

Eka Beraia¹
Georgia

**THE CLIMAX OF RUSSIAN INFORMATION WARFARE
IN POST-SOVIET COUNTRIES MEANWHILE
AND AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: GEORGIAN CASE**

***Abstract:** In our age of technological evolution, we are eyewitnesses of the fact that the world is interconnected more digitally rather than physically. This connection enables a variety of goals, set by different actors, to forge ahead, and go through the target society effectively and successfully to gain the preferable ending. In such conditions, psychological warfare finds the perfect ground and a corresponding theatre to conduct intensive non-military operations for achieving political, military, and economic goals. Even though the environmental conditions are permanently changing for psychological warfare, the main principles remain unchangeable. Governments and even non-governmental actors mainly use so-called psywar tactics to influence the target society and undermine credibility without suppression, coercion, or even using military force. Psychological warfare is considered to be the first phase or the first step in preparing suitable environments, and conditions for particular groups of people, and the territories where ‘the invisible invasion’ should be performed. In the majority of cases, government actors choose psywar as the main tool to demoralise the opponent. Social media, disinformation, and propaganda are used to strengthen the subvert of opponents, manipulate the target society’s beliefs and attitudes, forge scientific research data and historical facts to veil the real reason for wars and engage the goodwill and trust of people. Russia demonstrated several phases of psychological war before the invasion of the Georgian Brief War in 2008, by following the so-called ‘defeat – in detail’ tactics, which means defeating the enemy by division into small parts instead of using its entire strength. Such overwhelming attacks could weaken Georgian society, and cause vulnerability,*

¹ Eka Beraia, PhD, Caucasus International University (CIU, Georgia). Email: eka.beraia@ciu.edu.ge

intense fear, and anxiety, and this way Russia could achieve superiority on the battlefield.

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What is a Psychological War?

The definition can be formulated this way: it might be several actions including everything from TV and Radio propaganda up to torture and violence that needs peculiar, comprehensive information on the target society. It is based on moral and physical aspects that are different from traditional military techniques. Its purpose is to destroy the will and spirit of the opponent and cause frustration and disappointment, this way guarantees a victorious ending. Psywar includes nearly every tool and every instrument that can impact an enemy's behaviour. Among these instruments propaganda is one of the most effective methods to manipulate the target society correspondingly².

In the 21st Century, hybrid warfare is the most common name of the war that we hear nowadays. Modern wars are full of hybrid elements. Even terrorist organisations are very good at it. They are getting modernised, they train and try to involve as many people as they can, using asymmetric methods of war and systematic campaigns by different means to target vulnerable sectors in society for their objectives. They are trying to manipulate people with social media or other cyber tools. As such, hybrid threats could be conducted by both state and non-state actors³. Detecting and revealing crime is a particularly attractive approach as it makes it more difficult for the targeted states to detect the harmful activity and respond before it occurs. Criminal organisations' business or job could include different types of actions such as smuggling networks, the ability to provide forged documents, financial crime schemes, or simply the ability to threaten, intimidate, pressure, or harm strategically important individuals or groups in a specific situation for political purposes. Next and most harmful is Psychological warfare, which is the most common tool for terrorist organisations. They are trying to spread information about explosions, terrorism, nuclear threats, etc. The true impact of a Psychological

² R. Coombs, *Psychological Warfare: Principles for Global Competition*, "Small Arms Journal", <<https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/psychological-warfare-principles-global-competition>> (20.12.2022).

³ D. L. Buffaloe, *Defining Asymmetric Warfare*, "The Land Warfare Papers", No. 58, September 2008, pp. 17-26.

war can cause considerable fear, panic, and social disruption, exactly the effects terrorists wish to achieve⁴.

Psychological effects from fear of being exposed may be one of the major consequences. Unless information about potential exposure is made available from a credible source, people unsure about their exposure might seek advice from medical centres, complicating the centres' ability to deal with acute injuries⁵.

Psychological war is not a new phenomenon. Although it has always been in use since the old times. The emergence of Scientific interests as well as the development of communicational technologies and techniques is more often applied and used in the modern world. If we look back in history we will see how Vikings used this method by spreading different false stories, gossip, rumours, and legends about their brave character, fierceness, barbarity, and wildness to terrorise and intimidate their adversary. This was the best possibility to create a suitable environment for defeating the opponent before the battle. The Romans also used the same tactics to defeat Carthaginians when they started manipulating them for peace that would be worth humiliation and disgrace. The term 'Carthaginian peace' still carries the psychological message for those who will rise against the strong power such as the Rome of that time and abolish, will get shameful and embarrassing freedom that might be equal to slavery and failure⁶.

