


Information activities of the Russian Federation in 2023

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ARTICLE

Abstract

The subject of information activities carried out by the Russian Federation was taken up as a result of the dynamic changes taking place in the security environment. Research methods from the field of scientific research methodology typical for social sciences were used to implement the undertaken research problem. The comparative method was used to juxtapose narratives. The method of content analysis included the analysis of the source material obtained from the information environment. The introduction presents information on the essence of information activities as an element of military activities. The next section of the article presents information activities that enabled the achievement of political goals both in Russia itself and on the international arena. The conclusions indicate those activities that diversified the recipients. The result of the conducted research was the identification of those information activities that allowed the Russian Federation to impose its arguments on the Russian society and in the global competition of superpowers.

Keywords

international security, Russian Federation, information activities, NATO

Introduction

The dynamic changes in the international environment that have taken place in the modern world have resulted in information becoming a weapon as effective as conventional weapons. The conduct of the Russian Federation (RF) has changed the security structure in Europe and led to the imposition of a new order. Information operations¹ of the RF were intended to influence the will of the adversary in such a way that it would interpret the situation as the Russian authorities intended and that its ability to respond would be limited².

The research problem undertaken makes it possible to present, using the example of the RF, the ways in which a superpower can achieve its strategic objectives and consolidate its position on the international stage using information activities.

The article analyses the various planes of influence and presents selected examples of the implementation of the RF's information activities, which introduced information chaos, led to the undermining of the legitimacy of power and lowered trust in the administration of other states. The result of the research is the identification of specific actions of the RF that influenced the change of security architecture in Europe.

The publication uses research methods typical of the social sciences. The comparative method was used in contrasting the narratives of the RF and Western states. The content analysis method involved exegesis of source material obtained from the international information environment and national documents.

Of particular relevance to the subject matter are publications on information operations [e.g. Zbigniew Modrzejewski's *Operacje informacyjne* (Eng. Information Operations)] or geopolitics (e.g. Samuel Ramani's *Putin's War on Ukraine*).

To date, there have been few scholarly publications that focus on outreach, rather than the propaganda or disinformation activities that are only part of it.

¹ *Operacje informacyjne* (Eng. Information operations) DD-3.10(A), Centrum Doktryn i Szkolenia Sił Zbrojnych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, Bydgoszcz 2017, p. 15; *Operacje psychologiczne* (Eng. Psychological operations) DD-3.10.1(B), Centrum Doktryn i Szkolenia Sił Zbrojnych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, Bydgoszcz 2017, p. 13.

² *Operacje informacyjne DD-3.10(A)*..., pp. 15–17; Z. Modrzejewski, *Operacje informacyjne* (Eng. Information operations), Warszawa 2015, in many places; *Informacyjny wymiar wojny hybrydowej* (Eng. The information dimension of hybrid warfare), M. Wrzosek et al. (sci. ed.), Warszawa 2018, pp. 183–200.

Information activities of the Russian Federation

The Russian Federation is conducting information activities in Central Europe, including in relation to the Republic of Poland (RP). It seeks to achieve strategic goals that would enable it to return to its glory days, and therefore focuses on finding gaps in its security system and testing the resistance of Polish citizens to Russian propaganda.

Russia uses information activities, including propaganda and disinformation activities, and information techniques. It uses, for example, key opinion leaders to amplify its own message, disseminates topics that are sensitive and resonate well in the news environment, such as refugees or the possibility of nuclear weapons³.

Actions against the Republic of Poland

The Russian Federation began to intensively influence the perception of both the international community, including the Baltic states, and its own society from 2014. Back then, it portrayed Poles as mercenary soldiers at the service of Kiev's fascists. This is confirmed by the opinion expressed by Leonid Baranov, Minister of State Security of the Donetsk People's Republic, that 105 Polish mercenaries took part in the fighting in the Donbass⁴. The Russian propaganda apparatus is gradually moving away from depicting Polish mercenaries as committing reprehensible acts, such as raping local women, to depreciating the participation of Polish citizens in the Russian-Ukrainian war⁵. Such a narrative influences the perception of the audience and masks the lack of progress of the "special military operation"⁶. In addition, it is becoming a source of animosity between Ukrainians and Poles.

