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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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**BACK IN THE U.S.S.R... SURPRISE!**  
EXAMINATION OF RUSSIAN INFORMATION OPERATIONS AGAINST THE WEST IN 2016

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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## Executive Summary

**Title:** *Back in the U.S.S.R. ...SURPRISE! Investigation of Russian Information Operations Against the West in 2016*

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**Thesis:** This paper will explore why the West was surprised by Russia's use of information environment operations in 2016.

**Discussion:** The purpose of this paper is to investigate the methods that Russia used to conduct information operations in order to influence the West to advance their own agenda in 2016.

**Conclusion:** It starts with understanding what end state Russia is trying to achieve. Then the US and the West need to hit the restart button on the way they currently think about war. Conflict with Russia is likely to be less about troops and missiles and more about information and a clash of ideas. Mao stated, *"The view that strategic victory is determined by tactical successes alone is wrong because it overlooks the fact that victory or defeat in a war is first and foremost a question of whether the situation as a whole and its various stages are properly taken into account."*

The US and the West are not going to win an information war with Russia if they continue to look at every information operation as a tactical attack; they need to understand the Russian system and the theories behind their actions. If someone succeeds at influencing a system, by injecting chaos, then the system has now evolved. Therefore, it is vital for the US and the West to realize that Russia's system has been doing just that, evolving. The US and the West should realize that Russia's fight for influence and power on the global scale has never truly ended, they have just adjusted their complex system. Russia has studied the US and the West from the moment the Cold War ended and have observed the evolution of the US and the West's complex systems, it is now time for us to crack the books and study Russia's complex system.

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## Preface

Chaos is a part of our everyday life even if we don't realize it. The clearest example to most people is through the weather. Meteorologists are constantly studying patterns and the science of weather, but the reality is that a surprise afternoon rain shower in the summer still occurs no matter how much analysis is done by the meteorologist. No matter how prepared you were for your day when you left the house, there are times you are caught without an umbrella. This doesn't mean the meteorologist did not know what he or she was talking about that morning before you left your house and got caught in the rain, it just means the weather is not a linear system. It is not a simple system where the same predictable pattern occurs, such as if A happens then B and C and so on. It is a non-linear system in which, at any moment, something that may seem random or chaotic could disrupt the pattern or behavior of the system. Even if you believe you can predict something, there is always a chance of surprise.

The intelligence community tries to present itself as a linear system with people who are able to see, hear, and stop everything. However, the intelligence community is nothing like a linear system. It is a complex non-linear system such that, when chaos is inserted, intelligence failure is likely to happen at some point. It might be a simple slip up or it might be something as large as Pearl Harbor. Either way, it is something that is unavoidable because of the complexity of the system. Richard Betts states that an intelligence failure can be conceptualized in three overlapping ways: 1) Failure in perspective; 2) Pathologies of communication; 3) Paradoxes of perception.<sup>1</sup> The intelligence system, no matter the amount of information, resources, or data, still contains a human element and humans are the ultimate causes of chaos in a system.

If we look at war through the eyes of Carl von Clausewitz and his trinity of "people, army, and government," it is easy to see that if chaos is introduced artificially into any

portion of the trinity, the balance or unity of purpose can be altered. Political leaders will lose their “rationality.” The populace will disintegrate into warring opinions and convictions. Military leaders, already coping with the chaotic nature of war, will lose a realistic grasp of probabilities and opportunities.

The United States’ trinity currently could be seen as thrown off balance by the actions of Russian information operations. Russia has used the human element to introduce chaos into the US complex system. In light of their history, however, their recent actions should not be surprising.

This paper will reveal the depth of knowledge and experience Russia has when it comes to the world of information operations, specifically creating chaos in the mind of their adversary. In the past, Russian information operations targeted the mind of a specific statesman or commander. However, today, with the ability to use social media, their target audience has changed. Russia is less focused on a specific person but instead more interested on creating chaos in the public at large. The US and the West need to realize and come to grips that Russia is no longer going to continue to use their original play book. Instead they are going to evolve.

## **1.0 Introduction – Why we were surprised?**

In 2016, the United States (US) and the West discovered that Russia had been conducting Information Environment Operations (IEO) to try and influence the US presidential election. It was a shock to the nation and immediately started a debate over who knew what and how the US government could allow this to happen. The reality is the US and the West were caught flat footed. The purpose of this paper is to examine the actions/methods Russia conducted to influence US persons or advance their own agenda in 2016. To understand how the US and West were caught by surprise today, it is important to understand Russia's theories and methods in regard to information operations, and to see how those type of actions were conducted in the past and how they are being conducted currently. It is important to understand this a not a new type of operation for Russia. The Soviet Union, then Russia, has been conducting some form of information operations since the end of World War II and all through the Cold War up to today. The foundations for such operations were laid as far ago as the Tsarist period. However, the US and its Western allies only recently realized Russia never stopped conducting information operations.