Psywar originated from political warfare which means 'Crisis diplomacy', 'war of nerves', or even 'Dramatic intimidation diplomacy' which means that Psywar and Political War (PW) have been synchronised to outline the ways to use propaganda (sometimes with military operations) for a particular government to achieve the desired goal. It is defined as a well-planned strategy of how to use communications to impact people, and their attitudes, and change their behaviour. Sometimes psywar includes ideological aspects to manipulate the target society, their emotions, and thoughts, to support the fulfilment of national objectives. The main point is that hate and victory, even empathy, sometimes must be emphasised and exaggerated to inject ideology or propagandistic opinion into people's minds. Thus, information becomes valueless and public ideals vanish. We have to mention that within Psywar propaganda plays a crucial role as it combines education, entertainment, and persuasion. Entertainment has to attract the audience's attention, education veils propaganda and makes it invisible even through its persuasive attitude and

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ R. Coombs, *op. cit.*

⁶ M. Sarkar, *Psychological Warfare: War without Arms and Weapons*, <<https://www.unrevealedfiles.com/psychological-warfare-war-without-arms-and-weapons/>> (20.12.2022).

tones; Psywar is considered to be the tactical use of propaganda, threats, and many other strategies to deceive, mislead, intimidate, demoralise or influence an enemy's thinking⁷.

Over the years, even the specific terminology of psychological warfare was coined to appeal to a greater audience. There are some of them:

- a. MISO – Military Information Support Operation (activities now include everything from cyber warfare, deception, and social manipulation, to kinetic actions for psychological effect.);
- b. PSYOP – psychological operations (soldiers find themselves conducting a multitude of operations.);
- c. PSYHAR – Psychological Harassment (irritation, annoyance, etc.);
- d. ISSO – Interagency-Intergovernmental Support Operations that influences and shape foreign decisions and behaviours in support of regional policies, interests military threats. It is a special operation that strengthens planning capability, media knowledge, and capabilities on the regional level⁸.

Psychological warfare is the first step in conflict, the pre-war phase, the very first activity that starts the operation to produce effects on the real world. Some definite features characterise psywar:

- a. It is the first activity in conflict;
- b. It is continuous and active;
- c. psychological warfare produces effects in the 'real' world;
- d. psychological warfare occurs at every echelon; rank, or level of society;
- e. Psychological warfare is unrestricted;
- f. Psychological warfare plays a key role in competition and rivalry⁹.

Prussian general and military theorist Clausewitz focuses on morals that in the modern world can be understood as psychological, he suggests: “moral force has been the chief cause of the decision; after that was given, the loss continued to increase until it reached its culminating, the turning point at the close of the whole act”. In other words, to gain success over the enemy the moral power should be lost to divert their intentions and defeat. Niccolo Machiavelli, Italian diplomat, military philosopher, and historian claimed: “however strong your armed forces are, in entering a new province you will need the goodwill of the people of the place”¹⁰. Therefore:

⁷ R. Marinelli, *Psychological Warfare, We Are Under Attack!*, <<https://medium.com/@roccomarinelli/psychological-warfare-we-are-under-attack-39c3e37964d4>> (20.12.2022).

⁸ R. Coombs, *op. cit.*

⁹ M. S. Reshi, *Psychological Warfare: A Critical Study of Tactics and conceptualization in Indian perspective*, presented on a National Seminar on Emerging Contours of Laws and National, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336653855_Psychological_Warfare_A_Critical_Study_of_Tactics_and_conceptualization_in_Indian_perspective> (20.12.2022)

¹⁰ D. L. Buffaloe, *op. cit.*

1. Psychological warfare is the tool used to manipulate the behaviour of a target audience within an acceptable time frame. As the theories of bounded rationality and satisfaction suggest, it is always up to the target audience to decide how much pressure is enough to force a behavioural change;
2. Psychological warfare is the intentional, tactical use of propaganda, threats, and other non-combat techniques during wars, threats of conflict, or times of political unrest. It is designed to mislead, demoralise, intimidate, or otherwise manipulate the thinking or actions of an enemy. Why is it used?:
 - a. To assist in overcoming an enemy's will to fight,
 - b. To sustain the morale and win the alliance of friendly groups in countries occupied by the enemy,
 - c. To influence the morale and attitudes of people¹¹.

Propaganda

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the term propaganda is defined as: “ideas or statements that are often false or exaggerated and that are spread to help a cause, a political leader, a government, etc.; the spreading of ideas, information, or rumour to help or injure an institution, a cause, or a person; ideas, facts, or allegations spread deliberately to further one’s cause or to damage an opposing cause; also: a public action having such an effect”¹².

A narrower definition of propaganda is presented in the NATO glossary – AAP-06: “Information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote a political cause or point of view”¹³.

The term propaganda is translated from the Latin gerundive as ‘things that must be disseminated’. The problem with this term is the fact that in different cultures it has different connotations. In some cultures, this term can have a neutral or even positive connotation. Thus, for example, in some Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries, propaganda is usually associated with simple advertising. Another example is the Russian language, the Russian word *пропаганда* (propaganda) is usually used with the meaning of the English word promotion¹⁴. At the same time, in other cultures, mainly in Western ones, this term has a strongly negative connotation. The Czech historian Zbynek Zeman

¹¹ M. Sarkar, *op. cit.*

¹² B. Mueh Craven, *The Poster and Contemporary American Propaganda*, Fort Collins 2013, <<https://mountainscholar.org/items/d28f57a8-7845-4b24-99df-6a74db377268>> (20.12.2022)

¹³ NATO Standardization Agency, *AAP-06 NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions (English and French) 2013*, <https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/Other_Pubs/aap6.pdf> (20.12.2022).