³ L. Phillips, D. Crouch, *Have Chemical Weapons been Used in Ukraine?*, RUSI, 20 VI 2023, <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/have-chemical-weapons-been-used-ukraine> [accessed: 7 VII 2023]; W. Courtney, *Countering Russia's Nuclear Threat in Europe*, RAND, 20 IV 2023, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2023/04/countering-russias-nuclear-threat-in-europe.html> [accessed: 7 VII 2023].

⁴ *ДНР заявляет о взятых в плен польских наемниках*, РИА Новости, 2 IX 2014, <https://ria.ru/20140902/1022431781.html> [accessed: 7 VII 2023].

⁵ *СМИ сообщили об изнасиловании несовершеннолетней наемниками из Польши*, Известия, 10 II 2023, <https://iz.ru/1468024/2023-02-10/smi-soobshchili-ob-iznasilovanii-nesovershennoletnei-naemnikami-iz-polshi> [accessed: 7 VII 2023].

⁶ The term "special military operation" is used by the Russian side to refer to the war in Ukraine, which Russia started in the Donbass in 2014 and then extended to the whole of Ukraine 24 II 2022.

The Russian Federation has been conducting propaganda activities against Poland in the international information environment. Poland was portrayed there as a state ready to realise its goals and aspirations, e.g. the appropriation of Ukraine's western lands, especially Lviv, without regard for international relations. Such fake news appeared in 2014, when attempts were made to convince the international community that Ukraine should be divided among European states and such a plan was allegedly being prepared by the European Union (EU). On the one hand, the claims of the RP were presented, while on the other hand, the dysfunction of the EU was pointed out. The aim of such actions was to arouse emotions in the public and to portray Poland as an aggressor instead of an assisting state.

Disinformation activities are conducted by the Russian Federation on a long-term basis. Russia highlights sensitive topics that become a tool for fuelling social unrest. It first tests individual messages that strike at citizens' sense of security, and then creates information campaigns out of them that undermine the credibility of state institutions and uniformed services. In this way, the state and the pillars of its security are decomposed⁷.

In order to achieve the desired informational effects, the Russian Federation additionally engages public opinion leaders, including government representatives, academics and so-called useful idiots. An example is the statement by Russian historian Oleg Nazarov, who indicated that Poland was seeking to annex the western part of Ukraine.

Representatives of the Russian administration were also opinion leaders. In 2023, the head of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation (Служба Внешней Разведки Российской Федерации) Sergei Naryshkin echoed the narrative of Poland's desire to annex the western lands of Ukraine and, in this context, invoked the statement that Poland was the hyena of Europe⁸. In the message to its own public, Russia is portrayed as a state forced to fight for its integrity

⁷ See: K. Kuśmirek, *Działania informacyjne i propagandowe Federacji Rosyjskiej na wybranych przykładach* (Eng. Information and propaganda activities of the Russian Federation with selected examples), in: *Zarządzanie informacją i wiedzą na potrzeby analiz strategicznych i operacyjnych Sił Zbrojnych RP*, J. Tarczyński, A. Lis (eds.), Warszawa–Bydgoszcz 2022, pp. 79–93; J. Fiszer, M. Fiszer, *Wojna w Ukrainie. Od napaści do kontrofensywy* (Eng. The war in Ukraine. From assault to counter-offensive), Warszawa 2023, in many places.

⁸ M. Sławiński, *Szef rosyjskiego wywiadu poszedł z tym do Łukaszenki: Polska czeka na odpowiedni moment* (Eng. Russian intelligence chief went to Lukashenko with this: Poland is waiting for the right moment), *Wprost*, 27 VI 2023, <https://www.wprost.pl/swiat/11165518/szef-rosyjskiego-wywiadu-poszedl-z-tym-do-lukaszenki-polska-czeka-na-odpowiedni-moment.html> [accessed: 6 VII 2023].

and values as the West tries to destroy it. In the case of RP, there is talk of its Rusophobic behaviour⁹. Such a phenomenon is called the besieged fortress syndrome.

