on 2 September as the Ukrainian forces withdrew from the area.

⁵ Signed by Yanukovych and the leaders of the Ukrainian parliamentary opposition.

⁶ See more Mölder, Sazonov, Värk 2014, pp. 2148–2161; Mölder, Sazonov, Värk 2015, pp. 1–28.

24 August 2014–31 December 2014. The Pro-Russian counteroffensive

At the end of August (24.08.2014) the separatists initiated a major offensive against Mariupol. A ceasefire was established with the first Minsk Protocol and was signed by parties of the conflict under the auspices of the OSCE on 5 September 2014 in Minsk, but it ultimately failed.

Political Events in 2015

The key term to describe the developments of the Ukrainian crisis in 2015 would be ceasefire. The parties agreed to end active fighting on February 10th 2015, and for the rest of the year this was more or less adhered to, although frequent clashes between the parties nevertheless continued.

The Ukrainian crisis was discussed in multiple international forums throughout the year (2015), including several permanent forums such as the Contact Group (the OSCE, Ukraine, Russia, and the rebels, the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, the DPR and the LPR) and the Normandy format (Germany, France, Ukraine, Russia). Active bilateral negotiations between the leaders of the United States, Germany, France with Russia and Ukraine also continued throughout the year, but without any significant breakthrough towards peace. Political contacts between the leaders of Ukraine and Russia deteriorated. The proxy armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine in the Donbas region was followed by an active information and economic war that was actively advanced by Russia against Ukraine. Russia was especially uncompromising in regards to Ukraine's debts and gas supplies, and moreover displayed great reluctance to reach any agreements on these issues. The western countries continued their sanctions against Russia due to its involvement in the Ukrainian crisis.

The first phase from January to March 2015

In January 2015 the rebels achieved their long-term military task and captured the Donetsk International Airport. The Minsk II Agreement, which arose via the initiative of the German and French leaders Angela Merkel and François Hollande, was signed on February 12th by representatives of the OSCE (Heidi Tagliavini), Ukraine (Leonid Kuchma), Russia (Mikhail Zurabov), the DPR (Alexandre Zakharcenko) and the LPR (Igor Plotnitsky). The ceasefire began on February 15th (2015), with the exception of the areas of Debaltseve and Mariupol, where fighting continued. Ukraine withdrew its forces from the Debaltseve area on February 18th. From 24th to 26th February 2015 both parties began to withdraw their artillery from the front lines. The

parliament of Ukraine approved a law that conferred “special status” on the Donbas region on 17 March 2015, as specified by the Minsk II agreement. The OSCE Monitoring Mission continued to observe the situation in the crisis area, but their involvement was often prevented by rebels.

The second phase from April to June 2015

The fragile ceasefire in the crisis area was followed by frequent armed clashes between the opposing parties. Tensions between Russia and Ukraine increased slightly, but during this period there were no significant changes in the positions of parties in the crisis area. Because of continuing tensions in Ukraine, the United States proposed the deployment of US forces to Eastern Europe.

The third phase from July to September 2015

The low intensity conflict continued until mid-August, when shelling recommenced and could be identified, especially near Mariupol and Horlivka. At the end of August a new ceasefire agreement was achieved. It has been in effect since 1st September 2015 and has proved to be quite effective as there have been extended periods when no casualties were reported. . At the end of September 2015, an agreement on withdrawal of small weapons from contact line was reached. From mid-July, clashes between the Right Sector and the Ukrainian Government occurred in Mukachevo.

The fourth phase from October to December 2015

After a relatively peaceful period and several agreements on the withdrawal of weaponry, fighting resumed at the end of October. The Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU was ratified by EU member states on 21st November 2015. Russia continued its economic war against Ukraine into 2016 as it suspended the free trade zone and showed great reluctance to finding solutions to Ukraine’s debt agreements. Local elections were held in Ukraine, where the pro-Government parties were successful in Western and Northern Ukraine. The opposition, on the other hand, found broad support in Southern and Eastern Ukraine. The separatist republics of Donetsk and Luhansk postponed their elections until 2016.

For more detailed timeline late 2013-2015, see **Appendix 1**.

OVERVIEW OF MILITARY EVENTS IN EASTERN UKRAINE IN 2014–2015

Andrei Šlabovič

With contributions by *Vladimir Sazonov*



This chapter gives a short overview of the military conflicts that took place in Eastern Ukraine in 2014 and 2015. The following overview was compiled by Capt. Andrei Šlabovič, with an introduction provided by Vladimir Sazonov.

The military intervention of the Russian Federation in Eastern Ukraine in 2014 can be divided into four distinct phases. The Russian intervention of 2015 can be divided into three different phases. In their book about Russian aggression in Ukraine, Lt. Col. (ret.) Dmitry Tymchuk¹, Lt. Col. (ret.) Juri Karin, Col. Konstantin Mashovets and Col. (ret.) Vyacheslav Gusarov from the NGO Information Resistance, write that “the success of the special operations in Crimea gave Putin cause to think that he could easily conquer the southern and eastern territories of Ukraine”.² Taking control of the Donbas region, which is already mostly pro-Russian, would have seemed like an easy task for Russia at that time (2014). The seizure of the Odesskaya, Nikolayevskaya, and Hersonskaya oblasts, would also have seemed like an easy task for Vladimir Putin and his team.³

But in reality the situation developed otherwise and Russia was unable to complete even the minimum of its objectives that Putin had outlined for Eastern Ukraine before aggressions were initiated. Already in 2014 Russia and pro-Russian separatists were well short of the Kremlin’s programme, especially in regards to their military operations. Russia gained control over only a small part of Eastern-Ukraine. And the Russian-Ukraine conflict in the Donbas region continues to the present.

¹ Head of Center for Military and Political Studies, Information Resistance (IR) section.

² **Тымчук, Д.; Карин, Ю.; Машовец, К.; Гусаров, В.** 2016. Вторжение в Украину: Хроника российской агрессии. Киев: Брайт Стар Паблшинг, р. 9.

³ *Ibid.*, р. 9.

Combat Activity in Eastern Ukraine in 2014

Andrei Šlabovitš

Phase I: Provoking the military conflict (end of March – beginning of May 2014)

Igor Girkin (Strelkov) diversion group initiated its activities in Slavyansk and Kramatorsk on 12–14 April 2014. The first armed attack was directed against the representatives of the Ukrainian government as several key the buildings of the government and civilian-military authorities were seized. The group was clearly better organised and equipped than the other pro-Russian groups that were active during the same period of time (e.g. in Donetsk, Mariupol). It is possible that some important staff members of the Girkin group were already affiliated with the Russian Federation. The Cossacks were deployed to the areas of Antracyt and Krasnyi Luch.

Phase II: Escalation of the military conflict (May – beginning of July 2014)

An assault and defence group comprised of local pro-Russians and volunteers from the Russian Federation⁴ took control of the majority of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. The Russian Federation supported these “volunteers” in every possible way, and provided them with equipment, and transportation to the conflict areas, and armaments and ammunition. The civil-military authorities of the Russian Federation were involved mostly with command and coordination, yet the direct military intervention of special forces and the participation of various specialists cannot be ruled out. It is also possible that with Girkin’s departure from Slavyansk, and his relocation to Donetsk at the beginning of July the involvement of the Russian Federation in Donetsk became indirect, and more emphasis was placed on the activities organised and funded by local oligarchs (e.g. Khodakovsky’s Vostok Battalion by Rinat Akhmetov). However, the arrival of Chechens and other volunteers from the Russian Federation to Donetsk and the first attack on the Donetsk airport on 25–26 May 2014 were obviously directly connected with, and supported by the Russian Federation.

⁴ However, the majority of them could be regarded as “mercenaries”: there is abundant information about hiring former servicemen for a remarkable reward.

Phase III: Direct intervention in the military conflict, the changing situation (July-September 2014)

Because the units were comprised of “volunteers” and as the local pro-Russians were unable to stop the Ukrainian offensive, the separatists were in danger of being isolated from the Russian Federation as well as from each other (e.g. seizure of the border areas by Ukrainian forces, the manoeuvre to the area between Donetsk and Luhansk), thus it is most likely that Russian forces were directly involved. From July 2014 the special forces and artillery units of the Russian Federation repulsed the operations of the Ukrainians near the border and supported the counterattacks of pro-Russians with everything they had in order to regain lost ground (e.g. the battles around Zelenopolye, Saur-Mogila, where attacks originated from both Donetsk and the Russian Federation). At first, the activities of the regular forces of the Russian Army were minimal, and most likely limited to border areas in the form of tactical battle groups of units up to the size of a company, while the participation of specialty units (e.g. artillery, air defence, etc.) was considerably increased. However, with the continued pressure on the part of the Ukrainians, the Russian Federation had to intervene with numerous regular forces (battle groups of several battalions), and this became the turning point of the conflict (the Ilovaysk battle). From that point on it was necessary for the Ukrainians to stop attacking and concentrate on defensive activities. After the battle on September 2014, it is likely that the majority of the Russian regular forces were withdrawn to the Russian border.

Phase IV: Stirring up the military conflict (September-December 2014)

After the successful operation against Ukraine in August-September, the Russian Federation continued its support of the conflict. The activities were relatively similar to those of the second phase (providing equipment, armament, and support with “volunteers”). However, there is some evidence that the percentage of former Russian military personnel (“persons on vacation” and “volunteers”) coming from the Russian Federation became higher in proportion to the locals. Compared to August, the involvement of the regular Russian forces in the form of special forces and specialists was reduced, yet they remained active in some places (e.g. attacks on the Donetsk airport). Russia’s support for rebels in the form of equipment and armament remained extensive. The Russian Federation continued to train “volunteers”⁵ who were prepared to participate in the conflict when and if needed.

⁵ The majority of them being reservists who retired recently or even servicemen in active service.

Combat Activity in Eastern Ukraine in 2015

The year 2015 began with a truce. The situation started to change in mid-January when hostilities resumed around the Donetsk Airport and other sectors of the ATO. Pro-Russian forces were provided with additional supplies and launched an offensive against both Donetsk and Mariupol. At the end of January, Zakharov – the “leader” of the Donetsk People’s Republic – announced the end to the ceasefire and the exchange of prisoners of war and started an offensive against the Ukrainians in order to “free” the entire territory of the Donetsk oblast.

Initially pro-Russian forces resumed attacks on the Donetsk Airport. After receiving reinforcements from the Russian Federation (Ukraine has documented the presence of the Russian Spetsnaz special forces in Ukraine as well as their losses there) and despite of the resistance of Ukrainians, the pro-Russians managed to almost cut off the new airport terminal from other Ukrainian forces. This made the provision of logistic support to the terminal garrison almost impossible. After the fall of the Donetsk Airport on the 22nd of January (2015), the frontline in Donetsk stabilized and has remained largely unchanged to the present day. The main effort of pro-Russians was to seize Debaltseve.

As a result of the battles in summer 2014, Debaltseve fell to the Ukrainians. Debaltseve was of vital importance to the Russian Federation since the Donetsk railroad passes through the city and it was once a major railroad hub. The railroad infrastructure was heavily damaged during hostilities, yet after taking control of Debaltseve, the pro-Russians managed to restore it and resume train traffic between the Russian Federation and Donetsk. This was extremely important as it guaranteed the regular and large-scale supply of pro-Russian soldiers directly from Russia via rail transport. Pro-Russian forces began to mass in the area around Debaltseve and started offensive at the end of January. There was fierce and heavy fighting and it was during this period that one of the largest combat operations of the entire conflict in Eastern Ukraine was undertaken. Both sides assembled large numbers of their combat units, and there were numerous signs that the battle groups of the pro-Russians’ were comprised of units formed from the Russian regular forces (mostly armoured units, Spetsnaz units and artillery units).

Hostilities lasted from the end of January to the end of February 2015 with about 3–5 thousand combatants on the Ukrainian side and about 15–19 thousand combatants on the pro-Russian side. A large number of indirect fire assets and armoured vehicles were used in combat activities; the pro-Russians carried out offensive operations with up to battalion-sized units

deployed against the fortified positions of the Ukrainians, with most of them being suppressed. However, the separatists were able to seize the strategically important villages of Ulegorsk, and then Logvinov a few days later, after the arrival of additional forces and by exploiting all the gaps in the Ukrainians' tactical control. With the seizure of Logvinovo, Ukrainian forces were in danger of being encircled, and therefore had to withdraw from the Debaltseve area with great losses. This also necessitated their abandonment of some of their equipment and weapon systems. The Debaltseve rail hub was taken by pro-Russians on the 18th of February, but this came at a high cost as the Separatists also suffered great losses with regard to both personnel and armoured equipment. There were reports that some Russian personnel were among the losses.

In parallel with the Debaltseve operation, the Ukrainian forces started an offensive operation towards Mariupol with the aim of recapturing the Shirokino settlement, which is located by the Azov Sea. The settlement had been controlled by Russian and pro-Russian forces since the beginning of September. The aim of the offensive was to reduce the pressure on the forces in the Debaltseve area and to exploit a favourable situation, as the majority of the separatists' reserves were concentrated in the area and committed to the occupation of the important railroad hub. The battles in Shirokino rapidly developed into positional warfare and lasted until the beginning of July when pro-Russians were forced to withdraw their forces from the area, and the settlement reverted to back to the control of Ukraine. Several Ukrainian units, including the Azov battalion of volunteers, (later regiment) participated in these battles. The Azov battalion was repeatedly accused of Nazism by the Russian media.

The wintertime battles in Debaltseve and other regions of the Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts showed that the conflict parties had reached a state of impasse. The Ukrainians clearly lacked the military capability to respond with a counterattack (this was also due to political restrictions). The Pro-Russians, on the other hand, did not have enough forces to continue offensive activities to achieve their goals, i.e. clearing the Lugansk and Donetsk oblasts from Ukrainians. Therefore, Russian authorities had a choice of whether to further escalate the situation by bringing more Russian forces to the area, or to try to achieve some of their goals through negotiation. During the Debaltseve hostilities, an agreement was reached as a result of the Minsk multilateral agreements between the Russian Federation, Germany and France to establish a ceasefire. The ceasefire was to begin on the 15th of February, however, it actually started only after Debaltseve had been completely occupied on the

18th of February. The peace settlement meeting is commonly referred to as the Minsk II agreement.

The agreement required both parties to remove their heavy weapons (those of 100mm calibre or more) from the actual line of contact (in reality this process was delayed until the autumn). From the beginning of March until the end of April (2015) at the line of contact remained relatively quiet, although there were some incidents of fire exchanges between small units and contacts between opposing reconnaissance groups along different points of the actual line of contact. The situation started to escalate again at the end of May. On the 3rd of June (2015) about 1000 pro-Russians (including Russian volunteers) attempted advanced towards the settlement of Marjinka, west of Donetsk using indirect fire assets and tanks. The attack of the pro-Russians was suppressed and according to unofficial data sources they suffered heavy losses. The next notable battles took place in Starognatavka (towards Mariupol) and in Belaya Kamenka where there were company-sized battle groups. The outcome of these battles was hardly worth the effort.

At the beginning of September 2015 the parties again agreed to a cease-fire and continued the removal of heavy weapons. The situation in the front-line remained stable until the end of the year, although there were some exchanges of fire, and random indirect fire incidents that occurred. Reconnaissance groups carrying out diversionary activities and laying mines were active in the close rear area of both parties.

To sum up, the combat activities in Eastern Ukraine in 2015 can be subdivided into three phases.

Phase I

The 1st phase – the period of fierce fighting, from the beginning of January to the end of February (2015). Pro-Russians with the support of the units of Russian regular forces attempted to occupy strategically important objects in the Donetsk oblast. The occupation of the objects had either a propagandistic importance (e.g. the Donetsk Airport), or were of a military-economic importance (the Debaltseve rail hub). However, the broader goals set for this phase, which were most probably the destruction of the Ukrainian forces and occupation of the entire Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts were not achieved. This was the peak of the 2015 combat activity when Russian authorities tried to achieve their political goals through military means. By the end of the 1st phase the intensity of combat activity decreased considerably.