On November 9, 1989, the Cold War started to thaw with the fall of the Berlin Wall. That shock was the beginning of change that would come over the next few years. The West's biggest enemy, the Soviet Union, started to collapse and would eventually fall in 1991 when Mikhail Gorbachev resigned as President of the Soviet Union and Boris Yeltsin became the newly elected President of the independent Russian state. The global power structure had changed from a bipolar world to a unipolar world according to Charles Krauthammer.<sup>2</sup> America operated on the premise that not only that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a win for democracy, but also that the US now enjoyed preeminence -- political, economic, military, and cultural – in a unipolar world. The US would be the decisive player in any conflict in which it might choose to involve itself.<sup>3</sup>

The new world power structure is part of the reason why the US was surprised by Russia's actions in 2016. Since the early 1990's, the US didn't see the new Russia as a priority and started to shift away from the Cold War era policies, turning its attention to other conflicts, relationships, and interests around the world. This was a key factor because Russia never stopped wanting to have or maintain regional power or global power. There is even a specific doctrine under Vladimir Putin that addresses this ambitions policy, claiming Russia bears a responsibility for upholding security both on a global and regional level and is ready for it.<sup>4</sup> Even though this objective has always been a part of the national strategy, in the early 1990's the Russian government was dealing with the internal issue of former USSR nations defecting and forming their own nations states. This led to a massive economic crisis within post-Soviet states and Russia proper<sup>5</sup>. This was a low point for Russia in terms of economic and military power, which is why the US and the West turned their attention toward other interests even though they should have paid more attention to what Russia was doing. The US became involved more in the Middle East with the First Gulf War, United Nation Peace Keeping operations, and other national interests laid out in the National Security Strategy of the United States (1993 edition)<sup>6</sup>. Meanwhile, Russia was inching its way out of the hole that the collapse of the USSR had created.

Russia needed time to get their country back in order, which they did. From the economic crisis of 1998 to the early 2000's, Russia's economy had grown at an average rate of 6.5 percent a year. Real wages started to skyrocket, consumer spending was exploding, and unemployment and poverty were declining.<sup>7</sup> It looked like the country had pulled itself up from the days of communism and it was only a matter of time before they would become a true democratic country and no longer an autocratic one.

However, that is not the case, Russia may present themselves as conducting democratic action but it is not a true democracy. This is an important fact to understand because of two

reasons. The first is that since it is not a true democracy, Putin has the ability to make unilateral decisions against his enemies quickly with little, to no resistance. Secondly, Putin seems to fear Russia becoming a “true” democracy. Currently, he is able to censor what the country believes, sees, reads, tweets, etc. and there is evidence to say that he is squashing outspoken opposition, creating fear within the public that if you are showing any push back toward the government it is at your own risk.

## **2.0 Russia’s Play Book- Actions to Unbalance the “Trinity”**

The use of information warfare by Russians is not something new; the Soviet Union invested vast resources into information warfare to advance their communist ideology abroad. However, the modern digital era provides the ability for Russian state-sponsored disinformation campaigners to reach much larger audiences with anti-American and anti-democratic messages while covering their tracks.<sup>8</sup> The Soviet Union had strong established information warfare methods and theories and when the Iron Curtain fell, with their military and economy weakened, the new Russia leaned heavily on information operations.

The best way to show the evolution of how Russia is today conducting information operations is to understand the building blocks of how it became the primary non-military offensive warfare for Russia. Russia understood that an attack introducing chaos into any of the areas of Clausewitz’s trinity using information will create chaos in the system. It is important to understand all the theories like Active Measures, Non-linear warfare, and where it all began with Reflexive Control individually in order to appreciate that the recent attacks do not constitute something new but rather represent an evolution.

## 2.1 Russia's Reflexive Control Theory Evolution

Reflexive Control Theory has been a part of the Soviet Union and today's Russian society since the start of the Cold War. Reflexive Control theory is defined as a means of conveying to a partner or an opponent specially prepared information to incline him to voluntarily make the predetermined decision desired by the initiator of the action.<sup>9</sup> The goal is to make sure you are not only disrupting the commander's decision-making process but also influence and lead him/her to the decision that best suits your objectives. This goal of disrupting the decision-making process has been an essential part of warfare long before it was ever associated with information environment operations.