In 2023, there was an intensification of Russian rhetoric directed against Poland. This was due to Poland's involvement in lobbying for Ukraine. Russian politician Dmitry Medvedev spread particularly hostile propaganda against, among others, the Polish President: *Polish scum named "duda" have offered to execute Russia like a rabid beast. And anyone else hoping to negotiate with such bastards? It makes no sense*¹⁰. Depreciating the image of the Polish President, he used the pejorative term bastard to create an alternative reality. Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko in April 2023 accused Poland of training mercenaries for an armed uprising against the Belarusian regime. In effect, he was preparing Belarusian society for the necessity of a clash between Belarus and the West. The Republic of Poland is identified in the Belarusian information environment with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (North Atlantic Alliance, NATO), therefore the fight against it is a fight against the Alliance as a whole.

Prigozhin's rebellion in the Russian news environment

Yevgeny Prigozhin Head of the Wagner Group¹¹ began his march to the Kremlin on 24 June 2023. Its aim was to change key positions in the Russian Armed Forces and (...) *restore justice*¹². This was the result of forcing Group members to sign contracts

⁹ *Польские бизнесмены ответят за русофобию Варшавы*, ВЗГЛЯД, 14 VII 2023, <https://vz.ru/politics/2023/7/14/1221118.html> [accessed: 31 VII 2023].

¹⁰ *Медведев считает, что заявления Польши подтверждают бессмысленность каких-либо переговоров*, Тасс, 27 VI 2023, <https://tass.ru/politika/18100221> [accessed: 6 VII 2023]. Translations in the article are from the author (editor's note).

¹¹ The Wagner Group was established in 2014 as a private military company. It is named after the pseudonym of its founder Dmitry Utikin aka Wagner. See: A.M. Dyer, W. Lorenz, F. Bryjka, *Grupa Wagnera na Białorusi – konsekwencje dla NATO i UE* (Eng. The Wagner Group in Belarus - implications for NATO and the EU), Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, 7 IX 2023, <https://www.pism.pl/publikacje/grupa-wagnera-na-bialorusi-konsekwencje-dla-nato-i-ue> [accessed: 18 I 2024].

¹² *Ekspert: śmierć Prigożyna to dobra wiadomość, zaostrza się walka o władzę w otoczeniu osłabionego Putina* (Eng. Expert: Prigozhin's death is good news, power struggle intensifies around a weakened Putin), PAP, 24 VIII 2023, <https://www.pap.pl/aktualnosci/ekspert-smierc-prigozyna-dobra-wiadomosc-zaostrza-sie-walka-o-wladze-w-otoczeniu> [accessed: 18 I 2024].

and be conscripted into the Russian military¹³. An additional factor was the conflict between Prigozhin and the Russian military over the war in Ukraine and how the Wagner Group would be used. Within hours, the mutiny was abandoned and the Russian Defence Ministry guaranteed the safety of mercenaries who contact the department or law enforcement agencies.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, in a speech broadcast the day after the revolt, called the Wagnerists traitors and proposed moving the Wagner Group to Belarus¹⁴. However, it is important to consider whether Prigozhin's action was part of Russia's maskirovka to shift forces to Belarus and conduct further hybrid actions against NATO. This is confirmed by the words of President Lukashenko, who stated that the Wagnerists wanted (...) *to go on a trip to Warsaw and Rzeszów*¹⁵.

The information that Prigozhin and his mercenaries had left the Russian Federation for Belarus was not published in the Russian news environment until several hours after the event. Information chaos was introduced as no reasons were given for Prigozhin's change of plans and a narrative was promoted that the mercenaries did not have sufficient support to continue the rebellion. Putin's authority and image as a strong leader was undoubtedly shaken. The Russian public's access to information was restricted by the introduction of censorship. The psychological measures of the Russian Federation towards its own society focused on changing perceptions

¹³ M. Murphy, *Ukraine war: Russia moves to take direct control of Wagner Group*, BBC, 11 VI 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-65871232> [accessed: 25 VII 2023]. Mykhailo Podolak, an advisor to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, commented on the putsch as an example of the lack of consent to violence. A different opinion was presented by journalist Vladislav Davidzon, who stated that it was a form of humiliation of Russian President Vladimir Putin and showed the extent of internal divisions within the system he leads. Experts from The Atlantic Council were of a similar opinion, pointing out that the Kremlin would lose the trust of the oligarchs and the war in Ukraine would no longer be a priority for them.