¹⁴ J. Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, New York 1973.

as well as Former officer Daniel Lerner outlines the US military's WWII Skywar operation in his 1949 book *Psychological Warfare Against Nazi Germany* divided propaganda into three main categories white, grey, and black. The main criterion that helps to distinguish these types of propaganda is the degree of involvement of the sponsor¹⁵.

White propaganda – (or open propaganda) represents the accurate information that comes from a source and is identified correctly. The goal of white propaganda is to promote the ideas and points of view that are pursued by the sponsor using truthful facts. The previous century, particularly the beginning of the bipolar period, covers a crucial event among many others. One such case was the so-called 'Project Troy' which recruited and mobilised top scholars and psychologists with one purpose: to identify all possible means of transmitting true information through the Iron Curtain via radio channels. That was the main reason why and how *The Voice of America*, the broadcasting network, was launched by IIS (International Information Service). *The Voice of America* served to enhance and promote the US's main values: democracy and democratic principles by neglecting the Soviet mindset and highlighting the priority of American attitudes and lifestyles. The project was part of the Psywar between the U.S. and the Soviet Union where foreign policy strategists and University experts worked in one team, to attack the enemy and demoralise. The cornerstone of this project was one of the most crucial documents in the political history of the U.S. – the National Security Council Paper NSC-68 which defined clearly that the Cold War was a real risk for the survival of the free world as defeating Communism demanded combining political, economic and psychological techniques. Soon it was obvious that only the Voice of America was not able to make miracles and penetrate the Iron Curtain, thus white propaganda came into action. University exchange programs, professional books, journal publications, and many other ways were to be implemented to manipulate the antagonist society and accomplish Project Troy. Even a Psychological strategy board was created to study the Soviet society's opinion and to take sufficient measures through the program where Soviet dissidents were also recruited. Thus, the White propaganda as a tool of psywar was successfully performed¹⁶.

Grey propaganda – represents accurate data but the citation is omitted or stated incorrectly. This type of propaganda can be visualised somewhere between white and black. The goal of grey propaganda is to promote the ideas and opinions a sponsor desires to spread, but at the same time, it is done in a

¹⁵ Z. Zeman, *Selling the War: Art and Propaganda in World War II*, London 1978.

¹⁶ J. Chisem, *U.S. Propaganda and the Cultural Cold War*, "E-International Relations", <https://www.e-ir.info/2012/08/16/u-s-propaganda-and-the-cultural-cold-war/#_ftn6> (24.11.2022).

manner that will be better accepted by the audience than the official statements. Thus, grey propaganda uses truthful information in combination with unverified information or just lightly distorts truthful information. The main idea of this tactic is the fact that the ideas provided by the neutral side will be perceived by the audience willingly¹⁷.

Black propaganda – stands out from the above-mentioned types of propaganda as it is misleading and untrustworthy as it spreads lies, fabrications, and deceptions. This propaganda is to hide the sponsor's real identity and involvement. Very often it is performed so that the sponsor seems to be on a hostile side. The goal of this type of propaganda is to destroy the prestige of the opposite side, cause negative feelings and undermine the reliability and trustworthiness of the opposition. To reach its goal, various newspapers, jokes, falsified documents, rumours, films, leaflets, etc. are usually implemented. Black propaganda was actively used during the Cold War period by the Soviet Union as well as the U.S. These propaganda activities along with other types of active measures were applied through the KGB's special organisation called *Служба – А* (Service A). Daniel Learner explained: “While grey and black propaganda efforts have the most immediate impact, they are also the most dangerous. The target populace will eventually recognize the material as incorrect, discrediting the provider. Credibility is a condition of persuasion. You must first persuade a man to believe what you say before you can get him to do what you want.” It has to be mentioned that the word 'disinformation' is often confused with the meaning of the word propaganda. “Disinformation” was coined by Joseph Stalin who served as the first editor of the Russian newspaper “Pravda” – the official newspaper of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union as a name of the KGB's black propaganda department as he was sure that the word he had coined sounded West and people would accept it as the French origin word. The main purpose was to mislead public opinion and attention. The classic novel *The Animal Farm* written by Eric Arthur Blair (better known to the readers as George Orwell) allegorically represents a group of animals who live on a farm and rebel against their human farmers. Orwell creates a clear picture of Russia after the 1917 Revolution and the rise of power of its leader Joseph Stalin. Readers vividly see how animalism turns into communism, the characters represent political leaders who played crucial roles in the history of Russia and in Creating the Soviet Union and each case depicted in the novel corresponds to actions undertaken by the Russian Communist Regime. “Napoleon is always right” – this is how clever language and particular words can manipulate people, distort and

¹⁷ J. E. Combs, D. Nimmo, *The New Propaganda: The Dictatorship of Palaver in Contemporary Politics*, New York 1993.

misrepresent the truth and create a false narrative to justify the actions, and decisions and keep people under control¹⁸.