Phase II

The 2nd phase – during the summer offensive the activities of the pro-Russians continued mainly in the Donetsk oblast with the aim of improving their position and exerting influence on Ukrainian authorities. The level of combat intensity was considerably lower than that of the 1st phase. Most likely the pro-Russians had to mostly rely on their own resources as the participation of the Russian regular forces diminished. However, although the losses occurred during the very first days of the operation, the intensity of combat decreased rapidly until it was at the pre-operation level. Therefore, it is possible that the resources of pro-Russians were relatively limited (units composed of locals and Russian volunteers/mercenaries).

Phase III

The 3rd phase – during the autumn and winter, combat activity was of relatively low intensity along the line of contact. Mostly reconnaissance battles for were carried out for interference purpose and there were only occasional indirect fire attacks that took place. It is probable that there were also small Russian units involved on the separatists' side (mostly reconnaissance groups). The main purpose was to maintain tension, interfere with Ukrainians' activities, and create losses for them. Similar activities were also continued into 2016 and will most probably continue in the future as they do not require considerable resources, but are still an effective means of keeping Eastern Ukraine in a state of unrest.

LEGAL ELEMENT OF RUSSIA'S HYBRID WARFARE

René Värk



In the modern international community, there are an increasing number of laws regulating the conduct of states, international organisations, multinational corporations, and individuals. International law is expanding to encompass new areas (e.g. the cyber domain), while existing rules are becoming more detailed (e.g. human rights law). At the same time, various actors have come to attach more importance to legal arguments when, for example, it comes to choosing a course of actions or criticising another's behaviour. Most states are conscious of how they are perceived by other states and want to avoid the reputation of being a lawbreaking, or rogue state, due to the various negative consequences (e.g. decreased foreign investments, exclusion from international conferences, increased scrutiny by international organisations, etc.).

International laws define the way in which different actors may behave, must behave, or may not behave. By setting these rules, international law contributes to the maintenance of order in the international community and makes it easier for states to predict how others will behave in specific situations. When one actor has a certain right, then another actor has a corresponding obligation to respect that right, e.g. state X has the right to territorial integrity, therefore state Y has an obligation to refrain from violating the territorial integrity of state X. If a conflict arises, state X can use international law to assert its right and take appropriate measures to protect itself, e.g. the exercise self-defence. In other words, the law can provide criteria for the assessment of whether someone's behaviour is lawful or unlawful and prescribes the permitted counter-measures.

In modern conflicts, international law is often utilised as a weapon together with kinetic and other non-kinetic means. Using law in such a manner is called "lawfare". Charles J. Dunlap, Jr pioneered the term in 2001 and now defines lawfare as "the strategy of using – or misusing – law as a substitute

for traditional military means to achieve an operational objective”.¹ International law is a conveniently available option, and is a low-cost way for a state to pursue its interests. Like any traditional weapon, international law is neither good nor bad in and of itself – it simply depends on how it is used.

Russia uses both national and international law as a weapon. In Ukraine it combined lawfare with kinetic and other non-kinetic means to achieve its objectives. It manipulates international law in order to change the legal paradigm and take advantage of the loopholes and ambiguities. For example, how should the conflict in Ukraine be characterized? Has it reached the threshold of an armed conflict, wherein international humanitarian law (law of armed conflict) becomes applicable? If yes, then is it an international or non-international armed conflict (the applicable laws differ considerably)? Russia denies that it has breached the prohibition of using force against the territorial integrity of another state and claims that the ensuing territorial changes were effected through peaceful and lawful means (self-determination confirmed by a referendum). And moreover the employment of Russian forces was lawful and necessary to protect Russian nationals in Ukraine. Therefore, based on these arguments it becomes apparent that although Russia cannot unilaterally change the system of international law, it can erode the position and foundations of these international laws.

Russia often stresses that it behaves in accordance with international law, whereas others (foremost Ukraine and the Western countries) intentionally violate it. Russia's Foreign Policy Concept (both the 2013 and 2016 version) emphasises that the consistent application of international law is indispensable for the continuance of orderly and mutually beneficial international relations and that Russia conducts its foreign policy according to international law.² When it comes to international law, the 2016 version reiterates mostly the 2013 version, but the former takes a more direct and realistic approach, and reflects the actual practice of Russia in recent years

¹ **Dunlap, C. J. Jr.** 2008. Lawfare Today: A Perspective. – Yale Journal of International Affairs, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 146.

² The role of international law is discussed in various paragraphs of the foreign policy concept. **Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation** 2013. – Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. <www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/122186> (accessed on 31.01.2016). [**Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation** 2013]; **Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation** 2016. – Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. <www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/2542248> (accessed on 31.01.2016) [**Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation** 2016]

(e.g. justifies such interpretations of international law that were useful during the annexation of Crimea, denounces such practices of Western world that impose a threat to Russia's view of international relations).

In this sense Russia often portrays itself as a guardian of international law. It advances the notion that only Russia understands the original meaning of the central legal instruments, notably the United Nations Charter, and the general principles of international law, while others misinterpret, manipulate and misuse the rules of international law. This is what actually destabilises international relations, e.g. Russia alleges that the on-going conflict in Eastern Ukraine was started by and continues to be sustained by the European Union and the United States.

Russia focuses on the rules that regulate and safeguard inter-state relations, e.g. sovereignty, prohibition of the use of force, the prohibition of intervention in internal affairs, and the respect for territorial integrity, but it often adhere to an excessively conservative understanding of these rules that avoids the discussion of the rights and interests of individuals, and in many ways, seems to believe that these rules were carved in stone, (e.g. in 1945, with the adoption of the United Nations Charter) and therefore should not evolve over time. In other words, when Russia and other states discuss these issues, they may be using the same terms, but have a different understanding of them.

Although Russia's Foreign Policy Concept gives international law a prominent role, it is not the only factor that governs Russia's actions. The 2013 version declared that 'Russia pursues an independent foreign policy guided by its national interests and based on unconditional respect for international law'³ and the 2016 version repeats that 'Russia conducts an assertive and independent foreign policy guided by its national interests and based on unconditional respect for international law'⁴. It is true that a state's national interests can override its obligations under international law, and that a state can make a conscious choice to ignore international law when considering its course of action – this is an inescapable reality of international relations.

Russia acknowledges that the fundamental legal instrument of international law is the United Nations Charter (1945). Additionally, it invokes well-known documents such as the Friendly Relations Declaration (1970)⁵ and

³ **Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation** 2013, para. 24.

⁴ **Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation** 2016, para 21.

⁵ UN Doc. GA Res 2625 (XXV).

the Helsinki Final Act (1975)⁶. These sources contain universally endorsed principles such as the respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, the withholding of force, the inviolability of borders, and the non-intervention in and peaceful settlement of disputes. Although Russia stresses the importance of these principles, it blatantly violates them, which is manifest by the annexation of Crimea and the intervention in Eastern Ukraine. When challenged by others, Russia simply denies that it has done anything unlawful (e.g. there are no Russian armed forces in Ukraine, Russia does not provide assistance to ‘self-defence forces’, etc.), or it tries to create distractions by repeating its propaganda narratives (e.g. the people who are mistreated or threatened by the pro-Western regime in Kyiv must be protected). Such narratives carry powerful historical connotations and are designed to end the discussion about the lawfulness of Russia’s conduct by justifying, at least morally, the necessity to fight against extremism and its equivalents.

Russia skilfully uses the mistakes of other states to defend or to justify its own actions. In its domestic discussions and textbooks of international law Russia focuses on certain events, such as those that show the West disrespecting international law, and acting unilaterally (independent of authoritative collective mechanisms, foremost the United Nations). As a result, the West not trustworthy. Most notably, the referenced events include the NATO military operation in Kosovo (1999), the United States invasion of Iraq (2003), and the Western intervention in Libya (2011), which eventually exceeded the Security Council’s mandate. These actions are seen as precedents, and Russia uses them to defend its interests, regardless of the arguments made to the contrary by the West. However, conversely Russia also has no problem abandoning its long-term positions in favour of Western positions, as long as those positions better serve its own interests. In the case of Crimea, Russia abandoned its conservative position on self-determination, which it presented to the International Court of Justice in 2009 in connection with Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of sovereignty,⁷ and instead adopted the liberal position by emphasising that the United States had put forward that position during those proceedings.

When Russia claims that its actions are in accordance with international law and it is actually the actions of other states that are in violation of it, it

⁶ Final Act, Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, 1 August 1975.

⁷ **Written Statement of the Russian Federation** 2009. <www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/141/15628.pdf> (accessed on 31.01.2017); Värk, R. 2014. The Advisory Opinion on Kosovo’s Declaration of Independence: Hopes, Disappointments and Its Relevance to Crimea. – Polish Yearbook of International Law, Vol. 34, pp. 111–127, 123–125.

makes no reference to specific legal sources to explain its position. Instead, it simply makes general statements and continues to insist that it adheres to international law, or that it is other states who violate international law. This is done because it is more difficult to provide specific rules, which support or prohibit particular actions. There are also certain concepts that tend to recur in Russia's discourse to justify their actions, e.g. the protection of nationals abroad, intervention by invitation, and the provision of 'humanitarian' assistance, but the legal justifications of such concepts are either dubious or controversially implemented. When states provide genuine humanitarian assistance, it is done openly; often in co-operation with IOs/NGOs (e.g. the International Committee of the Red Cross) and in a way that allows others to verify the nature of the assistance. States are certainly free to offer humanitarian assistance, but other states are not obliged to accept such assistance, especially if the delivery has not been co-ordinated with them and they cannot verify the contents of the humanitarian convoys, as was the case with Russian 'humanitarian assistance' to Ukraine in August and September of 2014.

Even if Russia puts forward specific legal arguments to justify its actions, it does so in a twisted way. Russia argues that the regions in Eastern Ukraine should have the right of self-determination and to potentially secede, and that Ukrainians had no right to force the president, who had lost people's confidence, to step down. Likewise, Russia claims that it respects the territorial integrity of Ukraine, yet at the same time intervenes in Eastern Ukraine, destabilises the situation in Ukraine, and legitimises the so-called 'People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk' by recognising elections in these regions.

Russia maintains that the sanctions against it are unlawful, as they were not imposed by the Security Council.⁸ According to this argument only the United Nations has a legitimate right to impose general sanctions that are binding for all states. This however is disingenuous. The United Nations is not the only mechanism that can impose sanctions. States and international organisations also have such rights. Although these rights are not unlimited, they can include retorsions and reprisals. Nevertheless, Russia strives to depict the states that have imposed the sanctions against Russia as violators of international law, and portrays itself as an innocent victim who is subject to unfair and unlawful coercion by the West.

⁸ E.g. **News conference of Vladimir Putin**, 18 December 2014. <en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/copy/47250> (accessed on 31.01.2017).

One interesting document that has played a significant role in discussions about the conflict in Ukraine is the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances signed on 5 December 1994.⁹ It was developed in connection with Ukraine's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and provides security assurances by the United States of America, the Russian Federation, and the United Kingdom. The signatories promise to:

- *Respect the independence and sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine in accordance with the principles of the Helsinki Final Act (1975);*
- *Refrain from threats or the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine, except in self-defence or otherwise in accordance with the United Nations Charter;*
- *Refrain from the use of economic coercion to subordinate Ukraine to their own interests;*
- *Seek immediate action from the United Nations Security Council to provide assistance to Ukraine if it becomes a victim of an act of aggression or the object of a threat of aggression in which nuclear weapons are used;*
- *Not to use nuclear weapons against Ukraine, except in self-defence;*
- *To consult with one another if questions arise regarding these commitments.*

It is debatable whether the memorandum is a political document or a legal treaty.

When considering the statements made by the signatories during and after the Ukrainian crisis, it seems that the signatories do not strictly consider the memorandum to be a binding legal treaty. Furthermore, they disagree as to what the exact purpose of the memorandum is. For example, the United States Ambassador, Geoffrey Pyatt, claimed that the memorandum was not an agreement on security guarantees, but is rather an agreement to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. If this is the case, it means that no one can accuse the United States and the United Kingdom of not fulfilling their obligations towards Ukraine.¹⁰

Russia denies that it has violated the memorandum. It argues that: first, the crisis in Ukraine is a result of complex international processes, which are unrelated to Russia's obligations. Second, due to the anti-constitutional

⁹ UN Doc. A/49/765-S/1994/1399.

¹⁰ **Goncharenko, R.** 2014. Ukraine's forgotten security guarantee: The Budapest Memorandum. – Deutsche Welle, 5 December. <www.dw.com/en/ukraines-forgotten-security-guarantee-thebudapest-memorandum/a-18111097> (accessed on 31.01.2017).

coup, Ukraine is 'a new state with which we have signed no binding agreements'.¹¹ However, according to this line of reasoning States cannot make agreements – only governments can, therefore, when a government changes, any agreements made by the previous administration become invalid. This is not a sound position under international law.

The memorandum mostly refers to 'commitment' and only once does it use the word 'obligation' (the 'obligation to refrain from the threat or use of force' against Ukraine). Therefore, the wording is not the strongest. However, even if the signatories did not intend for the memorandum to have the same effect as a traditional legal treaty, it does reaffirm matters that are otherwise legally binding. For example, States are obliged to respect the independence and sovereignty of other States under all circumstances. But, as for it providing tangible security and defence assistance in case of an attack against the independence and sovereignty of Ukraine, the memorandum is of little use.

¹¹ **Vladimir Putin answered journalists' questions on the situation in Ukraine.** 4 March 2014. <en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20366> (accessed on 31.01.2017).

METHODS AND TOOLS OF RUSSIAN INFORMATION OPERATIONS USED AGAINST UKRAINIAN ARMED FORCES: THE ASSESSMENTS OF UKRAINIAN EXPERTS

Vladimir Sazonov, Kristiina Müür and Igor Kopõtin

Introduction

This chapter gives an overview of the methods and techniques used by Russia in its information operations against the Ukrainian army in 2014 and 2015. Due to the great variety of these methods, special attention is paid to those that were the most influential and were used most often.

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine which began in 2014 with the occupation of Crimea by Russian military forces shows how Ukraine's sovereignty was attacked using conventional warfare assets, but also by means of hybrid or non-linear warfare, notably information warfare assets.¹ The Kremlin's propaganda seeks to gain wider influence, spread of disinformation, and target all possible audiences on a massive scale (e.g. soldiers and officers, civil society, different religious and ethnic groups, governments, NGO-s, etc.). The scope of these operations is not limited to Ukraine but also extends to Western Europe as well.² In Ukraine, Russian propaganda aims

¹ See more **Rácz, A.** 2015. Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy's Ability to Resist. Helsinki: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs.

² **Sazonov, V.** 2015. Mõningaid üldisemaide täheldusi Vene Föderatsiooni infosõjast Ukraina kriisi kontekstis. – Maaailma Vaade 26. <<http://www.maailmavaade.ee/nr-26/moningaid-uldisemaide-taheldusi>> (accessed on 24.08.2016); **Sazonov, V.** 2016. Kremlin's infowar in the Baltics. – StopFake.org, 28.04.2016. <<http://www.stopfake.org/en/kremlin-s-infowar-in-the-baltics> and <http://uatoday.tv/society/kremlin-s-infowar-in-the-baltics-640083.html>> (accessed on 24.08.2016); **Сазонов, В.** 2016. Империя бьет по площадям. Некоторые замечания об информационной войне Кремля. – Информационное сопротивление, 09.05.2016. <<http://sprotyv.info/ru/news/kyev/imperiya-bet-po-ploshchadyam-nekotorye-zamechaniya-ob-informacionnoy-voynе-kremlya>> (accessed on 24.08.2016); **Сазонов, В.** 2016. Пропаганда без моральных устоев. Грязные приемы российских пропагандистов – Информационное сопротивление, 22.08.2016. <<http://sprotyv.info/ru/news/kyev/propaganda-bez-moralnyh-ustoev-gryaznye-priemy-rossiyskih-propagandistov>> (accessed

to disparage the Ukrainian government and to depict it as a corrupt, illegal, incapable and fascist junta.³ In addition to trying to diminish the morale of the Ukrainian army on the frontline and in the ATO⁴ region, Russian propaganda also attempts to influence the entire population of Ukraine by spreading contradictory information, misinformation and fake news to induce fear, panic and hatred among people.⁵

When did the Russian information war against Ukraine begin?