For instance, if you were to look at Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, he states "Disorder is born from order, cowardice from courage, weakness from strength. The line between disorder and order lies in logistics (shu), between cowardice and courage, in strategic advantage (shih); and between weakness and strength, in strategic positioning (hsing). Thus, the expert at getting the enemy to make his move shows himself (hsing) and the enemy is certain to follow. He baits the enemy, and the enemy is certain to take it. In so doing, he moves the enemy and lies in wait for him with his full force." Sun Tzu explains that if you create some sort of interference whether it is against your enemies *shu*, *shih*, or *hsing*, then you are going to have created a strategic advantage because you have influenced the decision-making process of your enemy toward the outcome you desire.<sup>10</sup>

Even though the research into Reflexive Control theory started in the 1960's, it wasn't until 1970's when Major General (ret.) M. D. Ionov, one of the Soviet Union's military specialists, saw how this could be used to "control the enemy" and wrote several articles on the subject in relationship to military thought. His work continued, and in one of his more recent articles from July 1995 titled, "*Control of the Enemy*," Ionov argued that information is needed on the status of the enemies' forces, the nature of their actions and the capabilities

in order to control them and simultaneously, to halt or to retard his counter-control efforts.<sup>11</sup> The similarities to Sun Tzu are very strong, the constant between the two being that the goal is to disrupt the enemy. He underlines four major points where you can control the enemy. First, in order for commanders to get the desired response, they need to visualize how their enemy would most likely respond to your action. Second, the outcome might not be what you desire if the enemy has discovered what your actions are and starts to counter them. Third, the use of newly developed methods of weapons, reconnaissance makes the exposé of your actions more venerable. Finally, the use of unconventional forms of pressure on the enemy, specifically those associated with social elements, intelligence, psychological, ethical and ideological factors.<sup>12</sup> Ionov's explanation of how the military would target the human aspects of war, referring to finding ways to "control the enemy," was the ground work for what US and the West today see as the traditional Soviet implementation of reflexive control in the form of an information or psychological (psyops) attack.

During the time of the Soviet Union, one could see how the USSR had employed RC, not only at the strategic and tactical levels of conventional warfare to influence the commander's decision-making process, but also in the informational environment. Even though the USSR collapsed, the theories and concepts in place didn't go away; they were adapted and adjusted to help Russia achieve its new strategic objectives. Since the 1990's, Russia has lost some of its ability to implement RC in a conventional warfare environment, so they have become more adept at implementing RC methods within the information environment. Russian Major General N. I. Turko noted, "The most dangerous manifestations in the tendency to rely on military power relates more to the possible impact of the use of reflective control by the opposing side through developments in the theory and practice of information war rather than to the direct use of the means of armed combat."<sup>13</sup> The use of RC as part of information operations is not just a Soviet or Russian tactic. Maj General Turko

believes the US conducted RC against the Soviet Union, which was one reason the Soviet Union collapsed, and that RC as a method for achieving geopolitical superiority as a means of arms control negotiations during the Cold War.<sup>14</sup> Maj General Turko says that a state should focus on the idea of inflicting unacceptable levels of damage against a state or a group by attacking their information resources, referring more to the physical aspects of information warfare, such as but are not limited to, the infrastructure and the technologies/mediums used to pass the information. Reflexive Control focuses less on the tangible part of war and more on the “military art,” which makes the information environment a great battle space to deploy RC.

As technology changed rapidly in the 1990’s, there was a school of thought by Russian Colonel S. Leonenko, who started thinking about reflexive control in terms of technology, such as weapons systems or computers and networks. In 1990, technology was allowing nations states, especially the US and the Western nations, to develop collection technology to gain a deeper understanding of how and what the enemy was doing. These new ways of collection and intelligence analysis were important to understand the immediate picture, but the US and the West started to drift away from the strategic picture. Russia realized that it was important to figure out “how the enemy thinks” in order to find the weak link in order to exploit it. This is how modern-day Russian information operations started to expand. As Russia continued to struggle to develop their military throughout the 1990’s because of financial issues and a struggling economy, Russia needed to find a way to continue to be in the “fight” to meet their strategic goals and to reestablish their regional power and information became their tool.

## **2.2 Russia’s Hybrid Warfare? New Generation Warfare? Non-Linear Operations? Russia’s War?**

Russia realized early after the fall of the Soviet Union that they would not be able to compete with its near peer competitors in a traditional military conflict, so they started to rethink about how Russia would fight a war. During the early 2000's, Russia watched the US and the West turn its attention to Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Global War on Terrorism, which allowed Russia more time to develop their methods and gave them an opportunity to study the tactics by the US and the West. They were seeing the latest technology and weaponry being deployed to combat the US and the West's enemies and realized that war had changed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. General of the Army, Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation Armed Forces, originally wrote in 2013 in Russian Military-Industrial Kurier about how the Russian Federation Armed Forces should start to see the future of war. Gerasimov states in the article, "The very "rules of war" have changed. The role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness."<sup>15</sup> This article sparked the conversation about what new type of warfare Russia planned to adopt. There have been several names for it including, Fourth Generation Warfare, Full Spectrum Warfare, Hybrid Warfare; however, there has not been universal acceptance of just one title.<sup>16</sup> Gerasimov observed the action of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and realized that lines of when war occurs and doesn't occur were blurry, therefore Russia needed to rethink. He took tactics developed by the Soviets, like reflexive control, and blended them with strategic thinking about total war, laying the ground work for scholars like Tad A. Schnauffer II to argue it is not any of the terms above but what has been developed is the concept of Non-linear war.<sup>17</sup>