The Dawn of the Russian Psychoanalytical Era

Today Russian foreign policy and its main military document are based on the demonstration of psychological methods of war. These methods were used in Georgia in 2008 as well as in Ukraine in 2014 and in 2022, to gain more details about Psywar conducted by Russians we have to analyse the historical background of how the process of psychological manipulation developed in Russian Society. From the very beginning, a deep interest in psychoanalysis arose in Russia. Russian psychoanalysis has a very interesting past. There were periods of sensitivity and activity when new psychoanalytical organisations were launched in Russia. Many well-known disciples of Freud returned to Russia with one desire to spread Freud's teaching and psychoanalytic concepts by establishing a school of Psychoanalysis, which would play a crucial part in promoting their country's successful future. There was an awakening interest in the theory and methods of Freud. His books were intensively published and his theories were represented widely in Russian society after 1917 when Russia experienced unparalleled social transformation or even an attempt to change, and establish new models in nearly every sphere such as politics, economics, culture, philosophy, and medicine, literature, pedagogy, etc. Thus, Psychoanalysis has become one of the most popular disciplines that could lure representatives of the different ranks of society, such as writers, artists, and philosophers. In 1921 the Russian Psychoanalytic Society was founded in Moscow under the leadership of Ivan Ermakov. The Russian Revolution and Civil War sharply outlined the problems of children and childhood as there were lots of orphans who experienced war and remained without their parents' care. Their emotional and psychological state urgently needed intensive intervention. The solution to the problem was using the method of so-called psycho-transformation or psycho-intervention for one purpose: to change mindset, habits, perception, etc. Russian leaders believed that the same change was also essential for the children of former Bourgeois and intelligentsia to change their behaviour and beliefs. Thus psychoanalysis structured the further theoretical framework of 'how to shape people's psychic'. Later as we have mentioned above, when the communists came into power psychoanalysis was used for political purposes and was blended into psywar methods.

¹⁸ J. Bridcut, *The KGB's long war against Rudolf Nureyev*, <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/3667963/The-KGBs-long-war-against-Rudolf-Nureyev.html>> (10.11.2022); G. Castillo, Domesticating the Cold War: Household Consumption as Propaganda in Marshall Plan Germany, "Journal of Contemporary History", 2005/40(2), pp. 261-288.

South Caucasian region – a target of Russia

The three main countries of the Caucasus region Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia are referred to as the Trans-Caucasus. The region is considered to be one of the most complex and unstable regions in the former Soviet space. It is situated at the crossroads of Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. The region has a traumatic Soviet past as it has suffered from many problems such as economic mismanagement, corruption, social problems, weak institutions, and authoritarianism. As soon as the Soviet Union collapsed inter-ethnic conflicts started to appear. Georgia is the most visible country out of these three countries as its location underlines its geopolitical role in the region as a mediator. The South Caucasus is a region with a unique geographical location, and ancient cultural and historical heritage, where three different nations are interconnected but each takes a separate route at the same time before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russia has had a wild interest in the region historically. During the period of Russian colonial expansion, no region has been so highlighted as the Caucasus. The massive conquest of the region started in the 18th century with the settlement of Cossacks. Time by time South Caucasus obeyed the Tsar's Russia and Georgia became the administrative centre of the Empire in the region, from here Russia could lead the conquest of the mountainous region, and highland regions easily. In the 19th century under the command of Russian General Aleksey Ermolov, the army started regular attacks against the mountain people, the so-called GORTS. The main imperial purpose of those battles was to take control over the military road and turn these isolated, little battles into a massive, permanent, and long war that Russia could use for its benefit. The particularly decisive stage of the war that took place in the North Caucasus against Muslims that lasted up to 1859 was led by the religious, political, and military leader Imam Shamil. This war is also known as the 'War of Murids'. Here Russian soldiers had to deal with the phenomena, we call today guerilla war for the first time. This war is believed to have played a crucial role in restructuring the Russian identity as a Russian high-rank society or elite started creating its multinational Empire by blending many different peoples, cultures, and pieces of land, and outlining the so-called mind map, where the Caucasus region would be a Russian version of the Orient. In this period plenty of Russians visited the Caucasus as the region has become the most important strategic place for them where their national identity was defined clearly. Moreover, the region represented a vast space for Russians to fulfil dreams, and accomplish further projections of romantic ideas about freedom and the so-called 'wildness', which they experienced in the high mountains. Here we have to mention that Russia at that time somehow associated itself with Europe (Eastern Europe precisely and not with Western

Europe) and this ‘oriental’ version was the best opportunity for them to strengthen their ‘Europeanism’¹⁹.