¹⁴ *Putin wygłosił przemówienie do Rosjan. Mówił o "zdradzie organizatorów buntu"* (Eng. Putin gave a speech to Russians. He spoke of the "betrayal of the organisers of the revolt"), Rzeczpospolita, 26 VI 2023, <https://www.rp.pl/swiat/art38660701-putin-wyglosil-przemowienie-do-rosjan-mowil-o-zdradzie-organizatorow-buntu> [accessed: 30 I 2024].

¹⁵ *Łukaszewko w rozmowie z Putinem: Wagnerowcy chcą jechać na wycieczkę do Warszawy i Rzeszowa* (Eng. Lukashenko in conversation with Putin: Wagnerists want to go on a trip to Warsaw and Rzeszów), Rzeczpospolita, 23 VII 2023, <https://www.rp.pl/polityka/art38770821-lukaszewko-w-rozmowie-z-putinem-wagnerowcy-chca-jechac-na-wycieczke-do-warszawy-i-rzeszowa> [accessed: 18 I 2024]. See: M. Dunningan, *Where Will All the Wagner Group Mercenaries Go Now That Russia Has Exiled Their Leader?*, RAND, 3 VII 2023, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2023/07/where-will-all-the-wagner-group-mercenaries-go-now.html> [accessed: 25 VII 2023]; M. Сакавик, *Зачем Путин и Лукашенко угрожают Польше "вагнеровцами"?*, DW, 24 VII 2023, <https://www.dw.com/ru/spektakl-putina-i-lukashenko-zacem-polse-ugrozaut-vagnerovcami/a-66332295> [accessed: 26 VII 2023]; G. Kuczyński, *Wagnerowcy. Psy wojny Putina* (Eng. Wagnerists. Putin's dogs of war), Warszawa 2022, in many places.

of the situation and intimidating the population. Internationally, on the other hand, Putin was no longer seen as a capable leader¹⁶. As a result, action on a global scale is expected to rebuild Putin's reputation as the ruler of an empire.

The Russian Federation used the involvement of key leaders, including politicians, to make the message credible. Putin was supported by Russian Ambassador to Minsk Boris Gryzlov, as well as soldiers from the 155th Marine Brigade of the Pacific Fleet, who recorded a video message of support for the president¹⁷. Representatives of the media also took a stand on the issue, including Vladimir Solovyov, president of the Union of Russian Journalists, appealing to Russian journalists not to succumb to provocations and to continue working for the good of society¹⁸. In addition, the entire propaganda apparatus was launched, including cultural institutions and so-called useful idiots. Representatives of the Russian Military-Historical Society particularly condemned the attempted mutiny and called on citizens not to support the mercenaries. Such gestures of acceptance reinforced the president's positive image and were proof of loyalty to authority.

The Russian Federation also used ethnic minorities to convince public opinion of the unity of the federal state. During the annexation of Crimea, great attention was paid to the issue of the Crimean Tatars. It should be pointed out that appreciation of the importance of national minorities is an important part of the identity of Russian society. In the crisis situation, Nikolai Doluda, ataman of the All-Russian Cossack Society, and Ismail Berdiev, representative of the Coordination Centre of Muslims of the North Caucasus, stood behind the commander-in-chief and considered the rebellion a betrayal of the state and leading to anarchy.

In order to intimidate the Russian public, it was pointed out that the mercenaries were trying to provoke a fratricidal civil war and had access to a nuclear arsenal.

To stabilise the external situation after Prigozhin's rebellion, the Russian Federation used a diplomatic corps, but also pursued an intensive foreign policy in the international information environment. Countries such as Venezuela, India, Iran, Saudi Arabia showed support for the Russian President. Some of these countries are

¹⁶ Prigozhin died in a plane crash on 23 August 2023. His death may be a warning that the Russian president must not be defied.

¹⁷ Глава Приморья опубликовал обращение 155-й бригады морской пехоты в поддержку Путина, Тасс, 25 VI 2023, <https://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/18109961> [accessed: 26 VII 2023].