The argument is that the actions conducted by Russia are not simply hybrid warfare (or any other title) because most definitions of hybrid warfare do not include the information, economic, social, and political aspects of warfare that states can apply on a much larger scale than non-states.<sup>18</sup> Russia's focus of non-military aspects of war such as information, cyber,

economic diplomatic, political, and social, along the typical aspects of hybrid warfare – conventional, irregular, terrorist, and criminal, should be defined as non-linear war (NLW).

Every military seeks to plan and execute missions geared to their strengths, which Russia has done with NLW. Russia has come a long way since the fall of the Soviet Union and over the last couple of decades they have realized their limitations. This has allowed Russia to focus on rebuilding their military power with their strengths in mind. The Russians realized that addressing the non-military aspects of war like information, cyber, economic, diplomatic, political, and social means was not only to their advantage, but essential to their international strategy and internal policies and strategy. Russia's use of NLW over the last few years has proven that it is their main effort against the West and the US because there is no limitation to what scale, timing, and/or type of action. Therefore, the advisory is always in constant state of reaction. Russia has moved away from the conventional force on force action (more on the strategic level) and has adopted a military approach that allows them to leverage their strengths in non-military assets.

One of Russia's strategic goals with NLW is undermining an adversary's legitimacy to its population and decrease the morale of its armed forces.<sup>19</sup> Conducting this type of warfare allows Russia to not only conduct more than one type of campaign against an adversary, but it can conduct the same type of campaign against multiple enemies simultaneously. Figure 1 describes what Russia believes is the role of non-military methods in inter-state conflict resolutions, broken down by phases or stages of the main conflict development. It is important to note the emphasis and variety of non-military measures done continuously throughout the campaign, not just in the early stages. There is slight variation regarding which non-military measure Russia would implement pending the phase, but it is clear NLW is Russia's preferred strategy. Even in the event of a more conventional state on state conflict,

Russia only accounts for military action during two stages, the rest of the NLW main conflict campaign spans seven phases.