Russian Aspiration in Modern Era and Military Doctrine

As of now Russia’s Neo imperialistic views and attitudes towards the South Caucasus region demonstrate the same character, intentions, and methods it is obvious that our former ‘big brother’ still uses psywar tactics to occupy our land, minds, and souls, Russia under Vladimir Putin has set a goal to restore the Soviet Union and create a new version of the model of the former USSR. The purpose that stands behind this intention is not just the imperialist mindset of Russia but its aspiration to become an equal competitor and rival to the US and NATO in the international political arena. From this perspective, it would be interesting to review the brief history of the Russian military documents or doctrines.

Military doctrine determines the character of dangers to the state, their historical context, and likely opponents or potential allies. It also outlines the general ways or methods for solving these challenges and the developments in the armed forces required to meet them.

Doctrine is meant to rationalise political efforts with available military means to attain security for the state. It is subordinate to military policy, offering an initial scientific and practical basis for developing military concepts, programs, and plans, which are examined concretely by other government documents. The Soviet military doctrine was separated into socio-political and military-technical components. It was set by the political leadership to emphasise the initiation of military considerations. The Soviet Union’s political leadership established a defensive military doctrine in 1987. By this period in the Cold War, the USSR saw no political goals that could be achieved via an offensive war:

- a. An offensive operation is aimed at destroying or defeating the enemy and imposing the will on him for a decisive victory. E.g spoiling/ambush/raid/ demonstration;
- b. A defensive operation defeats an enemy attack, buys time, economises forces, or develops conditions favourable for a counteroffensive that regains the initiative and defeats the enemy.

As the Cold War faded, Soviet military doctrine reflected the general assumption that there were no political objectives that could be attained via an offensive war; hence, the Soviet forces assumed that their war would be

¹⁹ E. Avdaliani, T. Dundua, *Russian Propaganda Against Georgia Through Ancient And Byzantine Symbols – Analysis*, <<https://www.eurasiareview.com/05062020-russian-propaganda-against-georgia-through-ancient-and-byzantine-symbols-analysis/>> (16.12.2022).

defensive, but require offensive operations to prosecute. Strategy is typically evolutionary, rather than revolutionary, and active defence evolves from active defence concepts of the late Soviet period. The practical aspects of Russian strategy making, operational concept development, organisation of forces, armaments, support, etc. Russian military strategy today offers a much better alignment between political aims, military means, and the socio-economic requirements to support them in this iteration of 'active defence'. Contemporary Russian military doctrine offers the broad provisions of "military policy and of military-economic support for the defence of the state based on an analysis of the military risks and threats facing the Russian Federation (RF) and the interests of its allies"²⁰. The military doctrine also offers a typology of conflicts, and periodization leading up to conflict (period of military danger and military threat). The Gerasimov Doctrine builds a framework for guerrilla, tactics (hackers, media, businessmen, leaks, and, yes, fake news, as well as conventional and asymmetric military means) and declares that non-military tactics are not auxiliary to the use of force but the preferred way to win. Gerasimov specifies that the objective is to achieve an environment of permanent unrest and conflict within an enemy state. General Gerasimov is no different in this respect from his predecessors. His so-called doctrine is hardly a driver of Russian national security policy. Rather, it is an effort to develop an operational concept for the Russian national security establishment to support its ongoing confrontation with the West. Instead of a new doctrine, Gerasimov offers a strategy to implement the actual doctrine that has guided Russian foreign and defence policies for over two decades: the Primakov doctrine. The Primakov doctrine is named after former foreign and prime minister Yevgeny Primakov whose elevation to the post of foreign minister in 1996 marked a major shift in Russian foreign policy. Before that, Russian foreign policy had largely sought accommodation with the West, following the outlines of Mikhail Gorbachev's late Soviet foreign policy. One of the key elements of the Primakov doctrine is its insistence on Russia's primacy in the post-Soviet space and pursuit of closer integration among former Soviet republics with Russia in the lead. Opposition to NATO expansion and, more broadly, persistent efforts to weaken transatlantic institutions and the U.S.-led international order are another. Partnership with China is the third fundamental component. All three remain major pillars of Russian foreign policy today²¹. What do critics say?

²⁰ M. Pietkiewicz, *The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, „Polish Political Science Yearbook”, vol. 47(3) (2018), pp. 505-520.

²¹ G. Friedman, *Beyond the Post-Cold War World*, <<https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/beyond-post-cold-war-world>> (17.11.2022).

Current Russian doctrine is an evolution of Soviet doctrine. First, a Soviet military doctrine of military denial and deception – called *maskirovka* – is the cornerstone of current policies of dis- and misinformation. From various Russian wars in the late 1990s to today, the *maskirovka* doctrine contributed to success on the battlefield and in international media by disputing or conflating Western findings. In 2013, Russian General Valery Gerasimov shaped *maskirovka* into a non-physical tool to support Russian foreign policy, a document many in the West call the ‘Gerasimov Doctrine’. While the concepts of denial and deception are at least as old as Sun Tzu, Gerasimov’s correlation of nonviolent foreign policy tools – such as sanctions, removal of diplomats, and official condemnations – to kinetic military action on an ever-shifting scale of war is a different approach to the same goal of war as the United States: “to impose our will on the enemy”. Russia and the target country’s foreign policies are evaluated through the lens of the Gerasimov Doctrine. Similarly, the capabilities of adversarial states toward Russia are evaluated according to Gerasimov’s defined “primary phases (stages) of conflict development”. This capability is divided into three spheres of power: social, information, and military. As with the Gerasimov Doctrine, these spheres overlap, but providing general divisions between different forms of power creates a measurable base for this exploratory research²².