¹⁸ Глава СЖР призвал журналистов не поддаваться на провокации, РИА Новости, 24 VI 2023, <https://ria.ru/20230624/zhurnalisty-1880217102.html> [accessed: 26 VII 2023].

mentioned in the Security Strategy of the Russian Federation (2021), which indicates bilateral relations with them¹⁹.

The dislocation of the Wagner Group after the Prigozhin putsch should be seen as a redeployment of Russian forces to Belarus and a strengthening of that direction²⁰. The venture was intended to confuse public opinion (the technique used was the accumulation of information) and to mask real moves. The Wagner Group's activities must be categorised as hybrid actions. It was more effective to neutralise them at that moment by taking non-kinetic rather than purely kinetic actions.

The Wagner Group continues its activities as a company and documents them on its Wagner Orchestra profile on Telegram. There, it presents progress on the battlefield, such as at Bachmut, where the Group destroyed a Polish Krab cannon. It also carries out psychological activities aimed at building a positive image, e.g. it reported on a meeting with children from the patriotic club Ryś. This changed the image of the Wagnerists in Belarusian society. The same activities were carried out during the annexation of Crimea. Their aim was to convince the public of the Group's peaceful intentions and create the impression that its members were part of the community²¹.

Information activities consist of reinforcing favourable attitudes towards the Russian Federation on the part of representatives of other states that legitimise its actions and confirm its position in the global security system.

NATO summit in Vilnius

At the NATO summit in Vilnius (11–12 July 2023), the Russian Federation used a technique of contrasting: bad West against good Russia. At the same time, it demonstrated that it alone is capable of ensuring global security (the technique used is an overstatement), while NATO is an archaic structure that fails to deliver on its promises and prioritises vested interests. The arrival of United States of America (US) President Joe Biden at the summit reinforced the rivalry between the superpowers.

¹⁹ Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 02.07.2021 г. № 400, <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/47046> [accessed: 27 VI 2023].

²⁰ Лукашенко подтвердил приезд главы ЧВК “Вагнер” Пригожина в Беларусь, БЕЛТА, 27 VI 2023, <https://www.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-podtverdil-priezd-glavy-chvk-vagner-prigozhina-v-belarus-574036-2023/> [accessed: 10 VII 2023].

²¹ Wagnerowcy odwiedzili “patriotyczne” białoruskie dzieci (Eng. Wagnerists visited ‘patriotic’ Belarusian children), Belsat, 27 VII 2023, <https://belsat.eu/pl/news/27-07-2023-wagnerowcy-odwiedzili-patriotyczne-bialoruskie-dzieci> [accessed: 28 VII 2023]. See in more detail: Оркестр Варнера, post on Telegram channel, https://t.me/s/orchestra_w [accessed: 28 VII 2023].

Representatives of the Ukrainian administration and media, including Serhiy Sydorenko, editor of the European Pravda portal, expressed the opinion that the failure to present Ukraine with a concrete plan for joining NATO at this summit would be a blow to Ukraine²². Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenski has been building in the minds of the international community the need for Ukraine to join NATO, including through diplomatic action. An example of this was his appeal to President Biden to invite Ukraine to join NATO, even if it was to become a member of the organisation after the war. The Vilnius summit was supposed to be a milestone for Ukraine in its accession to the North Atlantic Alliance and a strong wake-up call for the Russian Federation. It would have boosted morale and given strength to the Ukrainian soldiers and population to continue fighting. However, it should be stressed that joining NATO is conditional by law, as exemplified by Sweden, which has not yet been integrated into the Alliance structure²³. The Vilnius summit was only a prelude to the meeting to be held in Washington in 2024. Decisive commitments will not be made until after the U.S. presidential election (autumn 2024) and the next U.S. administration takes office, and after the change in the position of NATO Secretary General, which will take place during the Washington summit.

In the Russian news environment, the Vilnius summit was portrayed as an event where NATO countries sought to deploy 300,000 of their troops along the border with the Russian Federation. At the same time, Russia was portrayed as a victim of the Alliance's actions and it was reiterated that it was only seeking to ensure the security of its citizens²⁴. The message was given credence by President Putin, who confirmed that: *When it comes to Ukraine's membership of NATO, we have repeatedly said that this obviously poses a threat to Russia's security. And in fact, one of the reasons for the special military operation is the threat of Ukraine joining NATO*²⁵.

