



KEY TAKEAWAYS REGARDING THE INTENTIONS OF RUSSIA'S MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

Date: November 20, 2024

Disclaimer: This briefing note contains the encapsulation of views presented by the speaker and does not exclusively represent the views of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.

KEY EVENTS

On November 20, 2024, Julia Davis presented *Key Takeaways Regarding the Intentions of Russia's Media Campaigns* for this year's West Coast Security Conference. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period with questions from the audience and CISIS Vancouver executives. The key points discussed were Russia's potent hybrid warfare capabilities, how Russian media acts as an extension of its intelligence apparatus and should therefore be viewed as such, and why the West should view Russian rhetoric with greater caution given that media groups often explicitly outline the State's broader ambitions.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Russia is using hybrid warfare tactics to put stress on the cracks in the human infrastructure of Western society, as Russian officials know they would be unlikely to win a kinetic war with NATO and its allies. "Sanewashing" the radical aspects of Russian media and government agencies often diminishes the real threat of these groups actively working to harm Western countries and sow division wherever possible. To help counter these plans, Western society and its governments need to take Russia seriously, as the nature of our democratic political processes and free press leave it vulnerable to information warfare created to exploit the public sphere. This is a critical issue as a destabilized public sphere has led and may continue to lead to inflamed social and political tensions, leading to reduced security.

BACKGROUND

Presentation

Russia's current operating procedures involve information warfare, and Russian media groups view themselves as a propaganda wing of their Ministry of Defence, with rhetoric that offers a direct indication of the state's intentions (E.g. Russian Media discussing the invasion of Ukraine prior to the Crimea annexation or cutting undersea internet cables as an attack against the West), said Ms. Davis. As there are few internal politics due to the lack of the ability to criticize Putin and his policies, the Russian media almost entirely focuses on the West. State media commit most of their time to coming up with news stories and plans to undermine Western society with a "firehose" of false information.

Russian state media feels confident that Russia will not only be able to fully take over Ukraine due to Western hesitation but will also once again be able to normalize economic relations. Davis states that Russian state media views negotiations as a show of weakness and that the West will "blink first" when it comes to Russian aggression. Therefore, these views are passed on to the general public, who will likely be gradually convinced to support these actions.

Russian media has drawn parallels with the Chechen wars, where invaded populations (in this case, Ukrainians) will eventually be inducted into the Russian army to carry out operations in other nations, similar to how Chechens loyal to Kadyrov are operating in Ukraine. Therefore, Russian media is likely manufacturing consent for a series of escalating conflicts and annexations harkening back to the Soviet Union. These actions coincide with their work to undermine Western alliances and instill doubt that the US will not assist smaller nations if they come under attack from Russia. The recent US election and rhetoric and Ukraine believe their actions are working. These actions are all part of a multi-decade plan to grow and gain power. Russian state media and officials hope to regain what they've lost from the end of the Cold War. Therefore, media companies and academics should make an effort to document Russia's goals, societal inequality and colonial desires to undermine Western Nations and invade periphery nations. Russia is in a weak position with exacerbated ethnic tensions, social tensions and a dwindling economy; however, the West entertaining negotiations and reduced aid sets a dangerous precedent for an empowered Russian state. Russia's aspirations should be taken seriously and thoroughly recorded.

Question and Answer

Do you see the Russian demographic collapse and loss of influence and allies as the main reason for their consistent threat of Ukraine? Do you see this war as a desperate attempt of Russia to remain relevant, or something deeper than that?

They [Russia] have always wanted Ukraine back, one of their former colonies. There is an Imperial mindset at play. Something Putin has recorded to want. And he thought it was at reach after Crimea. There is a drive for a renewed Russian Empire that includes as many states as possible. Russia runs a concerted effort to delegitimize the identity, history, and culture of Ukrainians to manufacture consent in its annexation.

Many scholars and experts at think tanks predicted the authenticity of Putin's desire to invade Ukraine, all of which was ignored by the executive branch in the U.S. and by other leaders of allied nations, all of whom seemed genuinely surprised and not prepared. Then the consensus was, Ukraine will fall to Russia in a week. Here we are, 1001 days later. What is it that the West does not understand about what is going on in Russia and Ukraine that you think is fundamental to change for more effective engagement by western governments going forward? Or is it a cultural issue in the West, a character flaw of belief in their expert community?

The West dismisses Russia as a regional player, even though they have larger aspirations. The West has become easily overcome in specific ways like our unpreparedness in recognizing that Russia had full intentions to invade Ukraine. Furthermore, Russia is making great efforts to squeeze the West such as attempting to weaken the US dollar. Russia will likely make another attempt on Ukraine even if negotiations bring the war to an end. Therefore, it is crucial to seriously consider educating the public on Russia's aspirations and tactics and look toward the experts who have repeatedly predicted Russia's aggressive external actions.

Social media has been a predominant theme today. Each of you have a different mandate - Do you see how all three of you [Day 3's panel] would collaborate in shaping/informing hybrid warfare tactics and strategies?

Using Russia's own words back at them is the best measure to make an impact. It is difficult to twist a narrative when explicitly outlining their goals and viewpoints. This can be used in a plethora of ways, namely intelligence. The West should try to cover specific key topics to show how they are seen and carry themselves. Russian media's words are the most powerful tool for showcasing how the state operates.

It is hard to shame the shameless. We must rely on trial and error in contending with Russian disinformation. Russia views all media as propaganda, and it is merely a matter of what side you support. The best approach to counter Russian media is to capture them on video using their own words.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- Russian media often signals the intentions of the Russian state before they happen.
- The West is ignorant of the fact that Russia is focused on causing divisions in our society.
- Russian media groups see themselves as an extension of the State's intelligence and defence ministries.
- Russian media should be monitored and analyzed by the West's own media groups to better inoculate themselves from the "weapon" of Russian propaganda.

FURTHER READING

Adlakha-Hutcheon, G., & Kelshall, C.M. (Eds.). (2024). *(In)Security: Identifying the Invisible Disruptors of Security*. Springer Nature.
<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-67608-6>

Davis, J. (2017, September 12). Top Russian politician admits Kremlin 'stole' US presidency live on TV. International Business Times UK.
<https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/top-russian-politician-admits-kremlin-stole-us-presidency-live-tv-1639015>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

© (JULIA DAVIS, 2025)

Published by the Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare and Simon Fraser University

Available from: <https://jicw.org/>