In February 2013, General Valery Gerasimov – Russia’s chief of the General Staff, published a 2,000-word article, “The Value of Science Is in the Foresight”, Gerasimov took tactics developed by the Soviets, blended them with strategic military thinking about total war, and laid out a new theory of modern warfare—one that looks more like hacking an enemy’s society than attacking it head-on. He wrote: “The very ‘rules of war have changed. The role of nonmilitary 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. ... All this is supplemented by military means of a concealed character.”²³

Russia is planning to revise its military doctrine, last updated in 2000, according to a series of statements from Russia’s National Security Council. The draft, titled “The New Face of the Russian Armed Forces Until 2030”. Nikolai Patrushev, secretary of the Russian Security Council, commented on the pending changes in an interview with the Russian newspaper *Izvestia*. The 2000 doctrine needs to be adapted to the new security environment, which is

²² M. Kofman et al., *Russian Military Strategy: Core Tenets and Operational Concepts*, <https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/russian-military-strategy-core-tenets-and-operational-concepts.pdf> (18.11.2022).

²³ V. Gerasimov, *The Value of Science Is in the Foresight. New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying out Combat Operations*, "Military Review", January-February 2016, pp. 23-29.

likely to feature “local wars” and armed conflicts, he said. The current version allows the use of nuclear weapons “in response to large-scale aggression with conventional weapons in situations critical to the national security of the Russian Federation and its allies.” It also provides for the use of nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear-weapon state party to the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in the event of an invasion or any other attack on Russia, its territory, armed forces, or allies²⁴.

Just for now what we see is that Russia has become a force that started brutal military actions on its neighbouring territories or so-called zone of privileged interests (Georgia and Ukraine). The strategic geopolitical situation of Georgia at the crossroads of Russian ‘Top Interest territories’ has triggered the keen interest of the Russian Federation to occupy and invade Georgia. Besides there exist many other factors that sharpen the above-mentioned wild interest. These facts are the enlargement of NATO and the EU to former Soviet republics; Georgia’s foreign policy aspirations; and Political and economic developments in the South Caucasus, including conflicts and fragile stability in the North Caucasus. The Russian President trying to raise his Reputation in Russia shifted to a new model of Foreign policy as a possibility to consolidate Russian society. By focusing on the historical role of Russia in international politics, Vladimir Vladimirovich coined a new propagandistic term the phantom pains and painted a picture of geopolitical catastrophe in the modern age. Georgia is thought to be one of such phantom pains that represents the Russian traumatic past for Russia who dreams about restorations of its influence and power over Georgia, bringing it in a spinning orbit of the former space of the Soviet Union. So, returning Georgia into Moscow’s Orbit is the main goal of Neo imperialist Russia today. There are three main interests that Russia demonstrates today towards Georgia. These interests are:

- a. Global interests;
- b. Regional interest;
- c. Direct interest.

Russian Global interests were depicted in the official Russian Strategic document that was updated in 2020 during the Pandemic period. The document keeps the main framework of those adopted in 2013-16 that is perceived as post-2008 Russo-Georgian war and before the Crimea annexation.

The document differs from its previous version as it focuses on the exaggerated role of Russia as the Great Power in the multipolar world and outlines its responsibility to protect the citizens’ security, moral and spiritual values, defend Russia from the threat spread by the West and resist its information and psywar challenges. The document includes new attitudes toward Georgia and the Georgian Foreign Policy and highlights NATO’s and

²⁴ M. Kofman et al., *op. cit.*

the U.S.'s intention to militarise territories near Russia and even establish biological–military laboratories there, for example, Georgia’s National Center of Disease Control and Public Health (better known as Lugar Laboratory) represents the main threat to Russian security and needs an immediate response. During the pandemic period when the world struggled to manage the crisis caused by SARS-CoV-2, Russia activated its propagandistic machine to spread disinformation about vaccine diplomacy to engage the Georgian public distrust toward the vaccine such as Pfizer, AstraZeneca, etc. produced in Western countries, promoting the Russian Sputnik.

Religious Competence represents one of the main instruments Russia can use for its global interests and manipulation of Georgian Religious aspects. Therefore it was perfectly used as a part of the Kremlin’s disinformation campaigns – the role of religion (Orthodox, Christianity) has become the key to many manipulations of the Georgian people as Russia was the holy centre or a centre of gravity, who at the same time recognized the jurisdiction of Georgian Orthodox Church in the Occupied territories of Abkhazia and Ossetia and also has relations and close ties with Orthodox churches in both of the region.