Even though the notion of “information war” entered the larger public consciousness mostly in relation to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict starting in 2013–2014, the Russian information operations against Ukraine actually started two decades earlier and have been ongoing since the beginning of 1990s. According to several Ukrainian media experts, Vitalii Moroz⁶, Tetyana Lebedeva⁷ and Nataliya Gumenyuk⁸ among them, the operations became visible in 2003–2004 as Russian propagandists advanced the idea of dividing Ukraine into two or three parts. Vitalii Moroz sees the events that were occurring in Russia at the same time – the oppression of the *NTV* news channel and the appearance of political technologists in the Russian media space – as being related.⁹

At the same time some of these same technologists were hired by the team of Yanukovych to work against the then President of Ukraine Viktor Yushchenko. According to Tetyana Lebedeva¹⁰ Russian information activities started to appear already during the presidency of Leonid Kuchma (1994–

on 24.08.2016); Сазонов, В. 2016. Основная цель путинского режима – воссоздание империи в границах СССР и заполучение Европы в сферу влияния. – Информационное сопротивление, 31.03.2016. <<http://sprotyv.info/ru/news/kiev/uchenyy-osnovnaya-cel-putinskogo-rezhima-vossozhdanie-imperii-v-granichah-sssr-i>> (accessed on 24.08.2016).

³ Müür, K.; Mölder, H.; Sazonov, V.; Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, P. 2016. Russian Information Operations against the Ukrainian State and Defence Forces: April-December 2014 in Online News. – Journal of Baltic Security, Vol. 2, Issue 1. [Müür *et al.* 2016]

⁴ Anti-terrorist operation.

⁵ See e.g. Müür *et al.* 2016.

⁶ Interview with Vitalii Moroz (Head of the New Media Department at Internews Ukraine), carried out by Sazonov.

⁷ Interview with Tetyana Lebedeva, carried out by Sazonov.

⁸ Interview with Nataliya Gumenyuk (Editor-in-chief in Hromadske TV), carried out by Sazonov.

⁹ Interview with V. Moroz, carried out by Sazonov.

¹⁰ Honorary Head of the Independent Association of Broadcasters in Ukraine.

2004), but it was the impact of the “first Maidan” – the Orange Revolution of 2004 – that made the Russian rulers uneasy about their ability to maintain influence over Ukraine.¹¹ At that time, the Russian information operations were not as massive, aggressive, or as influential and visible as they are now.

Dmytro Kuleba¹² considers the more aggressive wave of Russian information campaigns to have started approximately one year before the annexation of Crimea, in 2013.¹³ The takeover process indicated that there was a well-prepared plan and that Russia was militarily ready to conduct the operation in Crimea.¹⁴

However, Tymchuk, Karin, Mashovets and Gusarov from the “Information Resistance” group assert that the Russian information operations actually started already in the 1990s. They divide them into the following stages¹⁵:

1. 1990s–2013 – preparatory phase; probing of the information situation
2. Aug–Nov 2013 – establishment of an information foothold
3. Dec 2013–Feb 2014 – information aggression against Crimea, and disruptions in the Donbas area
4. March–June 2014 – the application of wide-ranging information pressure

Col. Vyacheslav Gusarov (ret), an Ukrainian expert on information security, posits that the active phase of the information war began in July 2013 after a speech by President Vladimir Putin celebrating 1025 years since the Christianisation of the Kievan Rus, where he explicitly stated that Russia will never abandon Ukraine, regardless of whether it is in Europe or in Eurasian Customs Union.¹⁶

In the conflict in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea during 2014, Russian information operations were used at all levels from the political level against the state of Ukraine, its structures, and politicians, up to the military level.

¹¹ Interview with **T. Lebedeva**, carried out by Sazonov.

¹² Ambassador-at Large at the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry.

¹³ Interview with **Dmytro Kuleba**, carried out by Sazonov. About annexation of Crimea see **Mölder, H.; Sazonov, V.; Värk, R.** 2014. Krimmi liitmise ajaloolised, poliitilised ja õiguslikud tagamaad: I osa – Akadeemia, No. 12, pp. 2148–2161 [**Mölder, Sazonov, Värk** 2014]; **Mölder, H.; Sazonov, V.; Värk, R.** 2015. Krimmi liitmise ajaloolised, poliitilised ja õiguslikud tagamaad: II osa. – Akadeemia, No. 1, pp. 1–28. [**Mölder, Sazonov, Värk** 2015]

¹⁴ **Müür et al.** 2016, p. 34.

¹⁵ **Тымчук, Д.; Карин, Ю.; Машовец, К.; Гусаров, В.** 2016. Вторжение в Украину: Хроника российской агрессии. Киев: Брайт Стар Пабблишинг, p. 209–214.

¹⁶ Interview with **Vyacheslav Gusarov**, carried out by Sazonov and Müür.

In its information campaigns against the Ukrainian state and army, Russian propagandists make use of different myths, concepts and narratives that refer to contemporary Russian and Soviet history – e.g., the Second World War, Stepan Bandera and the *banderovitsi*¹⁷, Nazism and violence, genocide¹⁸, as well as Russophobia, Chauvinism etc. Additionally, they use the images of the “glorious” Soviet period, and are especially reverent of the reign of Joseph Stalin, who has again become popular among Russians since Vladimir Putin became the president of the Russian Federation.¹⁹

Narratives and metanarratives related to the Nazis and Fascism are successfully and massively used in the Russian information campaign against Ukraine. The Ukrainian armed forces and its volunteer units are often compared to executions squads (e.g., the *Einsatztruppen* of the Third Reich), Nazis, killers, terrorists, bandits, servants of the Kyiv junta. Ukraine is portrayed as a failed state, or a puppet of NATO and Western countries. Many Russian media outlets disseminate fake news stories about foreign soldiers and NATO troops in Ukraine²⁰, or allege that some of the NATO or European Union states actively assist the Kyiv junta and Ukrainian army, who are Nazi sympathizers and kill civilians.²¹ Another common narrative is the idea that there is a Western conspiracy against Russia, Russians and the Russian

¹⁷ *Banderivtsi* – followers of Stepan Bandera (1909-1959). Stepan Bandera was leader of the Ukrainian nationalists, head of Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN, in Ukrainian *Організація Українських Націоналістів*). Bandera was also the leader of Ukrainian independence movement. See e.g., **Киев митингует против нацизма и бандеровщины**. – *IA Regnum*, 7.11.2015. <<https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2007058.html>> (accessed on 24.08.2016).

¹⁸ See e.g. **Гришин, А.** 2014. Обыкновенный геноцид: «Высшее руководство Украины приказывало уничтожать русскоязычных». – *Комсомольская Правда*, 29 September. <<http://www.ufa.kp.ru/daily/26288.5/3166244/>> (accessed on 24.09.2016).

¹⁹ **Булин, Д.** 2011. Популярность Сталина в России стремительно растет. 27 апреля 2011 г. – *BBC Russian, Русская служба*. <http://www.bbc.com/russian/society/2011/04/110427_stalin_vciom_support.shtml> (accessed on 26 May 2016).

²⁰ See e.g. **Титов, С.** 2015. Радапустила на Украину иностранные войска. – *Комсомольская правда*, 4.6.2015. <<http://www.crimea.kp.ru/daily/26390.4/3267570/>> (accessed on 22.06.2016).

²¹ See e.g. **Смирнов, В.** 2014. В Эстонии «поставят на ноги» бойцов украинской армии, бом бывших Донбасс. – *Комсомольская правда*, 22.9.2014. <<http://kompravda.eu/online/news/1850795/>> (accessed on 12.02.2017).

World in general.²² Western politicians are depicted as cowardly two-faced people who promote the killing of civilians in Ukraine, especially children.²³

According to Russian propaganda the Ukrainian armed forces are in continual uprising due to the inhuman conditions in the army. For example, in an article in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* it was claimed that the “*Moral condition of the Ukrainian army makes us worry more and more. But the moral condition of the authorities of the army brings laughter through tears.*”²⁴ The Russian media depicts a Ukrainian army that is ruled by violence, chaos, hunger and illnesses. Ukrainian soldiers and volunteers are often portrayed as criminals, drug addicts, alcoholics, robbers and cowards, who torture and kill civilians (especially women, children, and the elderly).²⁵ During the escalation of the conflict in Donbas, especially before the Ukrainian mobilisation effort, the newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda* published regular stories about the mass exodus of hundreds and thousands of Ukrainian soldiers deserting from the Ukrainian army to join the Russian side.²⁶ The Russian propaganda machine continuously creates new terms, usually ones related to WWII²⁷ in order to supplement their information war and humiliate the Ukrainians.

²² See e.g. Коц, А.; Стешин, Д. 2014. Ополченец из Афганистана: Ливия, Сирия, Ирак... Вас, русских, окружают. – Комсомольская правда, 20.11.2014. <<http://kompravda.eu/daily/26310.3/3188038>> (accessed on 22.06.2016).

²³ See e.g. Туханина, О. 2014. Почему Запад вступает за Пусси Райот, а не за мертвых девочек из Луганска. – Комсомольская правда, 24.08.2014. <<http://kompravda.eu/daily/26273.7/3150573>> (accessed on 22.06.2016).

²⁴ В украинской армии начались бунты. – Комсомольская правда, 23.04.2014. <<http://kompravda.eu/daily/26223/3106716>> (accessed on 22.03.2017).

²⁵ See e.g. СМИ: Военные ВСУ спиваются целыми подразделениями. – IA Regnum, 20.10.2015. <<https://regnum.ru/news/society/1994593.html>> (accessed on 24.08.2016); Пьяные украинские солдаты неудачно штурмовали позиции ДНР – Басурин. – IA Regnum, 20.10.2015. <<https://regnum.ru/news/polit/1994847.html>> (accessed on 22.06.2016); Баранец, В. 2014. «Комсомолка» узнала имена фронтовиков, которых ограбили украинские солдаты. – Комсомольская правда, 26.9.2014. <<http://kompravda.eu/daily/26287/3165405/>> (accessed on 22.06.2016); Дз, В. 2014. Украинская армия открыла огонь по своим же солдатам. – Комсомольская правда, 17.10.2014. <<http://kompravda.eu/daily/26296/3174231>> (accessed on 22.06.2016).

²⁶ See e.g. Стешин, Д. 2014. Снова бои под Донецком: армия Украины перешла в отступление. – Комсомольская правда, 03.06.2014. <<http://kompravda.eu/daily/26389/3267064/>> (accessed on 22.03.2017).

²⁷ See e.g. Гришин, А. 2014. Никогда мы не будем близнецами с фашистами. – Комсомольская правда, 9.12.2014. <<http://kompravda.eu/daily/26317.5/3196304/>> (accessed on 22.03.2017).

This is accomplished through the usage of metaterms such as *Maidanjugend* (майданюгендовец), which is a derivative of *Hitlerjugend*.²⁸

In addition to mass media, Russia also makes use of various different institutions for its information campaigns. The Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church has played an important role in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.²⁹ Articles in which a priest tells a story of how the Ukrainian army is killing people, priests, and looting churches are common.³⁰ Sometimes the Ukrainian government is represented as being evil or it is equated with demons and Satan.³¹

Russian information aggression in Crimea

On 16 March 2014, Russia organized a fake referendum on the territory of Crimean Peninsula, which resulted in a “decision” to secede from Ukraine and join Russia. The respective application was approved on 18 March when President Vladimir Putin and leaders of Crimea signed the accession treaty and Crimea was pronounced to be an autonomous republic of the Russian Federation. The Sevastopol area was separated from the rest of Crimea and became a city of federal importance. Almost no other country has recognized the legality of the referendum or the incorporation of Crimea into the Russian Federation, and the vast majority of the international community still regards Crimea to be part of Ukraine.³² In his 18 March 2014 speech, Vladimir Putin attempted to justify the annexation of Crimea by emphasizing the common past of Russia and Crimea:

Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptised. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy determined the overall basis of the culture,

²⁸ See e.g. **Людей заставляют врать, что их бомбили ополченцы 2014**. – Комсомольская правда, 4.09.2014. <<http://kompravda.edu/daily/26278.4/3155601/>> (accessed on 22.03.2017).

²⁹ **Riistan, A.** 2016. The Moscow Patriarchate and The conflict in Ukraine. – *Sõjateadlane. Estonian Journal of Military Studies*, Vol. 2, pp. 206–231.

³⁰ See e.g. **Новикова, А.** 2015. Украинские националисты планируют карательную акцию против священников. – Комсомольская правда, 14.10.2014, <http://kompravda.eu/daily/26294/3172487/> (accessed on 24.08.2016).

³¹ See e.g. **Варсегов, Н.** 2014. В души украинских правителей вселился дьявол. – Комсомольская правда, 17.09.2014. <<http://kompravda.eu/daily/26283/3161165/>> (accessed on 24.08.2016).

³² **Mölder, Sazonov, Värk** 2014; **Mölder, Sazonov, Värk** 2015.

*civilisation and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. The graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian empire are also in Crimea. There is also Sevastopol – a legendary city with an outstanding history, a fortress that serves as the birthplace of Russia's Black Sea Fleet.*³³

Nevertheless, the occupation of Crimea would not have been so quick and effective without the strong influence of pre-existing Russian propaganda. Oleksiy Kopytko describes the preparations for the takeover of Crimea in early 2014:

*/.../ all the non-governmental organizations, which were already based in Sevastopol, all of Sevastopol's mass media, which were pro-Russian oriented, they were working in the Black Sea Fleet area. It was no secret that there were huge networks of resident spies cooperating with Russia and openly supporting the pro-Russian forces. All of these networks were working together. The Church also played a large role – I mean the Moscow Patriarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church.*³⁴

Jolanta Darczewska correctly noted that “the Crimean operation has served as an occasion for Russia to demonstrate to the entire world the capabilities and the potential of information warfare.”³⁵ Darczewska also stressed that:

*The information front was supported by diplomats, politicians, political analysts, experts, and representatives of the academic and cultural elites. This front, however, was many years in the making. At the time of the Ukrainian crisis (the Euromaidan), it was combined with ideological, political and socio-cultural sabotage, provocation and diplomatic activity. In short, multi-directional and complex measures were taken. Following the military occupation and incorporation of Crimea into Russia, the disinformation mechanisms were aimed at lending credibility to Moscow's intentions and concealing the gaps in the argumentation for the military moves and annexation of Crimea itself.*³⁶

In addition to a continuous stream of propaganda from different media outlets in Crimea, there were also information and psychological campaigns taking place in the “real world” – e.g., by engaging local people through street

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Interview with **Oleksiy Kopytko**, carried out by Sazonov and Müür.