²² *Ukraina w NATO? Publicysta: Brak konkretnego planu na szczycie w Wilnie będzie dla nas ciosem* (Eng. Ukraine in NATO? Publicist: the lack of a concrete plan at the Vilnius summit will be a blow to us), TVP Info, 21 VI 2023, <https://www.tvp.info/70705131/ukrainski-publicysta-przedstawienie-na-szczycie-w-wilnie-niekonkretnego-planu-czlonkostwa-ukrainy-w-nato-bedzie-dla-nas-ciosem> [accessed: 7 VII 2023].

²³ The article was completed on 30 IX 2023. At this time, Sweden has the status of a NATO invited state, not a NATO member state.

²⁴ *Политолог назвала главное событие предстоящего саммита НАТО в Вильнюсе*, Известия, 10 VII 2023, <https://iz.ru/1542191/2023-07-10/politolog-nazvala-glavnoe-sobytie-predstoiashchego-sammita-nato-v-vilniuse> [accessed: 18 VII 2023].

²⁵ *Путин назвал последствия принятия Украины в НАТО*, РИА Новости, 13 VII 2023, <https://crimea.ria.ru/20230713/putin-nazval-posledstviya-prinyatiya-ukrainy-v-nato-1130043821.html> [accessed: 18 VII 2023].

In addition to this, the Russian Federation reacted negatively to NATO's declaration of the transfer of cluster munitions to the Ukrainian side. Russia recognised that the Ukrainian Armed Forces would use these weapons to strike civilian targets and would therefore fight with them²⁶. The outreach activities carried out towards the Russian public were aimed at changing perceptions, as well as reinforcing negative emotions towards Western countries, which were presented as a threat to Russia's sovereignty.

The Western mass media mainly focused on showing the unity of the Alliance, but at the same time pointed out the duality of expectations between the Ukrainian side and the member states. The Ukrainians were of the opinion that, after 500 days of war, they had proved their readiness for accession, while NATO took the position that an enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation to include Ukraine was not possible until the war was over. Indeed, Ukraine's membership could encourage the Russian Federation to escalate to other European states²⁷. Such a situation contributes to building internal divisions within NATO and creating space for Russian propaganda depreciating Ukraine in the West.

A different picture of the current geopolitical situation was shaped in the U.S. news environment. In the USA, the Vilnius summit has been used as a prelude to the presidential campaign, in which the Ukrainian theme will be addressed through the prism of money spent and support given. This thesis was confirmed by Lorne Cook in a publication in *The Washington Post*, in which he summarised the summit. He indicated that the Ukrainian administration was grateful for the promises of more arms and ammunition, while at the same time disappointed that no specific date was set for Ukraine's accession to NATO. The publicist drew attention to the issue of funding and the failure of the allies to deliver on their commitment to

²⁶ Г. Мишутин, Н. Гасымов, *Чем для Украины закончился саммит НАТО в Вильнюсе*, *Ведомости*, 13 VI 2023, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2023/07/13/985067-mezhdunarodnie-novosti> [accessed: 18 VII 2023].

²⁷ M. Gebauer, R. Naukirch, Ch. Schult, *Gehört die Ukraine in die NATO?*, *Spiegel*, 10 VII 2023, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/nato-gipfel-in-vilnius-gehoert-die-ukraine-in-das-buendnis-a-e79ca421-d4d9-4663-9fac-1530b01b3b43> [accessed: 17 VII 2023]; N. Barotte, *Garanties de sécurité, processus d'adhésion de l'Ukraine... Les grands enjeux du sommet de l'OTAN à Vilnius*, *Le Figaro*, 10 VII 2023, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/otan-queelles-garanties-de-securite-pour-l-ukraine-le-dilemme-allie-20230710> [accessed: 17 VII 2023]; *NATO summit: Ukraine's future membership to be discussed by leaders in Vilnius*, *BBC*, 11 VI 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-66157625> [accessed: 18 VII 2023].

increase defence GDP²⁸. The outreach activities of the RF and the US will evolve depending on developments in the international security environment.