As for regional interests, South Causes has always been of strategic interest to Russia for political, military, and economic purposes. Particularly Georgia and Azerbaijan lure Russia as Armenia has a strategic partnership with Russia. Since Armenia has no land border with Russia, both countries use the shortest route that runs through Georgia. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan remains one of the challenges in the region. Russia always uses its chance to play the role of ‘a mediator or a peacekeeper’ in the conflict. The two largest ethnic minorities live in Georgia; Armenians and Azerbaijanians, but there is no tension between them even in the region where the conflict reaches its peak. During the recent escalation of conflict, a piece of disinformation was spread to undermine these relations. Transferring Russian military equipment through Georgia – the information was equally sensitive for three of the three countries. Moscow tried to send “kind messages” to manipulate the oil and gas supply routes existing in the region and demonstrate its wild interest in the powerful influence over energy resources.

Russian direct interest in Georgia: Moscow and Tbilisi have always had complicated relations, particularly after the USSR's collapse. Georgia had set the goal to transform itself from a failing former Soviet country into a successful country with the ambition of becoming an aspiring member of the EU annatto and a loyal partner of the US. The brief August war of 2008 turned up to be a turning point in Russ Georgian relationship when Russian military forces invaded the internationally recognized border of Georgia and occupied the territories there, Russian president of that time – Dimitry Medvedev’s aim was easy to read: to prevent NATO’s enlargement process. Since that time the Status quo in the Russo-Georgian relationship has finally been established: the

recognition of occupied territories (particularly Abkhazia and Ossetia). The absence of diplomatic relations between the Kremlin and Tbilisi, the presence of Russian military bases on the occupied: internationally recognized Georgian territories, Russian agreement to ensure integration of Abkhazia and Ossetia into the Russian Federation. Taking the above-mentioned into account Russia realises that Georgian society has completely different values and the difference is growing day by day. It means that returning Georgia to the 'Soviet Orbit' is not as easy at all. Therefore, the Russian wild interest in the shortest-term objective is to use psywar methods and tactics intensively and create value-based similarities between Georgian and Russian societies to achieve its imperialistic desire.

To Sum up, Overall, Russia's direct strategic interests in Georgia are to:

1. Bring Georgia closer to Russia in economic and socio-cultural terms;
2. Prevent the consolidation of democracy through increased polarisation in society, especially vis-à-vis issues related to values and foreign policy;
3. Prevent the Euro-Atlantic integration of Georgia through military dominance, economic sanctions, and influence operations;
4. Undermine the transit potential of Georgia (and the whole Caucasus region), not to allow for an alternative to Russian oil and gas supply to the West.

The climax of Russian Psywar from a pandemic period in Georgia to now

As the Georgian society's choice is evident – to join and become an honourable member of the EU and NATO (that is appropriately reflected in the Georgian constitution as one of the main priorities of Georgia) the path to its ambition for Georgians is not that easy. Russia, as we had mentioned above, still dreams about returning Georgia to the post-Soviet space and making the country its so-called backyard to build a solid fence that will prevent Georgians from the European integration process. Thus, Russia had chosen the more effective weapon to fight Georgia in the modern era: using Psywar methods that are considered to be one of the forms of hybrid warfare²⁵. One of the main targets of Russia's Hybrid warfare methods chosen against Georgia is demonstrated by political actors, political individuals, information, communication technologies, non-governmental organisations, intensive propaganda, and disinformation. Russia permanently tries to impact Georgians' perceptions, beliefs, and values to achieve its strategic goal. Georgia is considered to be the most reliable partner to the U.S., the EU, and NATO. It has to be mentioned that the Georgian-U.S. Strategic Partnership Charter (signed in

²⁵ M. S. Reshi, *op. cit.*

2009) is considered one of the main documents in modern Georgian political history and is still in progress. Russia at the same time tries to use all the possible methods to distract the bond between Georgia and the West which includes information manipulation as well as using hard power that is demonstrated at the so-called creeping wire borders at the occupied territories of Georgia. The latest polls conducted by IRI (International Republican Institute) show the consequences that 82% of Georgians believe that Russia is the main threat to Georgia as well as an economic threat, also this poll represents the reality of how the number of supporters of Georgia – Russian dialogue has reduced from 84 % to 40%. The best example of this can be considered the Georgians reaction and massive protest about the 2019 Junes event – when Russian MP Gavrilov – an Orthodox Christian, at the same time a communist took over the Speaker's chair at the Georgian Parliament. Such extreme vulnerabilities are always met by Russian attempts to deploy the narrative of the West, which is portrayed as ethically and morally corrupt, and anti-patriotic.