³⁵ **Darczewska, J.** 2014. The Anatomy of Russian Information Warfare: the Crimean operation, a case study. – Point of View, No. 42 (May 2014). Warsaw: Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia, p. 5. [**Darczewska** 2014]

³⁶ **Darczewska** 2014, p. 5.

interviews; “surveys”, “referendum rallies” and pro-Russian gatherings, as well as mass dissemination of posters, brochures, flyers, leaflets and SMS messages³⁷. It is important to note that the panic inducing text messages were made possible by the fact that the majority of the Ukrainian mobile network operators such as *KyivStar*, are controlled by Russian investors. Russian and pro-Russian media outlets were united in their purpose, which was to gain influence over the local populace by inculcating it with Putin’s ideology, and by spreading mistrust, panic and hatred against the Kyiv government.

Russian information aggression in the Donbas area

Russian information warfare has relied on the following methods and tools in the ongoing Donbas conflict:

a) Pro-Russian political parties

The role of pro-Russian political parties in the destabilization of situation in Ukraine, especially Crimea and Donbas, was significant. Kopytko points out that there were several active pro-Russian political parties in Ukraine seeking closer ties with Moscow.³⁸ The head of the Ukrainian President’s press service and Press Officer of the Information-Analytical Centre of the National Security and Defence Committee Col. Lysenko mentioned that some Ukrainian pro-Russian politicians were used by Russia in their information war against Ukraine, and moreover there were politicians who controlled their own mass media outlets who openly supported Russia.³⁹

b) Russian and separatist mass media

According to many of the interviewees, the Russian TV channels that were geared towards foreign and Russian-speaking audiences, such as *RT* (former *Russia Today*), *Pervyy Kanal*, *Rossiya 1*, *Rossiya 2*, *NTV*, *LifeNews* as well as others, were instrumental in disseminating massive amounts of propaganda against the Ukrainian armed forces until they were banned in Ukraine in 2014. Despite being banned on Ukrainian cable television, they are still watched by a wide audience via satellite or the Internet. Moreover, these channels continue to be highly relevant in the Donbas area and in Crimea.

³⁷ Interview with Col. **Andrii Lysenko**, carried out by Müür.

³⁸ Interview with **O. Kopytko**, carried out by Sazonov.

³⁹ Interview with **A. Lysenko**, carried out by Müür.

After the Ukrainian TV channels were banned in the occupied territories, it was very difficult for people living in Crimea and Donbas to get information from any sources other than the local separatists' channels and the Russian media. Several recent propaganda-oriented channels, especially *LifeNews*⁴⁰, got their start as online news portals, but now have become influential TV channels.⁴¹

Col. Lysenko pointed out that in the occupied territories roughly 90% is Russian propaganda.⁴² It is not only the Ukrainian channels that are banned in the occupied territories, there are also many websites that are prohibited as well. The so-called DNR and LNR both have ministries of propaganda.⁴³ According to Vitalii Moroz, when the conflict started the most popular Russian TV channel among Ukrainian soldiers was *LifeNews*.⁴⁴

The role of the separatist mass media in the Russian information war against Ukraine was significant. The pro-Russian separatist's information channels such as *Novosti Donetskoy Narodnoy Respubliki*⁴⁵, and the TV channels *Lugansk24* and *Tsentrалnoe informatsionnoe agentstvo Novorossii* (Novorus.info) spread fear and panic among Ukrainians, by reporting huge numbers of losses of the Ukrainian army and showing Ukrainian prisoners of war on *Youtube*.⁴⁶ The aim was to sow panic and mistrust among mobilized soldiers against the leaders of the Ukrainian army. The parading of the Ukrainian prisoners of war in Donetsk in January 2015 was also broadcast with the same purpose in mind.⁴⁷ Kopytko describes situation in the conflict area in Donbas the following way:

⁴⁰ <http://lifenews.ru>

⁴¹ Interview with **V. Moroz**, carried out by Sazonov.

⁴² Interview with **A. Lysenko**, carried out by Müür.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Interview with **V. Moroz**, carried out by Sazonov in 2015.

⁴⁵ <http://dnr-news.com/>

⁴⁶ Е. г. **Пленные укропы под Иловайском**, 30.08.2014. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5uM4t295e4k>> (25.03.2016); **Пленные укропы. Донецк, 22 января 2015 года.** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9BWcS9sPwM&oref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3Dq9BWcS9sPwM&has_verified=1> (accessed on 25.03.2016).

⁴⁷ **В Донецке прошел «парад» пленных.** – Комсомольская Правда, 24.08.2014. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-EzdyyHQRA>> (accessed on 25.03.2016); **Захарченко устроил „марш пленных киборгов“: пусть просят прощения у жителей Донецка.** – МК.EU, 22 января 2015. <<http://www.mk.ru/social/2015/01/22/zakharchenko-ustroil-marsh-plennykh-kiborgov-pust-prosyat-proshheniya-u-zhiteley-donecka.html>> (accessed on 25.03.2016).

*There is a first line of defence with the armed forces, and then there is a second line of defence with the National Guard. This is approximately 50 km from front line. Now all this territory is covered by the broadcasts of separatist radio and TV channels of Donetsk. There simply is not a comparable volume of Ukrainian TV channels. Our armed forces are under the total influence of hostile propaganda.*⁴⁸

In some cases, it is in Russia's interest to inflict greater casualties in order to ensure the success of their information and psychological operations. For example, the *FSB* was suspected of organizing a mortar attack on trams in the centre of Donetsk. Journalists from Russian TV channels were already close to the scene and ready to react. As soon as the intelligence-diversionary group opened fire on the civilians, the journalists would immediately report on the casualties. At first the news would be broadcast by Russian TV channels (including *RT* in English language), and then it would be offered for free to Western media channels, as is the standard practice.⁴⁹

c) Ukrainian pro-Russian mass media

There are also Ukrainian TV channels (e.g. *Inter*, channel 17, channel 112 and *Ukraina24*) that transmit messages with misleading content or content that is damaging to the morale of soldiers.⁵⁰ Officers from the Information Department of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine see the problem with Ukrainian newspapers and television channels to lie in their ownership by pro-Russian oligarchs. They consider *Vesti*, which is a free mass-circulated Russian-language newspaper to be the most provocative among them. Since this newspaper extensively distributes panic stories, it has a strong influence on the relatives of soldiers.⁵¹ O. Kopytko describes *Vesti*:

*Before they were putting out high quality Russian propaganda; nothing about execution squads (капает); nothing about fascists /.../ Objective journalism with high standards, but still showing that the government (of Ukraine) is a bunch of idiots.*⁵²

⁴⁸ Interview with **O. Kopytko**, carried out by Sazonov.

⁴⁹ Interview with **Anna Honcharyk**, Head of the International Outreach of the Ukrainian Crisis Media Center, carried out by Sazonov.

⁵⁰ Interview with **Yuriy Butusov**, carried out by Mühr.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Interview with **O. Kopytko**, carried out by Sazonov.

d) Fake websites

Russians and pro-Russian separatists have created a great number of fake homepages and portals. For example, they have created several fake websites for the Ukrainian press centre of the ATO. Regarding safe Internet and social media use in the armed forces, the group most at risk is younger soldiers who may often underestimate the risks, or might still maintain the habits of civilian life. Another issue is that there is no legal framework in Ukraine to regulate cyber space activities.⁵³

e) Rumours and fake stories

The Russian side spreads panic and rumours using social networks such as *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Odnoklassniki* and *Vkontakte*, but also makes use of local people. Rumours or fake news such as “The enemy forces are approaching”, or “Russian tanks are coming” etc. can be spread via social media much more quickly than through a formal hierarchy. Some Ukrainian soldiers are not aware that they help to distribute these rumours, although this is exactly what they do when they return home and tell their friends about their experiences on the frontline. This is also a source of dangerous information leaks. Since social media does not have any filters, it is a great way of spreading fake news and disinformation. Rumours are also spread from one person to another on the streets, markets etc. in different cities and villages. For example, in each apartment building there is a head of the house, or a head of the entrance – usually an old lady. By passing information along in this manner, within one hour, a rumour can spread through an entire town.⁵⁴

For example, in Kharkiv (the second-largest city in Ukraine) in 2014 and 2015 rumours to the effect that, e.g., “as long as we do not resist, Russia will occupy us peacefully and all will be fine” – were spread via public transport. Certain groups were tasked with spreading these rumours – e.g., a pair of people would enter a tram and then start an emotional discussion about the Russian invasion.⁵⁵ As a result of the rumours, instead of assisting Ukrainian soldiers, some local people would resist and tell the soldiers to go back home.⁵⁶

On the other hand some Ukrainian soldiers were suspicious of the locals, and fearful that, for example, food products that local people gave them were

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Interview with **O. Kopytko**, carried out by Sazonov.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Interview with **officers from Department of Information Operation** (Ministry of Defence of Ukraine), carried out by Kopötin.

poisoned.⁵⁷ This was another way in which, Russian agents and pro-Russian separatists very skilfully used local people.

f) Loudspeakers in the Donbas region

According to media experts, as well as several officials of the Ministry of Information Policy of Ukraine, another effective way of bringing people in the Donbas area quickly and efficiently under control was through the use of loudspeakers. This method was actively used already during the Second World War. Information that is transmitted through loudspeakers to Ukrainian soldiers on the front line reduces their willingness to wage war and influences their morale. The messages from the loudspeakers allege that the members of Ukrainian government and the commanders of the armed forces are traitors and liars who have sent Ukrainian troops to their death and will abandon them. And since the Russian military machine is so powerful, they are all doomed.⁵⁸

g) Mobile network operators

During the psychological operations and information campaigns, panic and fear were spread among Ukrainian people via mobile network operators. The most widely used operator in the ATO (anti-terrorist operations) region is *KyivStar*, the controlling shares of which belong to Russian businessmen.⁵⁹ Phone numbers of people who visited the ATO area were registered at information centres that were previously established in the so-called Novorossiya. Visitors soon began to receive text messages with following content: e.g. “Soldier, go home if you want to live”, “Welcome to the territory of Donetsk People’s Republic”, “Your generals are cowards and liars”, “Your commanders have escaped, because they know that the war is already lost”, “You are alone and nobody will help you”.⁶⁰

The phone numbers of family members and friends are used in a similar way – examples of messages include: “Your son is a prisoner of war” or “Your husband is dead”. Sometimes separatists make calls to the officers

⁵⁷ Interview with „Oleksandr“, carried out by Kopõtin.

⁵⁸ Interview with **T. Popova** (Deputy Minister, Ministry of Information Policy of Ukraine), carried out by Sazonov.

⁵⁹ **Из России с любовью. Кому принадлежат украинские операторы**, 30.6.2015. <<http://ukrainianiphone.com/2015/06/owners-of-ukrainian-operators/>> (accessed on 29.06.2015).

⁶⁰ Based on interviews carried out by Kopõtin.

working in the ATO area and try to intimidate them. The networks of separatist agents use the same tactics.⁶¹

For example, when the battles were under way in Debaltsevo (in July 2014 and later, in January – February 2015) this tactic of calling or sending SMSes was used quite actively but was not limited to this area. During intense fighting, Ukrainian soldiers also received messages such as “Your commanders have fled” or “The Ukrainian army will flee”, and “Your generals are cowards”.⁶² Other examples of disruptive text messages include: “Give up!” “You are betrayed!” “If you give up, nothing will happen to you”, “Come to our side – there will be peace and everything will be fine!”, “You are execution squads and you will bear responsibility – run away! “ „Tomorrow we will start to attack“.⁶³

h) Conflicts between regular armed forces and volunteers

Russian and pro-Russian activists, agents of influence, propagandists, trolls etc. seek to create conflicts and rifts between the Ukrainian regular armed forces and volunteers. For example, Russia tries to show that the mobilized regular forces do not want to fight, and it is for that reason the separatists have been able to cultivate better relations with them rather than with the volunteers.⁶⁴

i) The GRU, FSB and Russian agents of influence

Another influential Russian tool is the widespread and effective network of Russian agents presently working in Ukraine (especially in Donbas area and Crimea). The agents are connected to the *FSB*⁶⁵, and have experience in creating networks in Crimea and in the Donbas region as they were at work there well before the outbreak of the military conflict. These networks attempt to create panic, fear and hatred. The psychological influencing of people is carried out in a highly methodological and systemic manner. With the assistance and support of local agents, the Russian information operations in the Donbas area were actually established many years before the actual conflict broke out. It is important to note that local Communist functionaries

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Interview with **D. Kuleba**, carried out by Sazonov.

⁶³ Interview with **O. Kopytko**, carried out by Sazonov.

⁶⁴ Interview with **O. Kopytko**, carried out by Sazonov.

⁶⁵ The Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB) (Федеральная служба безопасности Российской Федерации).

and pro-Russian activists played an important role in helping to establish these local networks of agents.⁶⁶

When the intensive phase of the conflict began in Donbas, the area had already become susceptible to Russia's propaganda as many groups of saboteurs, pro-Russian activists and Russian spies had previously laid the groundwork there. Their work was vigorously supplemented during the war as Russia sent more spies and groups of "diversants" to the Donbas region. These groups consisted of approximately 30-40 people per group. They were professional and experienced intelligence officers (saboteurs, spies), who were sent to Eastern Ukraine to destabilize the situation and carry out information operations, as well as perform tactical military tasks.⁶⁷

The following example describes how the operation was carried out in Eastern Ukraine in 2014. Saboteurs, spies (Russian "diversants") and intelligence officers arrived in a certain location accompanied by trained journalists (usually two). One journalist would be a specialist in the military field, and the second would deal with civilian issues. They would quickly fabricate certain "desperate" situations and then make a video that would immediately be uploaded to YouTube or other social media outlets.⁶⁸

The footage would then be shown on both Russian and Ukrainian television. Typical imagery included the Donbas people rebelling against the Ukrainian "fascists" and "execution squads", the "Kyiv junta" ordering their troops to kill Russians, and torture civilians in Donbas, and etc. These reports would be coordinated by a group leader who was a professional saboteur or spy with significant experience in military operations and was acting on instructions from an FSB coordinator. The leader of the group would have at least two important numbers in his mobile phone. The first would be the number of the FSB coordinator, who was responsible for the regional and local agents. Both the FSB coordinator and the group leader would coordinate their efforts and work to recruit local people. Many of the local groups of militants were standing by, ready to act and waiting for the instructions from the coordinator. Essentially, almost all the functionaries were recruited from Eastern Ukraine.⁶⁹

Col. Lysenko also mentioned another group of pro-Russian agents called agents-migrants (*агенты-переселенцы*) – people who had left the occupied

⁶⁶ Interview with **Sergey Vysotsky**, carried out by Sazonov.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

territories (Crimea, Donbas) and told lies of the brutality of the Ukrainian soldiers.⁷⁰

j) Weaknesses of Ukrainian strategic communication

The disconnect between the Ukrainian army and the society was masterfully exploited by the Russian propaganda machine. The weak communication between the army and the society via the media as well as mistakes that took place during the mobilization provided fertile ground for the spread of rumours and so-called video “reports” with the content that was harmful to the army. For example, the Ukrainian TV channel *Hromadske TV*⁷¹ reported that in Kharkiv, in June 2015, the militia (local police) had detained many people during “document” checks and then invited them to join the armed forces. This resulted in large protests in Kharkiv, where the pro-Russian population is quite sizable.⁷² The “failure” of mobilization in Western Ukraine was shown via *Youtube*.⁷³ Negative reports of compulsory mobilization were also transmitted by Russian media channels.⁷⁴ In general Russia and the pro-Russian separatists masterfully sensationalized the problems of the Ukrainian army.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Interview with **A. Lysenko**, carried out by Müür.

⁷¹ Ukrainian TV channel.

⁷² **Анна Соколова про мобілізацію у Харкові**. – Hromadske.TV, 26.06.2015. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AejHyGvRsdo>> (accessed on 25.03.2016).

⁷³ **Новые хитрости военкоматов в ходе мобилизации**. – www.slovoidilo.ua. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZrK_6SwVd4> (accessed on 25.03.2016).