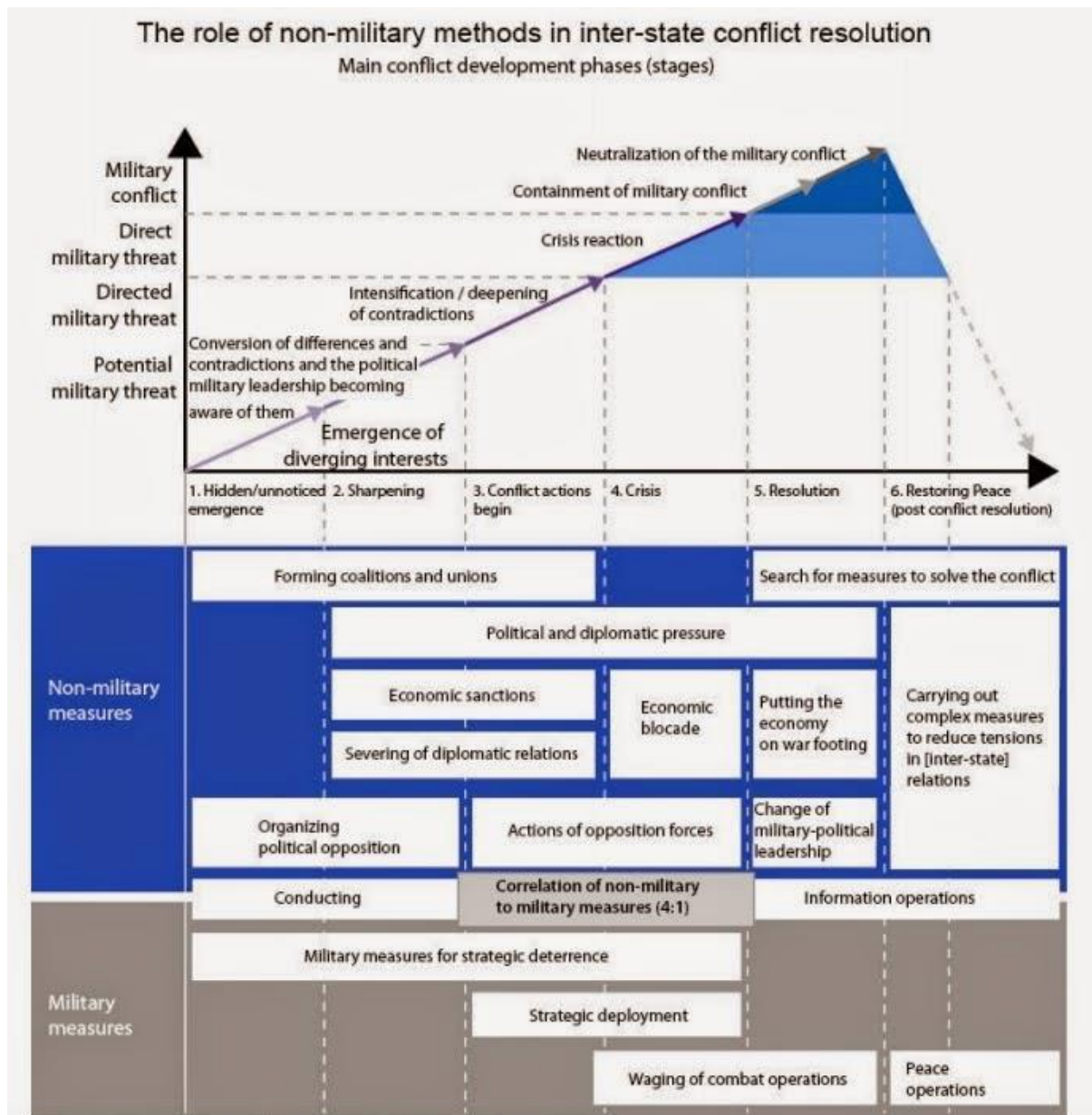


Figure 1. Graphic from Gerasimov article in *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kurier*, 26 February 2013, translated by Charles Bartles;

## 2.3 Russian Information Operations – Strongest of the Non-Military Measures

Information environment operations is a crucial part of the Russia's NLW tactics. The use of propaganda dates back to the start of war itself just through different mediums. But the goal is the same--to create distraction, confusion, or in some cases support. Russia has taken a simple concept like propaganda and has evolved it through the use of modern day technology. Information operations have become the critical tool for strategic geopolitical campaigns. According to former Committee for State Security (KGB) officer Igor Panarin, who worked with the Federal Agency of Government Communications and Information, the emphasis on information operations is based off Panarin's perception that Russia is, and has been continually under attack in the information domain by the US and the West.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, Russian leaders see their actions as retaliation for the information operations the West and the U.S. have conducted against Russia. There has been no official confirmation that the Russian government worked with Panarin to help create an office that would oversee "an international network of NGOs, information agencies and training institutions" for conducting Russia information operations.<sup>21</sup> However, there is evidence that Panarin lists eight different components of information operations that are being used today in Russian run NGO's, information agencies, and training institutions. Each of these components are embedded in known fronts for Russian state supported information operations.

Panarin's lists of eight components of information operations:

- The first two are ways; control or influence. The Russian government is finding ways to control or influence society with correct information that is delivered to frame the conversation- to achieve "international control of the public aimed at gaining certain benefits."<sup>22</sup>

- The next three are ways are the opposite of the first two. Instead of using factual information to achieve the control, they are using false information- the use of “disinformation,” “fabrication of information,” and/or “information manipulation” all with the same end goal of putting out false information to leverage the outcome you (the Russian Government) desire.<sup>23</sup> These actions of disseminating information that is totally or partially fake goes back to the Soviet concept of “active measures.”<sup>24</sup>

- Finally, the last three, are more targeted aspects of information that may have influence on a society but usually are used to target individuals or small groups to have them come out and support your desired message- “lobbying,” blackmail,” and/or “extortion of desired information.”<sup>25</sup> An example of how Russia is using one of these methods is through its monopolistic gas delivery systems and resources. Europe receives approximately one-third of its gas from the Russian energy company Gazprom, which periodically between 2006 to 2009, withheld deliveries to Ukraine during the cold months to maximize Russia’s political leverage.<sup>26</sup>

If you were to look at Panarin’s list, the most dominate method used by Russia today is dis-information, also known as “active measures.” By the 1960’s, active measures were well resourced and nearly operating at 10,000 individual Soviet bloc dis-information operations.<sup>27</sup> A reason these actions were not as successful then as they are today is the ability for information to be spread at a much faster pace on a much larger scale. Today, the internet and the social media platforms enable dis-information to spread rapidly. The use of the social media platforms is Russia’s preferred method against the West and the US because active measures are most successful when they are used on the adversary’s existing weakness or cracks- the more polarized a society, the more vulnerable.<sup>28</sup>

When looking at all the different actions in which information operations are conducted, all uses of information operations have a foundation, a revitalization, and a primary employment. The foundation for Russia's current operations is the Soviet development of reflexive control, the tactic of trying to influence the decision making. After the fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of modern day Russia, there was a need to relook at how they would be able to compete with the US and the West, which led to a focus on non-linear warfare, and the non-military measures. Of those non-military measures, information operations have become the primary method for Russia to achieve its strategic objectives and have global success against the U.S. and the West.

