

# INTRODUCTION: THE ROLE OF RUSSIAN INFORMATION WARFARE

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## Introduction

The German general, professor of political science, and progenitor of the Bundeswehr leadership concept of *Innere Führung*, Wolf Graf von Baudissin (1907–1993), reached a striking *conclusion* a result of his deliberations on the nature of war. He found that war is a spiritual activity by nature and the underlying reasons for war can be attributed to clashing worldview. In this conflict, the country or alliance of countries with the superior worldview will emerge victorious. Baudissin further proposed that the victor will be the *western* worldview. As bold as this assertion may be, the most surprising feature to emerge from his reflections is that Baudissin does not place any importance on armaments races or technological supremacy, but rather emphasized the mental dimensions of conflicts. Thus it is the smarter, and not the stronger who will win. In this *war of worldviews*, supremacy is achieved by adopting a correct leadership philosophy. Although Baudissin was reflecting on his own era, the developments that have occurred over the last decades confirm his theories with astonishing precision. It is therefore, possible to apply his findings to more recent conflicts as well. When considering that in the war between worldviews “only such armed forces will survive that are composed of free citizens and that operate in accordance with the democratic order of a state”.<sup>1</sup> It becomes evident that a military organization must be aligned with traditional Western humanistic and democratic values of peace, freedom, and responsibility. It is only then can it achieve military superiority. A soldier is only as strong as the society that they defend. A society must be in harmony with its armed forces if a soldier is to be effective. According to Baudissin’s thesis this harmony is only possible in a free society. An army embodies its political system and the army that is centered on freedom that can overcome

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<sup>1</sup> **Baudissin, W. Graf von** 2006. *Als Mensch hinter den Waffen*. Hg. von A. Dörfler-Dierken. Göttingen, S. 67.

the one that is grounded on repression. A free army is simply more capable of defeating a non-free army. Therefore, according to Baudissin, a country's modern armed forces should be educated in a way that promotes and develops "the will to become free and be free".<sup>2</sup> Baudissin also reached another fundamental *conclusion*: in the war of worldviews, the main objective is not to achieve military victory over the supporters of a particular worldview or to enact the *military defeat* of an enemy. It is rather to achieve a mental victory over an opponent by altering their convictions and integrating them into the victor's worldview.

Similarly, Russia's information warfare against Ukraine and against the West has also been a clash of worldviews wherein one party has attempted to defeat the other and alter the opponent's worldview. But as the Chinese general Su Zi points out, the greatest victories do not always come with violent effort. He writes: "Therefore the skillful leader subdues the enemy's troops without any fighting: he captures their cities laying siege to them: he overthrows their kingdom without lengthy operations in the field" (Su Zi, III, 6).<sup>3</sup>

### Ukraine in Russia's sphere of influence

Before delving further into an in-depth analysis of the current Ukrainian crisis, it is essential to understand the underlying reasons for its outbreak. Russia's wounded reaction to the events in Ukraine after the Euromaidan protests<sup>4</sup> in December, 2013 is well explained by Zbigniew Brzezinski<sup>5</sup> who describes Ukraine as 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".

Ukraine's independence in 1991 was already too much of a shock for many patriotically minded Russian political groups, as it meant a major defeat for Moscow's historical strategy that sought to exercise control over the geopolitical space around Russia's borders. According to Brzezinski<sup>6</sup>,

<sup>2</sup> **Baudissin Dokumentation Zentrum** (Führungsakademie der Bundeswehr) 56, 5.4/4: 18.–23. Februar 1956. W. G. v. Baudissin's presentation „Freiheit als Verpflichtung“.

<sup>3</sup> **Su Zi** 1994. *Art of War*. Translated by R.D. Sawyer. Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press.

<sup>4</sup> **Мухарьський, Антон** 2015. *Майдан. Революція духу*. Київ: Наш формат.

<sup>5</sup> **Brzezinski, Zbigniew** 1997. *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostategic Imperatives*. New York: Basic Books, p. 46.

<sup>6</sup> **Brzezinski** 1997, p. 92.

the loss of Ukraine decreases Russia's ability to rule over the Black Sea region. Crimea and Odessa have historically been important strategic access points to the Black Sea, as well as to the Mediterranean via the Bosphorus strait. Throughout history, Ukraine has always been essential to Russian nation-building narratives. Since Kyiv has traditionally been regarded as the "mother of all Russian cities", Ukraine holds a special place in Russian national myth. Therefore, Ukraine not only plays a pivotal role in Russian geopolitical strategic thinking, it also retains a symbolic value as the homeland of Russian civilization that should not be underestimated.<sup>7</sup> As Hugo Spaulding remarked:

*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. Both approaches pursued the same strategic goal of dominating Ukraine's internal and foreign affairs.<sup>8</sup>*

### **Russian information operations against the Ukrainian state and the Ukrainian Defence Forces**

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the Russian information operations against Ukraine started earlier than 2013–2014. Already in 1991, Russian propaganda was being directed against the independent state of Ukraine after dissolution of the Soviet Union.

After the fall of the pro-Russian President Yanukovich on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014, the Kyiv government embarked on a more determined path towards integration with the West. In Moscow, the prospect of losing Ukraine from its geopolitical sphere of influence was perceived as tantamount to a catastrophic defeat, perhaps even worse than the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

<sup>7</sup> 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. [**Sazonov et al.** 2016]

<sup>8</sup> **Spaulding, Hugo** 2015. Putin's next objectives in the Ukrainian. – Background, February 2015. Institute for the Study of War, p. 1, <[www.understandingwar.org](http://www.understandingwar.org)> (last accessed 24.08.2016).