⁷⁴ See e.g. **На улицах Украины проходит шестая волна насильственной мобилизации**. – Polirussia.news, 06.07.2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSUzkH_PfZc> (accessed on 25.03.2016).

⁷⁵ Interview with **officers from Department of Information Operation** (Ministry of Defence of Ukraine), carried out by Kopötin.

THE UKRAINIAN COUNTERMEASURES TO RUSSIA'S INFORMATION WAR IN 2014–2015

Igor Kopōtin. With contributions by Vladimir Sazonov



Information security in Ukraine at the beginning of the conflict

Ukraine directed its attention to the information sphere only in 2014 when it was faced with a very hostile Russian information campaign combined with overt military aggression. It was then that Ukrainian experts and officials started discussions and analysis, and to publish their recommendations.¹ By the time Ukraine began addressing information security issues and launching countermeasures, the Russian information warfare was already well established.

In Ukraine, the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine and the Ministry of Information Policy deal with strategic communication, while the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine deals with information warfare issues. At the beginning of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine in 2014, the Ukrainian state, as well as its army and media channels had neither the strategy nor the capabilities to cope with such tasks. Ukrainians were largely ill-prepared for information and psychological operation campaign being waged by Russia. For the society as a whole there was a lack of mediated information about the activities of the Ukrainian forces in the ATO region. For that reason, rumours and messages that were distributed by Russia got to easily dominate the information flow. The content put forward by Russia was also distributed via Ukrainian information channels. Panic stories were intensively circulated in the vicinity of the frontlines.

¹ **De Silva, R.** 2015. Ukraine's Information Security Head Discusses Russian Propaganda Tactics. – Defence IQ, January 6. <<http://www.defenceiq.com/defence-technology/articles/ukraine-s-information-security-head-discusses-russ/>> (accessed on 04.05.2016); **Гусаров, В.** 2014. Силы информационных операций России: каким должен быть ответ Украины? – Информационное сопротивление. 04.10.2014. <<http://sprotyv.info/ru/news/5931-sily-informacionnyh-operaciy-rossii-kakim-dolzen-byt-otvet-ukrainy>> (accessed on 07.11.2015).

Psychological defence capabilities of the Ukrainian Armed Forces

On 1 April 2013, the army instituted its ideological protocols for servicemen. The aim of the new discipline was to raise awareness of national defence policies, increase motivation, and deter the ideological influence of the enemy.²

Military schools and the military academy of Ukraine started to offer several degrees in the field of information studies. Today the Institute of Humanities of the National Defence University of Ukraine „Ivan Chernyakhovsky“ (NDUU) prepares military specialists in the field of information (2nd level of officer education), with further specialization opportunities in military sociology, law of armed conflict, and military pedagogy. The 1st level of professional training is carried out at several military schools in Lviv, Odessa (Navy) and Kharkiv (Air Force), and provides training for deputy commanders in a variety of study and instruction activities. The schools work in cooperation with the military department of the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv which provides military training for political science and psychology specialists for the army. Graduates of the NDUU (with the rank of a major) are posted as deputy commanders of regiments and brigades for study and instruction activities.³

Preparation in the field of information studies refers to a set of instructional measures designed to develop the attitude, morale, psychological qualities, and mindset of servicemen, as well as enhances their understanding of the overall military and political situation in order to complete their combat tasks.⁴

The brigades are serving in the ATO region. Almost all brigades in the ATO are staffed with NDUU graduates. The period of study is two years in peacetime, and 1.5 years in wartime (valid now). The combat experience in the ATO proved the need for officers with specialties in information and military psychology. Since 2015 military specialists have been tasked with protecting military personnel against the psychological operations of the enemy.⁵

² С 1 апреля в армии вводится военно-идеологическая подготовка. – UNIAN, 29.03.2013. <<http://army.unian.net/769570-s-1-aprelya-v-armii-vvoditsya-voenno-ideologicheskaya-podgotovka.html>> (accessed on 28.03.2016).

³ Подготовка специалистов информационно-пропагандистского обеспечения Вооруженных Сил Украины 2014. Учебное пособие [Study material], pages not numbered, owned by the author.

⁴ Информационно-пропагандистское обеспечение войск 2014. Study material, pages not numbered, owned by I. Kopŏtin.

⁵ Meeting with Ukrainian officers at the Institute of Humanities of the National Defence University of Ukraine „Ivan Chernyakhovsky“ on 25.06.2015.

Over the years the Ukrainian army has suffered a decline in morale. Russian agents have played their role in this, but it has also been a self-inflicted wound as the education system for military specialists in information warfare and other humanities has been modified several times, increasing its dysfunctionality. In volunteer units there are no information operations officers. The National Guard (the former internal forces) prepares its professional information warfare officers at the Kharkiv military school.⁶

Since 1993 there has been a volunteer chaplain service in the Ukrainian army. One of its tasks is the psychological protection of servicemen. Each Ukrainian military unit in the ATO has a chapel area, a bible, and 1-2 chaplains permanently embedded with every unit. As a rule, Greek Catholic or Kyiv Patriarch Orthodox priests work for the Ukrainian Armed Forces.⁷

The Ukrainian counterstrategy

The Ukrainian Crisis Media Centre

According to the management team of the Ukrainian Crisis Media Centre⁸ (UCMC), Russia had been effective in carrying out information and psychological operations, especially since the Ukrainian command structures did not provide adequate and timely information about events in the conflict area.⁹ To improve the situation, in 2014 the Ukrainian armed forces set out to re-establish effective media communication and to create a more balanced image of the army. The UCMC was established in March 2014. One of its tasks was to help the Ukrainian military-civilian authorities (army, police, etc.) strategically communicate with the civil society. Specialists and experts of the Ukrainian Crisis Media Centre worked for the Ministry of Defence and General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine as advisors.¹⁰

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Interview with the chaplain of the 8th Single Company Aratta of the Ukrainian Volunteers' Corps Right Sector on 08.10.2015; *Служба військових капеланів у воєнній організації української держави: необхідність, можливості та перспективи*. <<http://www.niss.gov.ua/content/articles/files/Kapelany-3aa20.pdf>> (accessed on 28.03.2016); *Департамент Патріаршої Курії Української Греко-Католицької Церкви у справах душпастирства силових структур України*. <<http://kapelanstvo.org.ua/>> (accessed on 28.03.2016); *Капелланы на фронте*. – Цензор.Нет, 24.12.2014. <http://censor.net.ua/resonance/316856/voennyi_kapellan_oleg_usatyuk_na_voynie_neveruyuschih_net_v_okope_pod_obstrelom_gradov_molyatsya_vse> (accessed on 28.03.2016).

⁸ <http://uacrisis.org/>

⁹ Meeting with employees of the Ukrainian Crisis Media Centre in Kyiv, 05.10.2015.

¹⁰ Український кризовий медіа центр (УКМЦ). <<http://uacrisis.org/ua/about>> (accessed on 25.03.2016). Interview with **Anna Honcharyk**, Head of the International Outreach of the Ukrainian Crisis Media Center, carried out by Kopōtin.

The Centre for Military and Political Studies – Information Resistance section

The Ministry of Information Policy was established in Ukraine on 2 December 2014. In that same year several NGOs, e.g. *Information Resistance*¹¹ or *StopFake.org*¹², were also established and took up the fight against harmful disinformation and fake news that was being spread via Russian mass-media and social media.¹³ According to several sources, the Ministry of Information Policy of Ukraine was initially ineffective in its resistance against Russian propaganda, whereas the NGOs proved to be much more effective. As Col. Andrii Lysenko, spokesperson of the Anti-terrorist operation (ATO), pointed out:

*After Ukraine started to bear the brunt of the Russian Federation's aggression, the question of informational counteractions arose. /.../ but at that time we did not have a President, because President Yanukovich had run away and the new President's pre-election campaign was just starting. So the President's duties were executed by the speaker of Verkhovna Rada, Mr. Oleksandr Turchynov. Since the Cabinet of ministers was also unprepared for such a contingency the group that took responsibility for the counter-measures was a non-governmental organization called Information Resistance. This organization included former ministers and military servicemen – such as Dmitry Tymchuk and Juri Karin. They were the first ones who were able to adequately respond to Russian propaganda.*¹⁴

The Centre for Military and Political Studies and its Information Resistance section was created in 2014. Oleksiy Kopytko of the Information Resistance and Committee on National Security and Defence (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine) stated that the NGO Information Resistance had already started its fight against Russian information campaigns in Ukraine in 2014. The creation of the press-centre in the ATO and also the informational-analytical centre Red Bull came out of their initiative.¹⁵

So, in 2014, despite the lack of adequate information about the crisis and combat activity from the general staff of the armed forces, there were still

¹¹ **Информационное сопротивление.** <<http://sprotyv.info/ru/>>.

¹² **Fedchenko, Y.** 2015. Debunking Lies and Stopping Fakes: Lessons from the Frontline. – POLICY PAPER 2015. <<http://www.globsec.org/upload/documents/policy-paper-1/13-fedchenko.pdf>> (accessed on 15.07.2015).

¹³ See about social media as weapon – **Nissen, T. E.** 2015. Sotsiaalmeedia kasutamise relevantsust. Tänapäeva konfliktide omadused. Tallinn: Riigikaitse raamatukogu.

¹⁴ Interview with Col. **A. Lysenko**, carried out by Müür.

¹⁵ Interview with **O. Kopytko**, carried out by Sazonov and Müür.

information leaks to journalists, the most popular of them being Dmytro Tymchuk. It was Tymchuk who established the information website Sprotyv.info¹⁶. Due to the self-imposed isolation of the Ukrainian armed forces, his news items were much in demand. The analyses he provided can be considered to be countermeasures.

The Ukrainian Crisis Media Centre focuses on improving the image of the armed forces, communicating war developments and reforms to internal audience. The most complicated work occurred in Illovaysk (from May to September 2014, i.e. from the beginning of the conflict until the Minsk-1 agreements), and during the combat activity in Debaltseve (December 2014–February 2015).¹⁷

At that time the media had no information on the changes in the command structure of the armed forces, so a briefing with questions and answers – known as the 1st communication plan – was compiled for them. To communicate these developments, several well-known Ukrainian media channels were used. Afterwards, the percentage of negative information about the armed forces dropped considerably, from 62% to 20%. Here the nature of the ownership of the Ukrainian media channels should be mentioned as all of the media channels are privately owned by an oligarch.¹⁸

Also, using embedded journalists in the Ukrainian army has proved to be an efficient means of making the Ukrainian side of the story more widely known.¹⁹

Information operations in “Case of Konstantinovka”

The Ukrainian Crisis Media Centre has started to ground itself on the principle „the truth, and now“, meaning that true information should be spread without a delay. An example is the case of Konstantinovka located in the rear area of combat activities, where on 16 March 2015 an MT-LB multipurpose armoured vehicle killed a child of 8. The incident was extensively covered

¹⁶ **Інформаційне Спротивлення**. <<http://sprotyv.info/ru/o-nas>> (accessed on 25.03.2016).

¹⁷ Interview with **A. Honcharyk**, Head of the International Outreach of the Ukrainian Crisis Media Center, carried out by Kopõtin.

¹⁸ Interview with **Nataliya Gumenyuk**, Head of Hromadske.TV International, carried out by Sazonov and Kopõtin.

¹⁹ **Як воюють мобілізовані журналісти**. – BBC Україна, 28.07.2015. <http://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/society/2015/07/150728_journalist3_ko> (accessed on 25.03.2016).

by Russian and pro-Russian media channels. A huge crowd arrived at the scene demanding to know the location of the culprits. They began throwing rocks at the Ukrainian military vehicles passing by. The riots that started in the village were seen as a riot against Ukraine.²⁰

A year later the incident was still a very sensitive subject, and Donetsk separatists tried to foment unrest by saying that the anti-separatist battalion “Lviv” from the Western Ukraine would be deployed against the pro-DNR people in Konstantinovka. This was yet another attempt at creating antagonism between West and East, augmenting anti-Ukrainian hysteria, and inciting violence and bloodshed between Ukrainian servicemen and civilians in Konstantinovka.²¹

In order to prevent the situation from getting out of control, the Ukrainian Crisis Media Centre launched an information operation immediately after the incident on 16 March 2015. A media release was made in Kyiv and broadcast on different Ukrainian media channels. Several Ukrainian news companies filed special reports and gave updates every hour. Unlike the case of Debaltseve, Ukrainian authorities did not attempt to hide the real state of affairs. It was immediately reported that both the driver of the vehicle, and another team member were arrested and their battalion commander was fired. A criminal case was initiated against the suspects. Moreover because of that incident, armoured equipment had to be transported on trailers to the ATO.²²

²⁰ **В Константиновке украинская бронемашинa сбила женщину с двумя детьми.** – Украинская Правда, 16.03.2015. <<http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2015/03/16/7061675/>> (accessed on 25.03.2016); **В Константиновке бронемашинa военных задавила восьмилетнюю девочку.** – Комсомольская Правда в Украине, 16.03.2015. <<http://kp.ua/incidents/494621-v-konstantynovke-bronemashyna-voennykh-zadavyla-vosmyletnuii-devochku>> (accessed on 25.03.2016); **Винокуров, Андрей** 2016. Константиновка в «особом статусе». В Константиновке Донецкой области начались волнения. – Газета. ru, 17.03.2016. <http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2015/03/16_a_6601801.shtml> (accessed on 25.03.2016).

²¹ **Басурин: Киев перебросил в Константиновку батальон «Львов» для «зачистки» населения.** – DNR-News.com, 15.03.2015. <<http://dnr-news.com/dnr/30830-basurin-kiev-perebrosil-v-konstantinovku-batalon-lvov-dlya-zachistki-naseleniya.html>> (accessed on 25.03.2016).

²² **Генштаб о ДТП в Константиновке: отстранен командир батальона, 2 солдата арестовано.** – Inforesist. <<https://inforesist.org/genshtab-o-dtp-v-konstantinovke-otstranen-komandir-batalona-4-soldat-arrestovano/>> (accessed on 25.03.2016); **Резонансное ДТП в Константиновке, спецтема.** – Inforesist, <<https://inforesist.org/tag/dtp-v-konstantinovke/>> (accessed on 25.03.2016); Interview with **A. Honcharyk**, Head of the International Outreach of the Ukrainian Crisis Media Center, carried out by Kopötin.

Ukraine's restrictions against Russian TV channels

One important, but also debatable, step towards diminishing the influence of Russian propaganda via TV came via stopping the transmission of Russian TV channels in Ukraine and increasing the broadcasts of local Ukrainian channels.²³ On 5 February 2015 the Verkhovna Rada imposed a decree restricting the distribution of movies and TV series about the Russian armed forces, which are released after 1991, due to them being a threat to Ukraine's national security.²⁴ In Crimea and the Donbas region, it was very difficult to get information from sources other than the Russian media and local separatists' channels, after Ukrainian TV channels had been banned in the occupied territories. New propaganda-oriented channels that started out as online news portals, such as *LifeNews*²⁵, were also founded during that time, and have now become influential TV channels.²⁶ However the ban against these Russian channels does not seem to be total and incidents have been reported of Russian media channels still being available in places.

In addition to Russian propaganda channels, there is also the issue of some Ukrainian channels having a pro-Russian orientation, for example *Channel 17*.²⁷

Flyers and leaflets as counter-measures in the ATO region

Due to the limited reach of Ukrainian media channels in the ATO region, the Ministry of Information Policy also resorted to distributing different leaflets and print material in the region to spread pro-government views in the region. Below you can see examples of leaflets depicting pro-Russian separatist political and military leaders as terrorists and criminals.

