Panel 08: Rethinking Great Power Politics After Russia-Ukraine War, Online Session, July 16, 2022, 15:00-16:30 GMT/UTC

The Russia-Ukraine Conflict Beyond the Mainstream Narrative

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Introducion

- The Russia-Ukraine conflict erupted in February 2022 after the Kremlin recognized the independence of the breakaway popular republics of Donetsk and Luhansk.

- In the aftermath of the recognition of sovereignty Russia invaded Ukraine under the justification of the demilitarization and denazification of the neighboring country, as well as to bring to trial those who perpetrated numerous bloody crimes against civilians in the Donbass, including against Russian citizens.

- Soon after, the international community and the mainstream media began a worldwide campaign against the Russian military action, sympathizing with the government of Kiev.

Russian vs Ukranian (dis)information

- Although Russia is well-known for its information capabilities—whether propaganda, disinformation, or counter-information—the Kremlin appears to have overestimated its ability to wage effective cognitive warfare[1] or underestimated the impact of Western brainwashing on public opinion.

- The Ukrainian leadership has effectively managed to counter the grounds on which the Russian government has supported its "special military operation". Ukrainian President Zelensky gained the trust, sympathy, and solidarity of Western leaders, the media, and public opinion, presenting his country as the victim of an unjustified aggression.

- Russian President Putin, excluded from the public debate due to the European Union ban on Russian media, was perceived by the same audience as a gangster.

[1] For a definition and discussion, see https://www.innovationhub-act.org/content/cognitive-warfare

WHO IS VOLODMYR ZELENSKY?

Where the truth lies

Is this the truth, or is there something more beyond the mainstream narrative? This presentation aims to offer a different perspective from the mainstream narrative supported and spread by pro-Western media outlets.

Introducing the concept of cognitive warfare

Cognitive warfare is an unconventional form of warfare that uses cyber tools to alter enemy cognitive processes, exploit mental biases or reflexive thinking, and provoke thought distortions, influence decision-making and hinder actions, with negative effects, both at the individual and collective levels. This complements the more traditional techniques of manipulation through information technology and information warfare, making the human increasingly targeted in the cognitive warfare.

Source: https://www.innovationhub-act.org/content/cognitive-warfare

EEAS STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION DIVISION (SG.STRAT.2)

THE POLICY, STRATEGY & GLOBAL PRIORITY ISSUES TEAM

THE INFORMATION ANALYSIS, OPEN SOURCE & DATA STRATEGY TEAM

THE EAST STRATCOM TASK FORCE

THE WESTERN BALKANS TASK FORCE

THE TASK FORCE SOUTH

The EU Information and Communication Strategy

- In March 2015, the European Council tasked the High Representative in cooperation with EU institutions and Member States to submit an action plan on strategic communication (see: European Council conclusions, 19 and 20 March 2015).

- The Task Force is part of the Strategic Communications and Information Analysis Division (AFFGEN.7) of the European External Action Service (EEAS). **It was set up to address Russia's ongoing disinformation campaigns.**

- The Task Force develops communication products and campaigns designed to better explain EU values, interests and policies in the Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine).

- The Task Force reports on and **analyses disinformation trends, explains and exposes disinformation narratives, and raises awareness of the negative impact of disinformation that originates in pro-Kremlin sources and is disseminated in the Eastern neighbourhood's information space and beyond**.

EU vs Russian (dis)information

- **EUvsDisinfo** is the flagship project of the European External Action Service's East StratCom Task Force, established in 2015 **to better forecast, address, and respond to the Russian Federation's ongoing disinformation campaigns affecting the European Union, its Member States, and countries in the shared neighbourhood**.

- EUvsDisinfo's core objective is to **increase public awareness and understanding of the Kremlin's disinformation operations, and to help citizens in Europe and beyond develop resistance to digital information and media manipulation**.

- Using data analysis and media monitoring services in 15 languages, EUvsDisinfo **identifies, compiles, and exposes disinformation cases originating in pro-Kremlin media that are spread across the EU and Eastern Partnership countries**. These cases (and their disproofs) are collected in the EUvsDisinfo database.

Source: https://euvsdisinfo.eu

Biased information: disinformation?

• The Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab) has operationalized the study of **disinformation by exposing falsehoods and fake news, documenting human rights abuses**, and building digital resilience worldwide.

• It tracks **global disinformation campaigns, fake news stories, covert military developments, and subversive attempts against democracy while teaching the public skills to identify and expose attempts to pollute the information space**.

• The mission of the DFRLab is to identify, expose, and explain disinformation where and when it occurs using opensource research; **to promote objective truth as a foundation of government for and by people; to protect democratic institutions and norms from those who would seek to undermine them in the digital engagement space**.

Source: https://www.digitalsherlocks.org

Zelensky: true glory?

- The EU and the U.S. neglect or pretend to ignore facts of which they are widely aware.

- In October 2021, the Pandora papers, leaked to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), revealed Zelensky's offshore connections and business ties with Russia and Belarus.

- Verkhovna Rada deputy Volodymyr Ariev (Bloc of Petro Poroshenko - BPP) said that some $41 million in PrivatBank were transferred to the accounts of an offshore company belonging to Zelensky. Ariev said funds were transferred when Ukrainian-Israeli-Cypriot billionaire, businessman, and politician, Ihor Kolomoisky owned the bank.

- In 2021 the U.S. banned Kolomoisky and his family from entering the country due to "significant corruption". Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken claimed that the oligarch "poses a serious threat to the future of Ukraine".

- Zelensky did nothing to reduce the influence of neo-Nazi groups in Ukraine and intensified relations with his patron Kolomoisky.

Hidden evidence of factual truths

- The EU and the U.S. ignore facts they were aware of about white suprematism, racism, neo-Nazism, and anti-Semitism that permeate Ukrainian politics and society.