### **3.0 How did we get here?**

After looking at the theories and methods that the Soviet Union and now Russia have used in the past, how did the US and the West really not believe that Russia would not conduct information operations against them again? There were key information environment operation "tells" indicating Russia was involved in information operations against former Soviet nations in Eastern Europe, and the US and West should have been paying more attention. General Yuri Baluyevsky, the former Russian military commander-in-chief, said that success in information warfare can be much more important than victory in a classical military conflict, because it is bloodless, yet the impact is overwhelming and can paralyze all of the enemy state's power structures.<sup>29</sup>

Once the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, it was almost like the US and West just assumed the Soviet Union would no longer be a problem. The US and the West believed it was only a matter of time when Soviet Union (then turning into Russia), would become a democracy, a true capitalist society, and eventually an ally to the US and the West.

Kathryn Stoner and Michael McFaul wrote in their paper that there were two camps of thought on who lost Russia. The first camp “too much” – that the International Monetary Fund, Treasury, shock therapists and democracy promoters were pushing too hard and too fast for reform within Russia.<sup>30</sup> Supporters in this camp thought Russia should be moving toward democratic reform; however, Russia was not ready for it at the speed the US and the world expected. The second camp “too little” – the US and the West were not critical enough of Russia’s corrupt, undemocratic, and belligerent government.<sup>31</sup>

This camp believed that while Russia was occupied with its internal power struggle, the US and the West should not have taken their eye off them and should have provided support for democratic reform even without Russia needing to ask. It would become clear again in the early 2000’s that Russia was starting to reestablish their power within the region. Even though the US and West was not paying as much attention to them, they were paying attention to our actions.

### **3.1 The Rest Button But... then Ukraine Happened**

The Russians were able to learn a lot about the US and the West during the early 2000’s, so when President Barrack Obama came into office, he announced a reset of US-Russia ties to reverse the “dangerous drift.” The reset aimed to restore and deepen the bilateral dialogue and engage Russia on pragmatic initiatives of mutual interest as well as reducing tensions stemming from Russia’s invasion of Georgia.<sup>32</sup> There were some major victories that looked promising for the relationship to continue to rebuild. However, when Vladimir Putin returned to the Russian Presidency in 2012, progress that had been made began to disappear. Putin blamed the US, specifically Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, for stoking unrest internally in Russia and Putin showed open distrust for the US and the West.

Even though the tensions were negative to the US-Russia relations, tension hadn't risen to the level of crisis that was felt during the Cold War.

The first real test of whether or not the US and the West would respond to increasing Russian aggression occurred when Russia took action in Ukraine in 2014 to seize Crimea, where the tool of choice was information. Russia's use of information operations in Ukraine was essential to the successful seizure of Crimea and operational expansion into the Donbas region.<sup>33</sup> Russia leveraged information for influence through multiple mediums; humanitarian efforts and the use of pro-Russia media specifically in Ukraine, and pro-Russia media on global level. Russia's overarching theme was promoting Russia (through common language, culture, politics, heritage, etc.) within the Ukraine, but they were also conducting information operations while denying any Russian government involvement. Russia ensured that both sides of the story were pushed out in the information environment, which created ambiguity about what was the real Russian agenda and goals. This was Russia's strategic objective and it created an illusion in the Donbas region that Russia was liberating those in Crimea and would be welcomed with open arms. This strategy allowed Russia to continue to tell the world leaders in the US and NATO that they were not trying to seize new territory, that Russia was welcomed and there to help. Russia's actions in Crimea shocked the US and the West, and US and the western nations realized they permitted Russia to conduct these operations with little to no interference.

### **3.2 Troll Attacks!**

The events in Crimea opened the eyes of the US and the West to the fact that Russia was not simply going to fall in line with traditional conflict tactics. They were going to strive to achieve their strategic goals through non-military actions/measures. While these tactics may have seemed new and unique to most in the US, the reality is that these types of

information operations actions had been happening in Eastern Europe for decades. The former prime minister of Sweden stated at a recent cybersecurity conference, “The Kremlin has been interfering in European politics for decades, through Russian propaganda, false information, attempts to smear people – that’s nothing new, what is new is the digital sophistication and the coordination.”<sup>34</sup>

This digital sophistication is where Putin and Russia have been investing. When Putin came to power in the 2000, he focused on controlling Russian television and newspapers. However, as his grip on the mainstream media became tighter, he realized he had been neglecting social media. He realized this when internal anti-government protests over civil rights began to organize through social media. Putin learned that in order to have complete control of the information that was being distributed within the nation, he needed to find ways to control the messages being shared through Russian state-owned media and social media. The question was, how can an individual or nation control messages on social media?