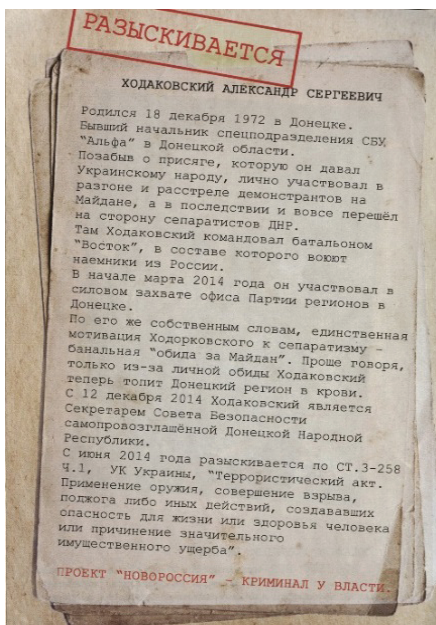
²³ **Mashable: Ukraine is banning films and TV shows that glorify Russia's military.** – Kyiv Post, 02 April 2015. <<http://www.kyivpost.com/content/lifestyle/mashable-ukraine-is-banning-films-and-tv-shows-that-glorify-russias-military-385189.html>> (accessed on 30.06.2015).

²⁴ **Mashable: Ukraine is banning films and TV shows that glorify Russia's military** 2015.

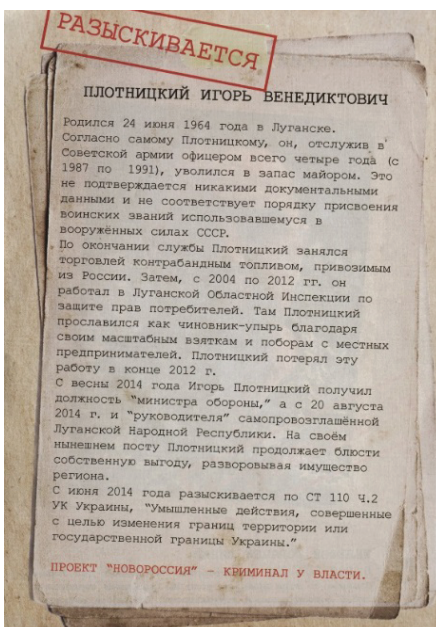
²⁵ <http://lifenews.ru>.

²⁶ Interview with **V. Moroz**, carried out by Sazonov.

²⁷ Interview with **Y. Butusov**, carried out by Mühr.



Picture 1. "Wanted Alexander Hodakovskiy. Project 'Novorossiya' – a criminal in power".



Picture 2. "Wanted Igor Plotnitskiy. Project 'Novorossiya' – a criminal in power"

CONCLUSION: THE RUSSIAN INFORMATION OPERATIONS IN 2014–2015

Vladimir Sazonov



The Russian information war in Ukraine in 2014 was a massive, multi-faceted, and coherent operation. Russia denies direct involvement, yet it supports local pro-Russian separatists and still sustains the conflict. Thus it can be considered a proxy war. Military activities are supported by an active media campaign that attempts to undermine the Ukrainian authorities and their political goals to reunite the country.

According to the dominant narrative, Russia cannot be a real Eurasian Empire if it does not control Ukraine and the Black Sea, therefore control over the Crimea is of utmost importance. Ukraine plays an important role in the Russian national mythology. Ukraine was an integral part of the birth of the Russian Empire, therefore Ukraine's unique position makes crisis management in the region extremely sensitive.

Moscow tries to consider the particular characteristics of each state and nation that it targets with information warfare. The strategy against another country (i.e. Ukraine) is usually built on pre-planned and prepared information campaigns, in which all possible scenarios have been rehearsed. But this is also only a small part of the global hybrid war that the Kremlin is engaged in. The war encompasses not only on the informational domain, but also cyberspace as well as economic, political, and social spheres, as well as other levels. In the case of Ukraine, Moscow also makes use of aggressive military pressure, overt support of separatists and terrorists in the Donbas region, and direct military intervention.

Lies, deceit, blackmail, threats, hypocrisy and more are the critical weapons of the Putin regime's propaganda arsenal.

The interviews with Ukrainian experts showed that Russian propaganda machine is quite flexible and quickly adapts to new situations. Although many information operations are spontaneous, they are clearly derived from a larger existing strategic plan.

Information and psychological operations in 2014 and 2015 against Ukraine were carried out in parallel with military operations, and were often integrated to support each other. If, for example, Ukraine started a mobiliza-

tion of soldiers, Russia would respond with a series of aggressive information attacks to influence mobilized or potentially mobilized persons, their families, and friends. Another example: at the start of one of the larger military offensives conducted by Ukraine, brutal fighting fronts appeared near Debaltseve, Ilovaysk, Mariupol, and the Donetsk Airport. Russian information activity was especially acute in these areas.

Information campaigns were also employed to respond to preparations for further mobilizations of the Ukrainian army. The Russian media, together with an army of trolls, the FSB and the GRU, whose agents are very active in Eastern Ukraine, and a myriad of other recruited separatist activists play an active role in all of Russia's information campaigns.

Russia often adopts defensive narratives. These are used to justify its positions. Russia also mythologizes the opposition between East and West. Ukrainian authorities, as well various concerned international organisations, are considered to be mere puppets of the West under the guidance of the United States and NATO. During Putin's presidency, Russia has declared the restoration of Russia as a Eurasian empire as a national goal.

In addition to the content of the messages, Russia technically ensures that certain messages reach specific audiences, while others do not (i.e. by controlling TV and radio towers, mobile phone operators etc.).

APPENDIX I.

OVERVIEW OF POLITICAL EVENTS IN UKRAINE

(21 November 2013 until December 2015)

Holger Mölder

The goal of this chapter is to give an overview of Ukraine's domestic and foreign policy, Russia's foreign policy, and the EU's policy from 2013–2015.

Political Chronology of the Conflict in Eastern Ukraine

The timeline gives an overview of the main events that took place during the crisis in Ukraine beginning from 21 November 2013, when the first protests were held in the Maidan square of Kyiv against the regime of President Viktor Yanukovich.

The timeline examines the developments of the crisis in Ukraine on a day-by-day basis, and outlines the major events that contributed to its escalation. These events are divided into five categories:

1. The International domain – major events related to the crisis in Ukraine that were manifest in the activities and positions of international organisations and foreign countries (except Russia) and their representatives.
2. The Russian Domain – major events of the crisis in Ukraine related to Russia.
3. The Ukraine Domain – major events of the crisis related to Ukraine, except Crimea and Donbas.
4. The Crimea Domain – major events of the crisis related to Crimea.
5. The Donbas Domain – major events of the crisis related to Donbas.

Timeline of Years 2013–2014

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
1st PERIOD: 21.11.13–21.02.14					
21.11.13			Protests are held in Maidan square, Kyiv.		
24.11.13			A large rally is held in Maidan square with some protesters attempting to attack government buildings.		
25.11.13			Former Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko declares a hunger strike.		
29.11.13	The Ukrainian government refuses to sign the European Union Association Agreement in Vilnius.				
30.11.13			The Maidan protesters are attacked by the Berkut.		
03.12.13			A no-confidence vote for the Azarov government (186 deputies of the required 226 voted to support it).		
04.12.13	Ukrainian opposition leaders meet with Guido Westerwelle, German Minister of Foreign Affairs.				
05.12.13	A meeting of the OSCE ministerial council held in Kyiv.		Groups of Yanukovich supporters gather in Kyiv. Prime Minister Azarov accuses the Ukrainian media of bias. Tymoshenko ends her hunger strike.		
06.12.13		Putin and Yanukovich meet in Sochi.			
08.12.13			Lenin's monument is removed in Kyiv.		

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
09.12.13			Additional special forces arrive in Kyiv. The police attacks the headquarters of the Batkivshchyna in Kyiv.		
10.12.13	EU foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton arrives in Kyiv. Štefan Füle, European Commissioner for Enlargement, declares that the association agreement does not harm the interests of Russia.		A meeting of four Ukrainian presidents (Kravtshuk, Kutshma, Yushchenko, Yanukovich).		
12.12.13		The Ukrainian SBU requests expert assistance from the FSB. Boris Nemtsov is barred from entering Ukraine.			
13.12.13			Yanukovich meets with opposition leaders.		
14.12.13	Š. Füle announces that the association agreement negotiations are suspended. Senators J. McCain and C. Murphy make speeches in the Maidan square.		Yanukovich forces the removal of several key leaders of the security service in response to the events of 30.11.		
17.12.13		Yanukovich and Putin meet in Moscow to sign the Ukrainian-Russian action plan, by which Russia will loan Ukraine 15 billion \$.			

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
19.12.13			Yanukovich re-releases a statement about the future of the association agreement and Ukraine's observer status in the Eurasian Economic Union.		
20.12.13	The EU declares its readiness to sign the association agreement immediately when Ukraine is ready.				
22.12.13			The Maidan People's Union is established.		
25.12.13			The journalist Tatyana Chernovol is beaten at the Borispol airport.		
01.01.14			200 000 people celebrate the Euro-maidan in Kyiv. 15 000 people march to commemorate the 105 th anniversary of Stepan Bandera.		
10.01.14			Clashes break out between the Berkut and Ukrainian protesters near the Svyatoshin courthouse in Kyiv, where the case of the so called "Vasiliukov terrorists" is being tried.		
15.01.14			Court prohibits public meetings in Kyiv.		
16.01.14	Representatives of the OSCE, the EU, Germany, and the USA condemn the new legal acts of the Ukrainian Parliament.		Laws initiated by the Party of Regions and Communists are passed, which prohibit public meetings.		

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
17.01.14			Yanukovich signs several anti-protest and anti-assembly laws. The head of the President's Office and its Spokesman resign in protest. Yanukovich fires Gennadi Vorobyov, Commander of Ukainian Land Forces.		
19.01.14			Protests are held against the new laws. Yatsenyuk and Turchynov seek to form an alternative parliament.		
21.01.14			Riots break out on Hrushejevs-kaja Street, Kyiv, where clashes with the Berkut leave 3 people dead.		
23.01.14			The police attack destroys the Euro-maidan Red Cross Centre.		
25.01.14			Yanukovich meets opposition leaders, offers the position of Prime Minister of Ukraine to Yatsenyuk and the position of Vice Prime Minister to Klitshko.		
27.01.14			The government proposes a sixfold increase of the Berkut and the Griffon units. Civil patrols (<i>titushki</i>) are legalized.		

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
28.01.14			Prime Minister Azarov tenders his resignation and flees the country to Austria. Protests are held in response to the recent laws passed on 16 January.		
29.01.14		Russia tightens the border control and increases customs requirements for Ukraine.	Cars with western Ukrainian license plates are set on fire in Kyiv.		
30.01.14			Yanukovich goes on sick leave. On the Euromaidan leaders D. Bulatov is found beaten.		
31.01.14			Yanukovich annuls the anti-protest laws signed on 16 January. Minister of Interior Affairs Zakhartshenko requests authorization for the use of rocket launchers against the protesters.		
03.02.14	Catherine Ashton announces the EU-USA aid package to Ukraine.		Riots with 50 000 participants in Maidan.		
04.02.14	Joseph Biden makes a phone call to Yanukovich. Catherine Aston visits Ukraine.		Yatsenyuk promises a new constitution by September.		
06.02.14	A conversation between US Assistant Secretary of State Nuland and Ambassador Pyatt is uploaded to Youtube ("fuck the EU").	Glazyev, a senior advisor to Russian President Putin, accuses the U.S. of intervening in the internal affairs of Ukraine and ignoring the Budapest Memorandum.	An explosive device is detonated in the Trade Unions Building.		
09.02.14			Opposition leaders announce the formation of self-defence units.		

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
15.02.14			Clashes between formations in Kyiv. Attempts to dismantle the barricades in Maidan.		
18.02.14			Maidan Protesters voice support to a pre-2004 form of the Ukrainian Constitution. Police uses force against protesters.		
19.02.14		The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs gives a warning to Ukraine.	Kyiv officials are implementing police checkpoints, school closures and public transportation restrictions.		
20.02.14		Vladislav Surkov makes an unofficial visit to Ukraine.	The Minister of Internal Affairs Zakharchenko signs a decree authorizing the use of live ammunition against protesters.		
21.02.14			President Yanukovich and Parliament announce that the 22 nd and 23 rd of February will be days of mourning. V. Rybak, Speaker of the Parliament, is resign. President Yanukovich and several ministers flee the country). Parliament takes control over the executive power of the country, Turchynov is proclaimed a temporary president. Tymoshenko is released from prison.		The members of parliament from southern and eastern regions release a statement supporting the protection of the existing constitutional law.

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
THE 2nd PERIOD 21.02–31.03					
23.02.14		In Putin's meeting with the security services the decision to annex Crimea is made.	The Parliament passes a law making the Ukrainian language the sole state language at all levels.	Pro-Euromaidan protests are held in Simferopol. The first pro-Russian civil defence units are created in Sevastopol and Simferopol.	
24.02.14				Pro-Russian protests held in Sevastopol. Protesters choose Alexei Chalyi to be the mayor of Sevastopol.	
25.02.14			The Berkut is dissolved.	Yatsuba, the Chairman of the Ukrainian administration in Sevastopol resigns. Pro-Russian protesters block the Crimean parliament.	
26.02.14	Ukraine requests from the United Nations round-the-clock monitoring of the security situation in Crimea.			Pro-Russian troops control of the Crimean Peninsula. The main route to Sevastopol was seized. Clashes between pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian protesters erupt in Simferopol. The Crimean Tatars create self-defence units.	

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
27.02.14		More Russian troops arrive in Crimea.		Pro-Russian troops seize the buildings of the Crimean Parliament and the Council of Ministers; A. Mohyilov, the PM of Crimea, is replaced by the pro-Russian S. Aksyonov. The Crimean Parliament votes for referendum of enhanced autonomy to be held on 25 May. S. Aksyonov and V. Konstantinov, Chairman of the Supreme Council, take an oath of allegiance to Yanukovich. Dissolved Berkut units seize the checkpoints to Crimea.	
28.02.14	Barack Obama admonishes Russia for taking military action in Crimea.			Yanukovich declares that Crimea must remain part of Ukraine. Pro-Russian troops seize the international airports in Simferopol and in Sevastopol. Petro Poroshenko arrives in Simferopol; Russia blocks the Balaklava harbour.	

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
01.03.14		Aksyonov appeals to Russia for Russia's military assistance in Crimea. Putin formally requests "the use the armed forces of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine until the normalization of the socio-political situation in that country", from the Federal Council. It is granted.	Pro-Russian protests erupt throughout Eastern and Southern Ukraine.	The referendum on Crimea's future is moved up to 30 March. The Ukrainian Navy and Sea Guard leaves the port of Sevastopol. The Russian Consulate in Simferopol begins issuing Russian passports for Crimeans.	The council of the Luhansk Oblast votes to make the Russian language the second official language of Ukraine, to cease the "persecution of Berkut fighters", to disarm the Maidan self-defense units and to ban a number of political organisations such as Svoboda and UNA-UNSO. Pro-Russian protests erupt in Donetsk, Mariupol, Zaporizhia and Odessa. The Donetsk regional state administration (RSA) building is occupied by rebels from 1 to 6 March.
02.03.14			Ukrainian military reservists are called up.	A navy building in Sevastopol and a Ukrainian marine infantry detachment in Feodosyia are surrounded by pro-Russian troops; the radar station in Sudak surrenders. The Chief of the Ukrainian Navy D. Berezovski takes an oath of allegiance to the pro-Russian authorities as do the heads of the Crimean security services. The Crimean Defence Ministry is established.	The Ukrainian oligarchs Koloymayiski, Taruta, etc. are appointed as governors in Eastern Ukraine.