- These facts have been ignored for years by Western governments to pursue political-military goals.
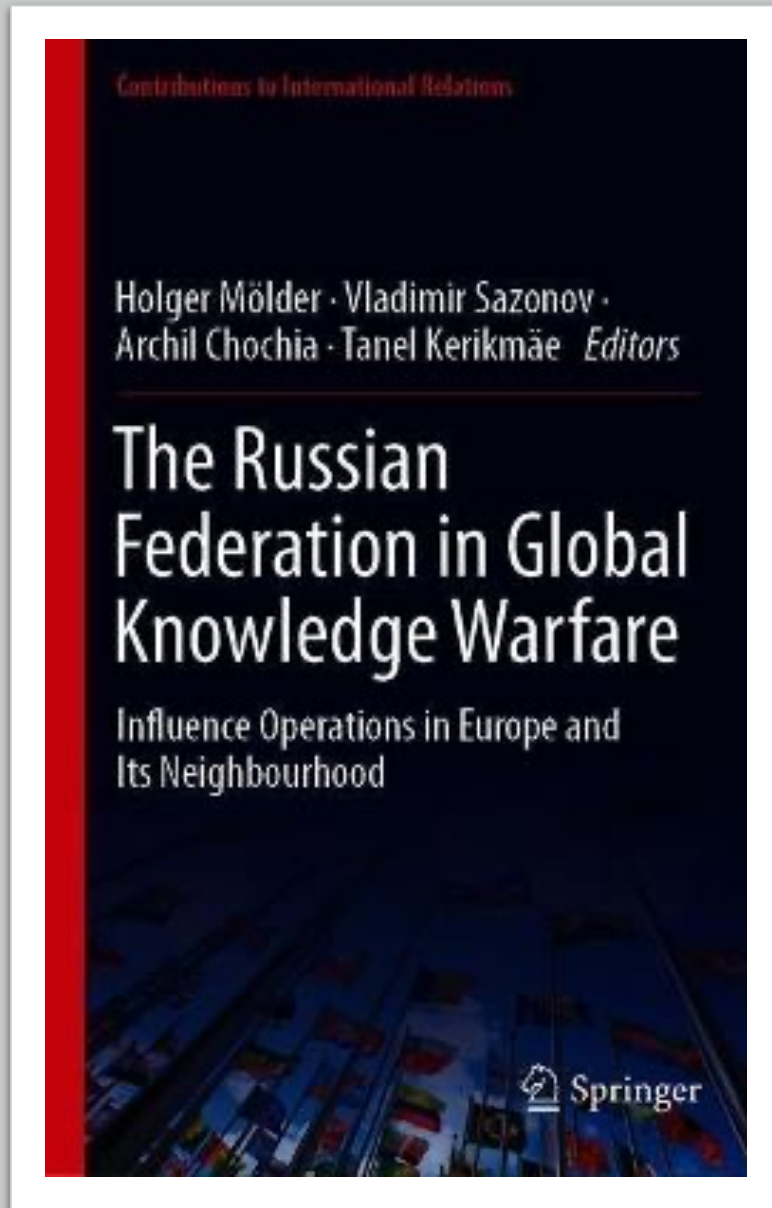
NATO & EU Eastward enlargement

- The Helsinki Final Act of 1975, a legally non-binding instrument that concluded the first Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) — re-established in 1995 as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OCSE) — implicitly recognized the 'sphere of influence' of the USSR that was determined in Eastern Europe after the end of World War II.

- The Eastern enlargement of the NATO & the EU infringes the principle of non-interference established by the Helsinki Accords.

- The Western narrative neglects the relevance of this political agreement, still in force with the Russian Federation as the successor state of the Soviet Union.

Findings and conclusions

- The freedom of information - "the right to know" - should be granted according to the main instruments on fundamental human rights.

- Media pluralism and access to information should be considered "the right to choose".

- The mainstream media, prompted by the Ukranian propaganda and the Western public information service, spread biased information, often without fact-checking (misinformation can become fake news).

- The mainstream media ignore the evidence of factual truths that this way are hidden from the audience.

- Sanctions adopted against Russian media outlets, entities and individuals further restrict the right of information.

- The general public is manipulated and influenced by Western and Ukrainian cognitive warfare.

Further reading by the author suggested on this topic

- 2022 – Inside and Beyond the Russo-Ukrainian War: The Pitfalls of the European Union, *Newsletter of the Academy of Yuste*, *16* (May), 1-31. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6595805.

- 2021 – The Russian Influence Strategy in its Contested Neighbourhood. In Holger Mölder, Vladimir Sazonov, Archil Chochia and Tanel Kerikmäe (eds.) *The Russian Federation in Global Information Warfare. Influence Operations in Europe and Its Neighborhood*, p. 149-172. Cham: Springer (series Contributions to International Relations - CIR). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-73955-3_8.

- 2021 – The Fall of the Berlin Wall, the Collapse of the USSR and the End of Cold War. A Chain of Surprises 'Too Big' to Be Predicted, Political Reflection, *7*(1) (Issue 26), 57-64. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4316574.

- 2019 – The War on Cyberterrorism, *Democracy and Security*, *15*(2), 172-199, first published online July 17, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1080/17419166.2018.1496826.

- 2016 – The Birth of a (Fake?) Nation at the Aftermath of the Decomposition of USSR. The Unsolved Issue of Post-Soviet 'Frozen Conflicts', *Proelium*, *7*(10), 161-178. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.44945.

- 2015 – Propaganda and International Relations: An Outlook in Wartime, *Vozes dos Vales*, *9*(7), 1-38. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.32424 (reprinted in *ArtCiencia.com*, *19*, 1-26. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.34593).

Thanks for your attention!

Now it's your question time

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