Yevgeny Prigozhin, who has been dubbed by the press in 2002 to be the “chef” to President Putin, seemed to find a solution—troll factories. Prigozhin’s company is believed to be a main backer of the St. Petersburg-based “Internet Research Agency” (IRA), a secretive technology firm.<sup>35</sup> Within the IRA, there are Russian and English language operations, allowing IRA to push out information to multiple audiences. Russia has been using this troll factory and others to conduct non-military information operations against the US and the West. It was discovered during the latest Western countries elections and the US presidential elections; the IRA conducted information warfare against the US by creating fictitious social-media personas, spreading falsehoods and promoting messages supportive of Donald Trump and critical of Hillary Clinton.<sup>36</sup>

As stated earlier in the paper, Russia's ability to inflict chaos toward the public is a goal, and these troll factories by the use of social media is meeting the mission. Russia's success against the US and the West was shown before the elections and now today. As for the last year, the discussion has been about who knew in the US or the West, not on what was occurring and how do we fix it. The chaos inflicted in 2016 on the public still can be seen.

#### **4.0 Surprised? Why should we be?**

Russia's actions against the US and West in 2016 were calculated, planned, and complex in order to influence not just one system but the web of systems that comprise the US and the West. Key principles of Soviet Union military art that are continued today is to achieve surprise whenever possible, military operations must be characterized by decisiveness and aggressiveness, and forces must strive continuously to seize and to hold the initiative.<sup>37</sup> This shows that Russia places great importance on conducting operations that will catch their enemy flatfooted. However, this shouldn't be a surprise because, as previously discussed earlier in the paper, Russia has been conducting these types of non-linear actions for decades.

During warfare, there is a goal of surprise toward your enemy on the battle field at the tactical level, but there is also a bigger element of surprise at the strategic level. The nature of strategic surprise in warfare is such that it confounds and negates an enemy's strategy, the purpose, not just a tactical objective.<sup>38</sup> Information operations can conduct surprise strategic level attacks, aimed at an adversary's strategic objectives. As this paper has addressed, it was Russia's goal to insert chaos into the US and Western's complex system.

The US and the West should focus on the operational art of surprise. Every nation that engages in military operations, whether they are kinetic or non-kinetic, strives to achieve the element of surprise. So, it should not be a surprise (pun intended), that the US and West were

surprised in 2016. What makes the Russian information actions in 2016 such a big deal is the fact that the US and the West are rarely truly surprised, and the chaos that was implemented with the initial surprise still exists in the system today. There have been a few instances in American history of genuine surprise, such as Pearl Harbor and 9/11, but for the most part, America is normally prepared for enemy actions.

Today, through information operations, it is becoming easier to conduct “surprise attacks” against the US and the West. This is because states like Russia are no longer looking to conduct a surprise attack via kinetic means, but through non-military actions thousands of miles away from their enemies. In addition, Russia is using a variety of commercial social media platforms to conduct these surprise attacks. Therefore, it is important to recognize when someone or some type of non-military actor injects chaos into the system and the platform our enemies are using to accomplish that mission.

It is easy to say the US and the West messed up, particularly the intelligence community (US and International) by not being able to predict that the Russians were going to conduct non-military actions against the US and the West. To say that the lack of knowledge was an intelligence failure may have some truth, but even the most powerful nations are not immune to failure.

Failure is part of the intelligence game because it is a complex system, not a linear system. The intelligence community system is constantly in motion, which is good and bad. Good because it is constantly in motion, always looking at current and possible information. Bad because there is an unquantified amount of information no agency or community is able to go through completely. That is why it is so easy to implement chaos into a system so complex like the intelligence community system. For the US and West, it is imperative to learn from these “failures” and realize that everything is part of a complex system; from the collectors and analysis to the decision makers.

## **4.1 Stop the Internal Fight and Start Fighting the Real Enemy, Now and in the Future!**

What is important to look at now is not whether or not there was an intelligence failure or that the decision makers didn't act fast enough, but that no matter how well the system is running, there are going to be actors trying to introduce surprise to the system. In this case, we were caught by surprise and it is important to look internally at our (US and West) systems, identify our strengths and identify how to minimize disruption to the system.

For the first time since the end of the Cold War, the US and the West have a near-peer competitor that has a long history of conducting non-military actions toward them, especially information operations. Intelligence communities, business, and governments are all examples of organizations looking at the patterns within complex systems. However, there are never enough people, time, or resources to look at all information, so the US and the West must realize there will be some acceptable level of risk. Risk is a hard thing for intelligence communities and governments to accept because it means that they are allowing for vulnerabilities that can influence the system and leaves them open to public criticism. When the public and the press realized Russia had conducted information operations to influence US elections, there was an immediate debate on who knew what, when and which organization or leader to blame. Once the US and the West come to grips with the idea of taking risk more often, then they need to start taking strong action toward Russia and anyone else conducting information operations.