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
03.03.14					Pro-Russian Protests occur in Donetsk and Odessa.
04.03.14		Putin ends military exercises and pulls troops back from the Ukrainian borders.		Confrontations occur at the Belbek Airbase.	Rebels consolidate their control of the local Regional Administration in Donetsk. P. Gubarev is elected as the people's governor of Donetsk.
05.03.14	The UN special envoy to Ukraine Roberterry is threatened in Simferopol. A telephone conversation between U. Paet and C. Ashton is leaked.		The district court in Kyiv rules on the detention of Aksyonov and Konstantinov. A bill is submitted to the Ukrainian Parliament to abolish the official neutrality of Ukraine.	Crimeans claim that 6000 members of the Ukrainian Armed Forces have defected to their side. The Ukrainian General M. Koval is kidnapped in Yalta.	Pro-Russian protests continue in Donetsk.
06.03.14				The Supreme Council of Crimea votes to formally secede Ukraine and to become part of the Russian Federation. The referendum is moved up to March 16 th 2014. Armed men seize the Simferopol Radio and Television Transmitting Station. The OSCE mission is barred from entering Crimea.	The SBU arrests Gubarev.
09.03.14	More than 200 scholars sign an appeal calling for a peaceful, sustainable, and fair resolution to the current conflict.				Protesters seize the Municipal Administration building in Luhansk.

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
10.03.14					Yatsenyuk states that central authorities still maintain control over Donetsk and have regained control of Luhansk. M. Dobkin is arrested.
11.03.14			Ukraine shuts down the broadcast of the Russian television channels Rossiya 24, Channel One Russia, RTR Planeta, and NTV Mir in Ukraine.	The Crimean government refuses to invite OSCE observers to the referendum.	Alexander Khari- tonov becomes the People's Governor of the Luhansk Oblast.
12.03.14	The OSCE releases its report on Crimea. G-7 leaders and the European Parliament reject the upcoming referendum. UN Human Rights Envoy I. Simon-ovic cancels his visit to Crimea.				
13.03.14		Russia supports the deployment of the OSCE monitoring mission to Ukraine. Russia initiates new military exercises near the border regions of Ukraine.	The Ukrainian National Guard is reconstituted.		Violent clashes break out between pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian protesters in Donetsk.
14.03.14	Russia-US talks on the Ukrainian crisis are held in London.	S. Lavrov declares that Russia has no plans to invade Eastern Ukraine.			
15.03.14		Anti-war protests are held in Moscow.			

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
16.03.14			The defence ministries of Ukraine and Russia agree on a truce in Crimea until March 21.	Crimeans vote in a Russian-controlled referendum to rejoin Russia.	Pro-Russian demonstrations are held in Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, Luhansk, Odessa, and Mykolaiv.
17.03.14	US declares sanctions against 11 Ukrainian and Russian officials.			The Crimean parliament of- ficially declares its independence from Ukraine and requests full accession to the Russian Federation. Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia, and South Ossetia officially recognise the independence of Crimea.	
18.03.14		In his remarks to both houses of the Russian parliament, Putin calls for the creation of “two new constituent entities within the Russian Federation: the Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol”.		Russia and Crimea sign the treaty of accession for the Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol into the Russian Federation. One Ukrainian soldier and one pro-Russian soldier are killed in Simferopol.	A Pro-Russian demonstration is held in Mariupol.
19.03.14				Russian troops attack Ukrainian military bases in Crimea.	
20.03.14			The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine passes a resolution concerning the “territorial integrity of the Ukrainian people”.		A pro-Russian demonstration is held in Kharkiv.

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
21.03.14		After approval by the Federation Council Putin ratifies the inclusion of Crimea and Sevastopol into the Russian Federation.		The Crimean Federal District is created by Russia. Ukraine starts to withdraw its military troops from the areas it previously occupied in Crimea.	
22.03.14		Russia nullifies documents signed in 2010 guaranteeing Russian gas supplies through Crimea.	Ukrainian border patrol guards seal off the northern entrance to Crimea.		Pro-Russian protests occur in Kherson, Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Luhansk.
24.03.14	Russia is suspended from the G-8.				
25.03.14		Russia awards medals to former Ukrainians who assisted in the annexation of Crimea.	Russian TV channels Rossiya 24, Channel One Russia, RTR Planeta, and NTV Mir are suspended by court decision.		
27.03.14	The UN General Assembly approves the resolution, declaring the annexation of Crimea to be illegal.				
29.03.14				Crimea and Sevastopol switch to Moscow Time.	Pro-Russian protests are held in Kharkiv and Donetsk.
30.03.14		The Don Cossacks of the Great Don Army release a statement that they are ready to enter Ukraine.			Demonstrations take place in Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv, Odessa, and Dnipropetrovsk.

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
The 3rd PERIOD 01.04–30.06					
02.04.14		Russia denounces the 2010 Kharkiv Pact and the Partition Treaty on the Status and Conditions of the Black Sea Fleet. Putin signs a decree to rehabilitate the Crimean Tatars.		The Novofedorivka incident.	
06.04.14	The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) deploys to Ukraine.				A Pro-Russian rally in Donetsk advocates for a Crimea-style referendum.
07.04.14			Turchynov launches a major counter-terrorism operation against separatist movements in the country's eastern regions. The Kharkiv People's Republic is declared.		The protesters in Donetsk inaugurate the People's Republic of Donetsk and seek unification with Russia. Pro-Russian activists storm the SBU offices in Donetsk and Luhansk.
08.04.14			Anti-terrorist operations are undertaken in Kharkiv.		Protesters occupying the SBU building declare the Luhansk Parliamentary Republic.
11.04.14			Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk visits Donetsk.	The Constitution of the Republic of Crimea and the City Charter of Sevastopol are adopted.	
12.04.14					Armed militants led by Igor Girkin capture the executive committee building, the police department and the SBU office in Slavyansk. Rebels take control of The local government buildings in Kramatorsk.

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
13.04.14			The Ukrainian Ministry of Interior Affairs creates special police units to deal with the activities of separatists.		Rebels take control of the town councils in Mariupol, Yenakievo and Makeyevka.
15.04.14			Acting President Turchynov announces the start of a military counter-offensive to confront pro-Russian militants. Pro-Russian MP Oleg Tsarov is attacked in Kyiv.		Ukrainian forces retake the Kramatorsk airfield: Rebels seize the police station in Horliivka.
16.04.14					Pro-Russian protesters attack a Ukrainian military unit in Mariupol.
17.04.14	A quadrilateral meeting is held in Geneva between Russia, Ukraine, the US, and the EU. The representatives agree on a plan to defuse the Ukrainian crisis by dissolving all illegal military formations in Ukraine.				
18.04.14			Ukraine stops the active phase of the anti-terrorist operation following the decisions of the Geneva meeting.		
21.04.14					In Luhansk, separatists announce that two referendums are scheduled: a referendum for greater autonomy on 11 May, and a referendum for independence on 18 May. Rebels take over the security service and the police offices in Kramatorsk.

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
22.04.14			President Turchynov resumes the active phase of the anti-terrorist operation.		
24.04.14					The Republic of Donetsk declares full mobilisation.
25.04.14					Seven OSCE inspectors are taken hostage in Slavyansk by rebels.
27.04.14					Rebels proclaim the Luhansk People's Republic. Rebels seize control of TV buildings in Donetsk and in the city of Stakhanov. Two members of the OSCE special monitoring mission are held in Yenakiieve.
28.04.14			The mayor of Kharkiv, Gennady Kernes, is critically injured as a result of attack.		
29.04.14					The city of Kostiantynivka and Pervomaisk are taken by rebels.
30.04.14					Rebels occupy government buildings in Horlivka and Alchevsk.
01.05.14			Ukraine re-institutes conscription.	A May Day parade is held in Simferopol.	Rebels seize government offices in Antratsyt, Amvrosiivka, and Krasnoarmiisk.

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
02.05.14			Violent clashes in Odessa. Police report that at least three people were killed by gunfire, fifteen more were wounded, and thirty-one died when they were trapped in the burning Trade Unions House.		Ukrainian forces launch a large-scale operation to retake Sloviansk and Kramatorsk.
03.05.14					12 OSCE military inspectors are released by the rebels.
08.05.14					Representatives of the Republics of Luhansk and Donetsk announce that they will go ahead with the 11 May referendum as scheduled, despite Putin's call for it to be suspended.
09.05.14					An armed standoff in Mariupol.
11.05.14					Status referendums are held in Donetsk and Luhansk.
14.05.14			An explosion occurs at a natural gas pipeline near Ivano-Frankivsk. National unity talks held in Kyiv.		
					The first full government of the Donetsk People's Republic is appointed.
19.05.14			Turchynov accuses the Communist party of collaborating with pro-Russian forces.		R. Akhmetov calls for non-violent protests against separatists.
21.05.14					According to reports the separatists control one third of the electoral commissions in Donbas.

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
22.05.14					The Volnovakha checkpoint is attacked. The Federal State of Novorossiia is officially declared.
25.05.14			Petro Poroshenko is elected President of Ukraine.		
26.05.14					The First battle for the Donetsk Airport; four OSCE inspectors are captured by rebels.
28.05.14					The Pro-Russian Vostok Battalion takes control of the RSA-building in Donetsk and removes the authorities of the DPR.
29.05.14					Four OSCE inspectors are captured by rebels.
02.06.14					The Luhansk Border Base falls under siege.
05.06.14	The 40 th G-7 summit is held in Brussels without Russia.				The Ukrainian government loses control of over 130 km of the border with Russia in the Luhansk Oblast.
14.06.14			Protesters attack the Russian embassy in Kyiv.		A Ukrainian Ilyushin Il-76 is shot down by rebels.
20.06.14			Poroshenko announces the fifteen-point peace plan.		
27.06.14					OSCE inspectors are freed by rebels on 27 and 28 June.

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
THE 4th PERIOD 01.07–31.08					
01.07.14					Ukraine's starts its post-ceasefire offensive.
05.07.14					Government forces retake Sloviansk and Kramatorsk. Druzhkivka, Artemivsk and Kostyantynivka are also recaptured.
17.07.14					Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 is shot down near Torez.
22.07.14					Severodonetsk is recaptured by Ukraine.
23.07.14					Lysychansk is retaken by Ukrainian troops.
27.07.14					Ukrainian troops recapture Shakhtarsk.
03.08.14					Government forces are encircled in Luhansk and Donetsk. Three quarters of the territory once held by the insurgents is now under Ukrainian control.
07.08.14					A. Borodai announces his resignation as Prime Minister of DPR. A. Zakhartshenko becomes his successor. The Battle for Ilovaysk starts.
12.08.14					Igor Girkin resigns from his post as commander of the insurgent forces.
19.08.14					Government forces enter Luhansk.
22.08.14					Unauthorised entry of a Russian humanitarian convoy.

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
23.08.14					Russians para-troopers are detained at Dzherkalne.
THE 5th PERIOD 25.08–31.12					
25.08.14					An insurgent counter-offensive stalls the government's offensive in the cities of Donetsk and Luhansk. The Battle of Novoazovsk starts. A column of armoured vehicles enters Ukraine from Russia near Novoazovsk.
27.08.14					Pro-Russian forces enter Novoazovsk.
30.08.14					The trapped Donbas Battalion withdraws from Ilovaysk.
05.09.14	After peace talks in Minsk under the auspices of the OSCE, Ukraine, Russia, the DPR, and the LPR agree to a ceasefire.				
06.09.14		Putin and Poroshenko discuss a ceasefire.			Fighting continues.
12.09.14					Exchange of prisoners.
25.09.14	The OSCE holds a video-conference between the opposing parties of the conflict. The OSCE chairman Didier Burkhalter issues a statement in which he has "urged all sides to immediately stop fighting".				

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
08.10.14	The High Commissioner of the UN Office of the United Nations for Human Rights issues a statement.				
13.10.14			Protests are held against the government in Kyiv.		
02.11.14					The Donbas general elections are held.
09.11.14					Several Russian munitions convoys are observed in the separatist-held territory.
09.12.14					Day of silence.
21.12.14					Prisoner exchanges 21-27 December.

Timeline of Year 2015

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
January 2015					
11.01.15					Pro-Russian separatists begin a new offensive in the area surrounding the Donetsk Airport.
22.01.15					Ukrainian troops are overrun by the rebels at the Donetsk airport.
23.01.15					Alexander Zakharchenko, announces that separatist forces are going on the offensive and rejects all forms of a ceasefire.
27.01.15			The Ukrainian parliament formally designates Russia as an aggressor state and the Donetsk and the Lugansk People's Republics as terrorist organizations.		
31.01.15	The peace talks of the Contact Group (representatives of the rebels, Ukraine, Russia and OSCE) collapse in Minsk				
February 2015					
05.02.15	Francois Holland and Angela Merkel announce a new peace initiative.		US secretary of state John Kerry visits Kiev.		
10.02.15	A preliminary ceasefire agreement for Eastern Ukraine is reached at the Minsk talks.				

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
12.02.15	The Minsk II Agreement is signed. The leaders of Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France agree to a deal to end the fighting in Eastern Ukraine at talks in Minsk, Belarus.		The IMF agrees to furnish Kiev with a four-year \$40 billion bailout loan, including \$17.5 billion to stabilize the country's economy.		After the Minsk II Agreement all parties agree to uphold the ceasefire, however, fighting continues at the Debaltseve rail hub.
17.02.15		Putin speaks about the situation in eastern Ukraine, in particular the conflict around Debaltseve and the foreign military assistance to Ukraine.			
18.02.15					Ukraine withdraws its forces from Debaltseve.
19.02.15			Poroshenko calls for UN peacekeepers as fighting spreads to the Mariupol area.		
22.02.15			The first anniversary of the Euromaidan movement in Kharkiv is interrupted by the detonation of a suspected improvised explosive device (2 dead, 11 injured).		
23.02.15			Ukraine postpones its heavy weapon withdrawal because of continued fighting.		
24.02.15	A meeting is held in Paris between the foreign ministers of Russia, Ukraine, Germany and France.	Putin dismisses the possibility of war between Russia and Ukraine, and makes clear that Russia cannot be forced to return Crimea.	Ukraine has its first day without a casualty during the period in which the Minsk II ceasefire was supposed to be in effect.		

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
27.02.15		Boris Nemtsov is assassinated in Moscow.			
March 2015					
02.03.15	The United Nations states that an estimated 6,000 people have been killed in eastern Ukraine since April 2014.	John Kerry and Sergey Lavrov discuss the ceasefire implementation.			
03.03.15			Ukraine and Russia reach an agreement that secures gas supplies to Ukraine.	Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin states that normalization of Ukraine-Russia relations requires the return of the annexed Crimean peninsula.	
04.03.15	German Chancellor Angela Merkel warns Russia that it will face further sanctions if the current ceasefire fails.				
06.03.15			Ukraine and Russia agree to double the OSCE Monitoring Mission in Ukraine.		
07.03.15					Parties of the conflict begin to withdraw heavy weaponry from the contact line.
09.03.15				Putin admits that his government made plans to annex Crimea before March 2014.	
11.03.15			The US decides to send additional non-lethal assistance to Ukraine.		

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
15.03.15				Chinese Premier Li Keqiang outlines his country's position on the Crimean annexation by neither overtly supporting nor opposing the move.	
16.03.15		President Putin orders a set of large-scale, snap military drills across the country to begin immediately			
18.03.15				Russia celebrates the anniversary of the annexation on Crimea.	
20.03.15				Poroshenko: "Crimea still is Ukraine".	
April 2015					
01.04.15				The Crimean Tatar television network ATR is silenced.	
02.04.15			Ukraine signs an interim agreement for discounted Russian gas supplies over the next three months.		
05.04.15					The first anniversary of the Donbas uprising.
06.04.15		Poroshenko gives approval to the federalization referendum.			
09.04.15					Russian-backed separatist forces in Eastern Ukraine execute at least four Ukrainian servicemen.