Perspectives

Russia's outreach activities in Central Europe will focus on creating a new order, as well as stirring up public emotions. This is driven by the desire to rebuild imperial influence and the need to ensure the security of Russian-speaking citizens in various countries.

It is important to note that the RF influences the international community by instilling fear and transgressing boundaries respected by democratic states.

Non-kinetic activities including information activities will be the same as before. Only the timing and tools change, while the information techniques remain the same. Parts of the Russian narrative have been replicated since the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and remain relevant. The content promoted includes:

- 1) the strong and unbreakable historical ties of the Donbass with Russia,
- 2) the intensification of NATO activities along the border with the Russian Federation, which are interpreted as an attack on Russian sovereignty,
- 3) Russophobia of the West, especially the US²⁹.

Their aim is to influence bilateral relations between Russia and the West and to undermine the position of the legally elected government in Ukraine. The president of the Russian Federation has called on the Ukrainian armed forces to overthrow the government in Kiev and forcibly take control of the state. This attitude of the Russian Federation was the subject of a speech by John Kelley U.S. political minister, who said, among other things: *We have heard Russia claim that it is not the aggressor, that it is trying to stop the 'genocide' in eastern Ukraine, that it needs to 'denazify' the Ukrainian government and fight drug addicts and satanists. Whatever today's excuse is, it cannot hide the fact that Russia is not the victim it claims to be*³⁰.

²⁸ L. Cook, *NATO summit results in brief: Mixed news for Ukraine, hope for Sweden and a response to Russia*, The Washington Post, 12 VI 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/07/12/nato-summit-vilnius-lithuania-ukraine/980690b6-20c8-11ee-8994-4b2d0b694a34_story.html [accessed: 17 VII 2023]. Cf.: *Despite Successes at NATO Summit, Divisions Remain*, The New York Times, 12 VII 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/12/world/europe/nato-summit-ukraine-biden.html> [accessed: 17 VII 2023]. See: S. Ramani, *Putin's War on Ukraine*, London 2023, in many places.

²⁹ В ДНР рассказали, что стало точкой невозврата в Донбассе, РИА Новости, 13 IV 2021, <https://ria.ru/20210413/operatsiya-1728010412.html> [accessed: 10 VII 2023].

³⁰ J. Kelley, *Remarks at a UN Security Council Briefing Called by Russia on Russophobia*, The U.S. Mission to the United Nations, 14 III 2023, <https://usun.usmission.gov/remarks-at-a-un-security-council->

Russia influenced the Polish information environment both during the Russian-Belarusian military exercises Zapad-21 and during the exercises carried out by Poland (e.g. Anaconda exercises)³¹. It has sought over the years to highlight topics that would discredit the Polish government administration and uniformed services, including deprecating high-ranking officers through the preparation of interviews (e.g. an interview with Major General Maciej Jabłoński in 2018)³², disinformation on the fulfilment of allied commitments and the purchase of armaments.

Cyberoperations are another information threat that destabilises the information environment. These include *deepfake*, a tool of image falsification that Russia is developing to gain public trust or discredit decision-makers.

The common denominator of the non-kinetic activities undertaken by the RF is the desire to maintain its position as hegemon in Central Europe. Given the military purchases made by Poland, Russian activity aimed at diminishing the potential of the Polish Armed Forces is to be expected.

The actions of the adversary at the border with Poland generate many threats, e.g. escalation of the migration crisis, sabotage, attack on critical infrastructure³³. The response from the Polish side may become a pretext for the RF to completely annex Belarus and thus provide assistance to it. It should be noted, however, that ensuring the safety of Polish citizens is a priority in the face of the threat.

As the geopolitical situation in the Middle East and Indo-Pacific is increasingly tense, the Russian Federation will pursue outreach activities (e.g. psychological actions such as demonstration of force and psychological pressure) that will stabilise

briefing-called-by-russia-on-russophobia/ [accessed: 10 VII 2023]. Countering the disinformation promoted by Russia is reliable public information. See: *EU response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine*, European Council, 7 VII 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-response-ukraine-invasion/> [accessed: 10 VII 2023].

³¹ Exercises Zapad-21 focused on, inter alia, psychological actions destabilising the internal security system of the Republic of Poland. The exercise was additionally a show of force by the Russian Armed Forces and a way to divert public attention from current international challenges.