The first action that the US must do is stop the debate over what is real or what is fake, which is exactly what Russia wants. They are influencing the system in order to cause chaos and distract people and nations from focusing on how to combat these non-linear warfare tactics. Otherwise, the US and the West are going to continue to debate and point

fingers as at each other, which allows the Russians to continue to gain momentum and influence.

The US, more than other Western nation since the end of 2016, has done little more than argue internally who to blame for Russian information operations against the 2016 election. Even though Russia information operations has caused chaos amongst top leaders within all three branches of the US government, it has not shutdown the government. However, Russians actions have possibly affected how the U.S. and the West took to the future.

This brings up the second action the US and the West should do in order to try and prevent being caught surprised again. We need to conduct more future analysis to understand not only our system but our adversary's systems. Future analysis will allow the intelligence community to look continually at not just tier one threats, but also the second, third, fourth, etc. tiers to the nation. The intelligence community has a tendency to pay attention to the tier one threat and take risk on the lower tier levels because of limitations, which they are not necessarily wrong to do. However, by tracking progression or even recession in power of the lower tiers, the US and the Western intelligence community would be in a better position to be proactive rather than having to react and relearn a system (tier threat).

## **5.0 Conclusion**

It starts with understanding what end state Russia is trying to achieve. Then the US and the West need to hit the restart button on the way they currently think about war. Conflict with Russia is likely to be less about troops and missiles and more about information and a clash of ideas. Mao stated, *"The view that strategic victory is determined by tactical successes alone is wrong because it overlooks the fact that victory or defeat in a war is first*

*and foremost a question of whether the situation as a whole and its various stages are properly taken into account.”<sup>39</sup>*

The US and the West are not<sup>40</sup> going to win an information war with Russia if they continue to look at every information operation as a tactical attack; they need to understand the Russian system and the theories behind their actions. If someone succeeds at influencing a system by injecting chaos, then the system has now evolved. Therefore, it is vital for the US and the West to realize that Russia’s system has been doing just that, evolving. The US and the West should realize that Russia’s fight for influence and power on the global scale has never truly ended, they have just adjusted their complex system. Russia has studied the US and the West from the moment that the Cold War ended and have observed the evolution of the US and the West’s complex systems. It is now time for us to crack the books and study Russia’s complex system.

## END NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs*. Council on Foreign Relations, (1999): 23.

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For the first time in more than forty years, we are no longer faced with the constant threat of World War III.

Democracy has been embraced by a majority of countries around the world and our former adversaries are now our partners. We face the future enjoying not only great credibility in the eyes of the world, but also with more, and in many cases stronger, friends and allies than ever before to help shoulder the responsibilities and burdens. Multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, NATO, the Organization of American States, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum and others are energized and ready to confront new challenges. In combat and humanitarian operations, we have proven our ability to build coalitions to achieve common objectives.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/22/AR2006122201175.html>

<sup>8</sup> Adam Twardowski and Julianne Smith, "The Future of U.S. – Russia Relations," *Papers for the Next President*, Center for a New American Security (January 2017): 12.

<sup>9</sup> Timothy L. Thomas, "Russia Reflexive Control Theory and the Military." *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*: 237. <http://doi.org/10.1080/1351804090450529>

<sup>10</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, ed. Roger Ames, chapters 1 – 7: 121.

<sup>11</sup> M. Ionov, "Control of the Enemy," *Naval Collection No. 7*, (July 1995): **\*\*NEED PAGE #**

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<sup>16</sup> Tad A. Schnauffer II, "Redefining Hybrid Warfare: Russia's Non-linear War against the West," *Journal of Strategic Security*, 10 no. 1 (2016): 17.

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-Currently there is no accepted definition of non-linear warfare. Mr. Schnauffer is trying to advocate through his article, that not only should there be a designated definition but that is what Russia is currently conducting.

<sup>18</sup> Tad A. Schnauffer II, “Redefining Hybrid Warfare: Russia’s Non-linear War against the West,” *Journal of Strategic Security*, 10 no. 1 (2016): 19.

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<sup>20</sup> Bret Perry, “Non-linear Warfare in Ukraine: The Critical Role of Information Operations and Special Operations,” *Small Wars Journal*, (Aug 14, 2015): 6.

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<sup>24</sup> Dennis Kux. “*Soviet Active Measures and Disinformation: Review and Assessment.*”

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<sup>27</sup> Max Bergmann and Carolyn Kenney, “War by Other Means, Russia Active Measures and the Weaponization of Information,” *Center for American Progress*. (June 2017): 7.

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<sup>31</sup> Kathryn Stoner and Michael McFaul. “Who lost Russia (this time) Vladimir Putin.” *The Washington Quarterly*. (30 July 2015) 168.

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