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
13.04.15	The foreign ministers of France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine meet in Berlin.				
15.04.15	The G7 foreign ministers discuss the crisis in Ukraine and issue a joint statement.				
17.04.15	300 U.S. troops from the 173 rd Airborne Brigade arrived in Western Ukraine for a six-month training mission designated Operation Fearless Guardian.				
27.04.15	The EU Summit focuses on the extension of sanctions against Russia.				
May 2015					
06.05.15	In Minsk, representatives from the Ukrainian government and the so-called pro-Russian People's Republics meet, alongside representatives from the OSCE and Russia.				
10.05.15	Putin and Merkel discuss the situation in Ukraine.				
12.05.15	Kerry and Putin meet in Sochi.				
13.05.15	NATO foreign ministers call for the implementation of the Minsk Agreement.				

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
14.05.15	NATO and the European Union announce the beginning of a joint effort to better address and counter Russian “hybrid warfare” both in Ukraine and in future conflicts.				
16.05.15			Ukraine passes a law, banning Soviet symbols.		
18.05.15		U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland visits Moscow.			
19.05.15		NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg meets with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Brussels.	The Ukrainian parliament approves legislation that will allow the government to impose a moratorium on debt repayment.		
21.05.15			The Ukrainian Parliament annuls its military agreements with Russia.		
22.05.15	Ukraine and the EU reach an agreement on a roughly \$2 billion loan.				
27.05.15		The Russian army begins massing troops, artillery, and armoured vehicles along the border of Ukraine.			

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
28.05.15		Putin signs an amendment to an order regarding the classification of deaths of Russian troops. The new amendment makes losses incurred during “special operations” in peacetime a state secret.			
31.05.15			M. Saakashvili is appointed governor of the Odessa region by Poroshenko.		
June 2015					
01.06.15	Bellingcat, an independent journalist organization, issues a report on the MH17 crash.				
05.06.16	The OSCE notes increased breaches of the ceasefire.				
07.06.15	During the opening ceremony of the 41st G7 Summit in Schloss Elmau, Bavaria. The President of the United States Barack Obama announces that he and his assembled colleagues will address the urgency of “standing up to Russian aggression”.				
08.06.15					A small vessel of the Ukrainian Sea Guard is sunk by a floating IED off the coast of Mariupol.

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
10.06.15		Pope Francis urges Putin to make “a sincere and great effort” for peace in Ukraine.			
14.06.15	The US proposes the deployment of military equipment to Eastern Europe.				
15.06.15					Around 500 residents from two frequently bombarded residential areas convene at the city center in rebel-held of Donetsk to voice their grievances.
16.06.15		Kerry and Lavrov discuss the situation in Ukraine.			
17.06.15	The European Union governments agree to a six-month extension of the sanctions against Russia.				
19.06.15		Speaking at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, Putin places the blame for the crisis in Ukraine squarely on the shoulders of Western policy-makers.			
20.06.15	A New OSCE Special Monitoring Mission Report is released.				
21.06.15			Lithuanian Defense Minister Marius Yanukonis tells the Ukrainian media that his country is ready to become the first to supply Ukraine with weapons.		

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
22.06.15		Nikolai Patrushev, advisor to President Putin, states that Moscow is incapable of stopping Russians from fighting in Ukraine.			
23.06.15	US Secretary of Defense, Ashton Carter, states that American military assets, including 250 tanks, howitzers and infantry fighting vehicles, will be positioned across several NATO states in the Balkans and the Baltics.				
24.06.15	The foreign ministers of France, Russia, Ukraine and Germany meet in Paris.				
28.06.15	The Netherlands ends the MH17 investigation due to separatist obstruction.				
30.06.15	Canada announces additional sanctions against Russia.				
July 2015					
01.07.15		The Office of Russia's Prosecutor-General announces that it has reviewed the decision of the Soviet State Council acknowledging the independence of the Baltic states. Russia insists that it was only a procedural matter, and not a political statement.	Both Ukraine's Naftogaz and Russia's Gazprom announce that gas supplies will be halted after the breakdown in talks between the two sides.		

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
03.07.15					Pro-Russian rebel forces in eastern Ukraine withdraw from the village of Shyrokyne.
07.07.15	Contact group talks are held in Minsk.				
09.07.15		Marine General Joseph Dunford, the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, states that Russia is the greatest threat to US national security.			
11.07.15			Twenty gunmen bearing Right Sector insignia engage in a deadly standoff with police in the city of Mukachevo.		
13.07.15			Prime Minister Yatsenyuk visits Washington.		
15.07.15					Ukraine reports the most intense bombardments of Ukrainian territory since the signing of the Minsk agreement with attacks occurring around western Donetsk, Svitlodarsk, and Horlivka.
16.07.15			The Ukrainian parliament approves draft changes to the constitution that would significantly decentralize power in Ukraine, including the granting of increased governing rights to the eastern regions controlled by pro-Russian separatists.		

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
17.07.15		Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov speaks with his counterparts in the US, Germany, and Ukraine, calling for the “demilitarisation of the flashpoint of Shyrokyne village”.			The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) notes violations of the cease-fire by both sides, as four civilians and one soldier are reported killed.
20.07.15			Troops from Ukraine, the United States and sixteen other countries begin the annual Rapid Trident exercises in the western Ukrainian city of Yavoriv.		
21.07.15	The Contact Group talks in Minsk lead to a preliminary agreement between the Ukrainian government and pro-Russian separatists, to extend the withdrawal of weaponry in eastern Ukraine.		A Right Sector protest meeting calls for the resignation of Poroshenko.		Ukraine and the OSCE announce plans to create a 30 km demilitarized zone in the Luhansk region.
23.07.15			US announces its intentions of providing Ukraine with long-range radar.		
26.07.15			Ukraine’s State Border Guard Service claims to have detained a Russian officer at a government checkpoint near Berezov.		
27.07.15					A member of the OSCE’s Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) is injured by shrapnel following an attack by separatist fighters.

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
29.07.15	Russia blocks the UN Security Council resolution on the MH17 tribunal.				
30.07.15		The United States adds twenty-six individuals and entities to its sanctions blacklist.			
31.07.15					Ukraine's highest court awards limited self-rule to the areas around Donetsk and Luhansk.
August 2015					
03.08.15		Ukraine's Yanukovych-era Prime Minister Mykola Azarov announces the formation of a Ukraine Salvation Committee in Moscow.			
04.08.15			The IMF transfers the second tranche of the Ukrainian loan to the National Bank of Ukraine.		
07.08.15					A new OSCE report is issued.
10.08.15					The Ukrainian military reports that around 400 rebel fighters, supported by tanks and armoured personnel carriers, have attacked government-held positions near the village of Starohnativka in the Donetsk region.

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
12.08.15					The Ukrainian army redeploys its heavy artillery to the frontlines.
13.08.15		US Secretary of State John Kerry calls his counterpart Sergei Lavrov, to express “grave concern” about renewed conflict.			Two Ukrainian service members are lost and 10 more are wounded in heavy shelling by pro-Russian forces.
14.08.15					Alexander Zakharchenko posts a video proclaiming that the rebel troops under his command have been reinforced by an additional 1,200 troops trained in Russia.
15.08.15					Fighting gradually moves closer to the strategically vital port of Mariupol along the Black Sea Coast.
17.08.15				Russian president Putin makes his third visit to Crimea since its annexation the previous year.	Fighting continues near Mariupol and the town of Horlivka (held by pro-Russian separatists), leading to the deaths of at least two soldiers and a number of civilians.
20.08.15					Four Ukrainian servicemen are killed, with another fourteen wounded as shelling continues against targets near Donetsk and Mariupol.

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
24.08.15			Poroshenko meets with German chancellor Angela Merkel and French president Francois Hollande to discuss the status and implementation of the Minsk II ceasefire.		
26.08.15	The Contact Group agrees to an end to the shelling on September 1.				
27.08.15			The Ukrainian government and its creditors reach an agreement on the restructuring of the country's debt.		
28.08.15					Ukraine's Ministry of Defense releases information about the exchange of two dozen prisoners with the self-proclaimed People's Republic of Donetsk.
29.08.15	German chancellor Merkel and French president Hollande hold a telephone conversation with Russian president Putin.				
31.08.15			Ukraine's parliament votes to support the first reading of the decentralization legislation.		

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
September 2015					
01.09.15			NATO and Ukraine begin the Sea Breeze 2015 naval exercises in the Black Sea. The Radical Party leaves Ukraine's coalition government.		The ceasefire largely holds in Eastern Ukraine.
02.09.15					Two servicemen are killed and six are wounded in an ambush near the city of Luhansk.
03.09.15	NATO inaugurates a new command post (formally dubbed the NATO Force Integration Unit headquarters) in Vilnius.		Ukraine approves a new military doctrine.		
05.09.15					Poroshenko states that the Western-backed truce signed in Minsk in February has been upheld this week for the first time, despite the pro-Russian rebels claim that a civilian was killed.
06.09.15			The International Monetary Fund's chief Christine Lagarde visits Kyiv.		
08.09.15					According to Ukrainian Minister of Defense Stepan Poltorak, the rate of attacks against Ukrainian forces reaches its lowest point since the beginning of the conflict over 18 months ago.

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
09.09.15		Russia is reported to have started construction on a large military base just across the border from Ukraine.			
11.09.15					For the first day in nearly eighteen months the shelling in eastern Ukraine completely ceases.
14.09.15	The European Union extends sanctions against 149 individuals.				
15.09.15			Poroshenko states that one of the main priorities of his government will be to fight against corruption.		
16.09.15			The Rada approves a debt restructuring agreement with the country's creditors.		Pro-Russian separatist authorities in the self-proclaimed People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk announce that local elections will take place in late October and early November, respectively.
19.09.15					The conflict has claimed the lives of some 8,000 people since April 2014, and has left almost 18,000 wounded, according to UN figures.
21.09.15			NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg begins a two-day visit to Ukraine.		

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
22.09.15		The trial of Nadezhda Savchenko begins in Russia.			
23.09.15		Russia reportedly plans on building a second big military base in Boguchar, Voronezh (45km from the Ukrainian border).	At least 200 alleged members of the nationalist Azov battalion storm Kharkiv's main administration building.		
25.09.15			The Ukrainian government bans flights by Russian airlines Transaero and Aeroflot to Ukraine.		The leadership of the so-called People's Republic of Luhansk bans a number of international relief organizations from operating in its territory.
26.09.15			Ukraine and Russia reach a "Winter Package" gas agreement.		
28.09.15	Presidents Obama and Putin both mention the conflict in their speeches to the United Nations General Assembly; later they hold a private a meeting.				
30.09.15					Ukrainian pro-Russian separatist governments reach an agreement on a deal to withdraw small weapons (defined as mortar shells and rockets with a caliber less than 100mm) from the line of contact.

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
October 2015					
02.10.15	The leaders of Germany, France, Russia, and Ukraine meet in Paris.				The OSCE confirms the presence of the dangerous TOS-1 Buratino missile system in eastern Ukraine.
03.10.15					Both sides start to withdraw additional weaponry away from the line of contact.
06.10.15					Russian-backed separatists in Ukraine announce that they will postpone controversial local elections.
09.10.15			Alexander Kononov, Russia's Minister of Justice, states that Russia will initiate discussions about the transfer of Nadezhda Savchenko back to Ukraine.		
10.10.15			Russia's Foreign Ministry voices support for an expanded OSCE Monitoring Mission in Eastern Ukraine with the maximum permitted number of observers – 1000.		
13.10.15	The Dutch Safety Board releases its MH17 report.				
15.10.15	Ukraine wins a seat on the UN Security Council.		Russia refuses to agree to a debt restructuring agreement with Ukraine and its other bondholders.		

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
16.10.15			Ukraine's government approves reforms that would create greater independence in the management of state gas company Naftogaz and unlock a \$300 million loan from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).		
19.10.15			Former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich begins legal action against Ukraine in the European Court of Human Rights for violating his human rights.		
20.10.15					Pro-Russian separatist forces and the Ukrainian military begin to withdraw tanks and smaller arms, from the Donetsk region.
22.10.15		Putin discusses Ukraine at the Valdai meeting.	The People's Front, a Ukrainian political party led by current Prime Minister Yatsenyuk, decides not to stand in nationwide local elections set for the coming Sunday in Ukraine.		
23.10.15			Russia and Ukraine each close their national airspace to each other thereby ending direct flights between the two countries.		

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
26.10.15			Local elections are held across Ukraine. The governing coalition makes a strong electoral showing in western and central Ukraine, while Voters in southern and central Ukraine lean towards the pro-Russian Opposition Bloc.		
27.10.15					A Ukrainian soldier is killed during an exchange of mortar fire with pro-Russian separatist forces.
29.10.15					The Ukrainian military and pro-Russian separatists exchange twenty prisoners.
30.10.15					A set of explosions at a munitions depot near Svatovo kill two and injure five.
November 2015					
01.11.15			Ukrainian authorities arrest Hennadiy Korban, a close associate of the influential Ukrainian oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky, as part of an anti-corruption investigation.		
03.11.15			Prime Minister Yatsenyuk states that he plans to replace many in his cabinet ministers after his coalition struggled in the local elections the previous week.		

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
04.11.15					Oleksander Turchynov, Secretary of the Ukrainian National Security and Defence Council, states that Ukraine could suspend, or even reverse, the withdrawal of weapons from the line of contact because of the increasing number of violations of the ceasefire.
07.11.15	The foreign ministers of Ukraine, Russia, Germany, and France – a group- ing known as the Normandy Format – meet in Berlin.				
09.11.15					According to a statement from the Ukrainian military, Ukrainian forces engage in direct combat with rebel forces for the first time in months.
15.11.15					Reportedly, shelling has increased significantly in Donetsk and in the surrounding areas, with at least six Ukrainian service- men killed and at least eight wounded over two days.

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
17.11.15			Poroshenko states that the EU has committed to the establishment of the EU-Ukraine free trade zone, which will come into effect on January 1, 2016.		
21.11.15	All 28 member states of the European Union ratify the association agreement with Ukraine.				
22.11.15				Twin Explosions near four Ukrainian power lines supplying Crimea leave most of the peninsula in the dark, as Ukraine supplies about 70% of the electricity used in Crimea.	
29.11.15			Mariupol holds regional elections that were originally scheduled to take place on October 24 th .		
30.11.15	US President Obama and Russian President Putin meet unofficially at the Paris Climate conference.				
December 2015					
01.12.15	Talks between Russian, Ukrainian, and European representatives are held in Brussels over the EU-Ukraine trade pact.				

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
03.12.15		Putin's annual State of the Nation Address makes no mention of Ukraine.			
07.12.15			US Vice President Joseph Biden visits Kyiv, and announces a new aid package.		
15.12.15	The German government mediates talks between Russia and Ukraine in an attempt to resolve the impasse of Ukraine's \$3 billion debt to Russia.	Secretary of State John Kerry meets with Russian President Putin.			
16.12.15		Russia suspends its free trade zone with Ukraine at the beginning of 2016.			
18.12.15			Ukraine states that it will place a moratorium on the repayment of its \$3 billion debt to Russia.		
21.12.15		Medvedev signs a decree that extends the existing food embargo against a number of Western countries, to include Ukraine as well.			
25.12.15		Russia appoints Boris Gryzlov as the new head of its delegation to the Contact Group talks.	Ukrainian Parliament passes a 2016 budget. Poroshenko signs a decree authorizing joint US, NATO, and Ukrainian military exercises to be held in Ukraine the following year.		The village of Zaitsevo becomes the, center of fighting as one soldier and a civilian, are killed and more are wounded.

Time	International	Russia	Ukraine	Crimea	Donbas
30.12.15	During the Normandy format talks the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, Germany, and France agree to extend the deadline for the implementation of the Minsk agreement into 2016.				

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