³² A fake news item about the Anaconda-18 exercises, along with a statement by Major General Jabłoński, was published on the pro-Russian disinformation portal *Niezależny Dziennik Polityczny*. See: *Gen. Jabłoński OSTRO: Dowódca Operacyjny zhańbił moją dywizję bojową! O co chodzi?* (Eng. Gen. Jabłoński FIERCELY: The Operational Commander has disgraced my combat division! What is it all about?), *Niezależny Dziennik Polityczny*, 13 XI 2018, <https://dziennik-polityczny.com/2018/11/13/gen-jablonski-ostro-dowodca-operacyjny-zhanbil-moja-dywizje-bojowa-o-co-chodzi/> [accessed: 7 VII 2023].

³³ A.M. Dwyner, *Grupa Wagnera na Białorusi – potencjalne zagrożenia dla Polski* (Eng. The Wagner Group in Belarus - potential threats to Poland), *Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych*, 27 VII 2023, <https://www.pism.pl/publikacje/grupa-wagnera-na-bialorusi-potencjalne-zagrozenia-dla-polski> [accessed: 28 VII 2023].

its position in the Baltic and force concessions from the West and temporarily freeze its actions in Europe (war with Ukraine)³⁴.

Conclusions

The Russian Federation conducts outreach activities by adapting to the realities of the functioning of individual states (political, social, economic conditions, etc.). The diversification of states has enabled the RF to use tools, such as, for example, psychological influence products, which exert pressure on the will of decision-makers and the public's understanding of the situation. Russia is once again trying to influence the security architecture.

The main conclusions include:

- 1) The information activities of the Russian Federation are conducted on a long-term basis and aimed at maintaining the role of hegemon and the desire to return to the glory days of the Russian empire.
- 2) Information activities are part of the power play at the global level. The intensification of a potential conflict in the Indo-Pacific will change the balance of power in the world.
- 3) The 2023 NATO summit in Vilnius was a prelude to discussions on the current geopolitical situation including existing conflicts in the international arena and their consequences. The final decisions on the Alliance's actions will be made at the 2024 meeting in Washington, D.C. They will be heavily influenced by the new American administration, which will set its tone in global relations.
- 4) The Russian Federation is permanently infiltrating the Baltic Sea states with information in order to undermine NATO's dominance there. It disseminates narratives and uses tools that have proven successful in previous conflicts.
- 5) Russia is escalating tensions by threatening to use tactical nuclear charges. This may be a prelude to creating conditions in which it will use weapons of mass destruction.
- 6) The Russian-Ukrainian war has led to a situation where Ukraine has become the most militarised state in Europe. This has consequently verified the technological capabilities of the West and the Russian Federation itself.

³⁴ See: M. Priebe, *Alternative Futures Following a Great Power War: Miranda Priebe and Bryan Frederick in Conversation*, RAND, 9 V 2023, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2023/05/alternative-futures-following-a-great-power-war-miranda.html> [accessed: 7 VII 2023].

Many of the Russian Federation's domestic and foreign policy outreach activities have enabled it to achieve some of its strategic objectives and information effects. Russia remains a player in international relations and continues to be an active participant in global competition. The Russian Federation's information activities in Europe are carried out towards international relations actors in order to consolidate the Russian position in the region and to achieve the intended information effects. Changing the perception of audiences and creating an alternative reality is an important factor in destabilising Western states. The information activities of the RF have a strong impact on the societies of Poland and the Baltic States. The sense of fear among citizens influences their political decisions and is a factor determining social attitudes.

The Russian authorities are also influencing their own society to gain support for the "special military operation" and to consolidate the desire to return to the glory days of the empire. Typical of Russian society, the superiority of collective behaviour over individual behaviour, a hostile attitude to changing realities and thinking of Greater Russia through the prism of ethnic minorities underpin the RF's information activities.

It is important to recognise that the issues presented in the publication are an important subject for representatives of both the scientific and military communities. Conclusions from the presented research can serve as a starting point for the preparation of a report for decision-makers. The article is not exhaustive and does not address many aspects of the topic, which provides an assumption for further research.

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