In order to prevent that from happening and to keep Ukraine, or at least part of Ukraine, under its control, Russia occupied Crimea<sup>9</sup> in March 2014 and undertook measures to destabilize the predominantly Russian-speaking Eastern Ukrainian regions by means of asymmetric warfare<sup>10</sup> – information operations, economic measures, cyber warfare, psychological warfare, etc. During the conflict Russia never pursued any kind of international or regional crisis management measures, despite being in a unique position to mediate between the Ukrainian government, which it officially recognized, and the People’s Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, which were not officially recognized, neither internationally nor by Russia. Russia’s behaviour during the crisis indicates that it was and is not interested in peace, but rather seeks to use the current crisis to advance its national interests and to enhance its political hegemony as an alternative power to the West. By destabilising Eastern Ukraine and undermining the peace processes, Russia also avoids taking any responsibility for the security and well-being of the mostly Russian-speaking people living in the conflict area.<sup>11</sup>

It is widely acknowledged that Russian information operations have become progressively massive, aggressive, influential, and visible. Dmytro Kuleba, Ambassador-at-Large at the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry, determined (2015) that the aggressive wave of Russian information campaigns began to appear approximately one year before the annexation of Crimea, in 2013<sup>12</sup>. Russia’s actions confirm that it was well-prepared, and militarily ready to conduct the operation in Crimea.

During the 2014–2015 conflict in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea, all levels of the Russian leadership, from the political (against the state of Ukraine, its structures and politicians) to the military were involved in information operations. According to Jolanta Darczewska<sup>13</sup>, the mass scale mobilization of

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example **Rosin, Kaupo** 2015. Hübriidsõda Ukrainas. – 2014 aastaraamat. Eesti Kaitsevägi. Kaitseväe peastaap, OÜ Greif, pp. 33–39.

<sup>11</sup> See more **Sazonov et al.** 2016.

<sup>12</sup> **Kuleba, Dmytro** 2015. Russian information operations against Ukraine. Interviewed by Vladimir Sazonov, Kyiv, 27 May 2015.

<sup>13</sup> **Darczewska, Jolanta** 2014. The Anatomy of Russian Information Warfare the Crimean operation, a case study. – Point of View. Number 42 (May 2014). Warsaw, Oúrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia, Centre for Eastern Studies, p. 5.

federal television channels<sup>14</sup>, radio stations, newspapers and online resources that was supported by diplomats, politicians, political analysts, experts, and representatives of the academic and cultural elites was unprecedented. In Russia's information campaigns against Ukraine, Moscow propagandists drew upon myths and narratives related to the Second World War, the activities of Stepan Bandera and Ukrainian nationalists of the 1940s, as well as Nazism and Nazi-induced violence in order to further their objectives. This was supplemented with images of the "glorious Soviet period". Such manipulations have become commonplace in the Russian media since Vladimir Putin came to power in the Russian Federation and they show no signs of abating.<sup>15</sup>

The current volume, *The Crisis in Ukraine and Information Operations of the Russian Federation*, aims to provide a better understanding of Russian policies towards Ukraine at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and to explain why Russia wants to control its neighboring territories such as Ukraine. This is why it is necessary to study the nature of Russian information warfare and hybrid war in the context of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict.<sup>16</sup>

The current issue includes articles of experts from Estonia, Ukraine, Latvia and Poland. All authors express their personal views. In his foreword to the issue, Maj. **Uku Arold** discusses the peculiarities of information operations of Russian Federation. Dr. **Sergii Pakhomenko** and Dr. **Catherine Tryma** analyze the ways in which identity can influence the current warfare in Ukraine. Col. Dr. **Adam Wetoszka** of Poland, analyses the concept of hybrid war. Dr. **Vladimir Sazonov** and M.A. **Igor Kopõtin** analyse the Russian information war against the Ukrainian Armed Forces in 2014–2015. Dr. **Holger Mölder** focuses on the impact of President Putin's and his administration's policies on the international system. M.A. **Maili Vilson** recounts the EU foreign policy responses to the Putin's challenges. Dr. **Yevhen Fedchenko** reveals the parallels between the Soviet propaganda and the activities of contemporary Russian ideologists. Dr. **Ieva Berzina** discusses how Latvian society perceived the Ukrainian crisis. Theologian Dr. **Ain Riistan** draws attention to on the role of the Moscow Patriarchate in the Russian information war during the conflict in Ukraine. Finally, a

<sup>14</sup> Federal television of the Russian Federation.

<sup>15</sup> **Lipman, Maria** 2009. Media Manipulation and Political Control in Russia. Chatham House, Carnegie Moscow Center, Moscow, <<https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/Russia%20and%20Eurasia/300109lipman.pdf>> (last accessed 24.08.2016).

<sup>16</sup> **Rácz, Andras** 2015. Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy's Ability to Resist. Helsinki: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs.

warfare expert from Ukraine M.I.B. **Dmytro Zolotukhin** explains what is the memetic warfare and how it threatens democratic values.

In conclusion, the research of multiple international experts clearly indicates that Russia considers information warfare to be of equal importance to military operations, or even more so. In some cases, military actions have even taken a supporting role, in the non-declared information war against Ukraine conducted by Russia.

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