Georgian society is considered to be Orthodox Christian. According to the surveys conducted by The Caucasus Barometer (CB). Every seventh Georgian out of ten is a follower of the Georgian Orthodox Church conducts surveys simultaneously in all three South Caucasus countries and collects data, opinions, and people's attitudes to political issues. The CB has run the surveys since 2004 annually.) The majority of Georgians respect their traditions, and identity and try to protect them, therefore they believe that the main guarantor of preserving Georgian values is the Georgian Orthodox Church. This attitude is very well used by Russia by spreading fake information and threatening Georgians with the westernisation of Georgian values that are in danger of disappearing. This way Russia targets the vulnerability and conducts cognitive warfare against Georgians.

One of the Kremlin's promoted propagandists declared: "Russia intervenes in your brains and then you do not know what to do with your altered consciousness". This is the formulation of the method of how Russia manipulates target societies by using pro-Russian narratives and rhetoric, deploying scepticism and mistrust. This is a strategy on how to veil a real goal and pretend 'as true – patriotic intentions at aiming to preserve real traditional Georgian values. Unfortunately, in some cases, some Georgians are deceived by such narratives as the Soviet past of these people still works somehow. It is tailored propaganda that works sufficiently targeting a particular segment of Georgian society spreading advanced, well-digested information that can effectively impact this group of people. A well-known American research organisation defines cognitive hacking as an attack that includes a psychological understanding of the target group, place, and time to post the disinformation and achieve a desirable ending). In our technologically

advanced age, IT technologies provide Russian propagandists the vast opportunity to use the Internet and Social media to act effectively and manipulate the masses of people.

It has also to be mentioned that psychological manipulation operations are not conducted just once, this is a permanent, ongoing process that conducts an invisible, silent information war. In this process, three main phases can be distinguished:

1. Narratives that outline fear – this phase includes the spreading of pro-Kremlin messages which manoeuvres Georgian society by highlighting problems dealing with security, identity, and territorial integrity, Russian propaganda focuses on various fake sources and emphasises only the Georgian partnership with the U.S., the EU, and NATO and represents fake news about it, for example, Lugar Laboratory or Bio laboratory named after late Senator of the US Richard Lugar was opened in Tbilisi in 2011 with US support. Russians spread narratives (vocalised by Russian officials including Putin) as if the laboratory is developing a secret biological weapon that endangers the security of the region.
2. Establishing fear and vulnerability – this phase includes wide-spreading the vulnerable, fake news, causing scepticism and disappointment regarding pro-western orientation. The Russian narrative tries to persuade Georgians that Western democracy and values are decaying, that NATO and the EU will never find a place for Georgia in their family and that the door for Georgia will always be kept closed. Georgia will be abandoned by its so-called strategic partners.
3. Suggestions for a solution – this is a phase that regards a solution to each of above mentioned problems both countries are Orthodox Christians and have common religious values which is primary for Georgia to preserve its identity.

Conclusions

During the first period of the pandemic, Russia used various sources and possibilities to spread fake information about SARS-CoV-2. For instance, pro-Kremlin online media (such as News-Front Georgia and Ge.world.Ge) spread such propagandistic information not only on their websites but also used social media (Facebook, Instagram). The content covered a variety of themes and interpretations about the virus's cause, origin, spread and transmission, treatment, and the attempt to discredit the West in the fight against the virus by highlighting the fact that “even such a little country as Georgia can struggle better and could manage to handle SARS-CoV-2 than developed and rich Europe and America”. This way Russian propagandistic machine was painting

priorities of Russian scientific achievements and demonstrating Western weaknesses, as only China and Russia were ready to help Georgia, not Lugar lab, and the West allies.

Cyberespionage and the number of full-scale cyber attacks are rising in Georgia. During the 2008 Russo-Georgian war Russia conducted large-scale cyber attacks on the main infrastructures and governmental agencies in Georgia. Even today Russian cyber attacks remain one of the main threats to Georgia. Here we have to remember the results of the survey conducted by the organisation Georgian Reforms Association (GRASS) according to this research on August 7-12 Russia bombed 15 historical monuments in Georgia, 10 of them were churches, and 5 were museums (including Georgian translator, publicist, public figure's Ivane Machabeli's house – museum in Tamarasheni). After the war, the Russian military forces also destroyed 7 churches as a result of training. Among these churches two monuments were of the 9th Century: the church of St. George in the village of Kemert and the temple in the village of Kurta.

On August 5, 2022, one of the bars in Tbilisi called Dedaena Bar was cyber-attacked by Russian trolls. The reason for internet aggression was caused by the policy of bars demanding Russian visitors to condemn Russian aggression in Georgia in 1992 and 2008 as well as in Ukraine and to acknowledge more than 20% of Georgian territories occupied by the Russian Federation. As an immediate cyber attack result, the bar was punished by uploading negative, fake comments and reviews, and its rate level was reduced to 2.4. Besides, numerous aggressive comments were written on the bar's social network page.

Russian efforts to exploit Georgia's physical domain to achieve its strategic goals, either by planned interventions or by seizing opportunities provided by the local Georgian socio-political environment. Despite Russia's hybrid warfare, the Government of Georgia must continue on the road to attaining Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

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