

# DEFENSE DOSSIER

ISSUE 33

JULY  
2022



NATO'S OLD/NEW MISSION

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ASSESSING GERMANY'S "NEW ERA" IN FOREIGN AND SECURITY  
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FOR UKRAINE, NECESSITY IS THE MOTHER OF INVENTION

*Sydney Duckor*



# AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY COUNCIL

*Explaining the World. Empowering Policymakers.*



# DEFENSE DOSSIER

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome to the July 2022 edition of the American Foreign Policy Council's *Defense Dossier* e-journal. In this issue, we focus on the changes taking place in Europe as a result of Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

Those changes are numerous. Moscow's misbehavior—and the threat of more to come—has revitalized NATO, a security bloc that was seen as largely obsolete just a few years ago. One of NATO's key member states, Germany, is itself now reevaluating its relationship with Russia as a result of the war. Russia's aggression has also reopened the issue of energy security, and emphasized the need for countries on the Continent to find alternatives to their current, deep dependence on Russia for oil and gas. European states are also beginning to confront Russia's information operations in earnest, with the objective of reducing the reach and appeal of its official propaganda. Ukrainians, meanwhile, have gone a step further, using information operations, psychological warfare, and drone technologies to level the playing field in their fight against Russia.

We tackle these topics, and more, in the pages that follow. As always, we hope you enjoy them.

Sincerely,

Ilan Berman  
Chief Editor

Richard M. Harrison  
Managing Editor



## NATO's Old/New Mission

*Dov S. Zakheim*

NATO owes Vladimir Putin a note of thanks. The Russian autocrat's invasion of Ukraine has united an organization that not so long ago French president Emmanuel Macron had described as "brain dead."<sup>1</sup> NATO is as united today as at any time during the latter stages of the Cold War. It no longer is seeking missions far from Europe in "out of area" places such as Afghanistan or Libya. Its focus is once again on Europe. And its members no longer are shirking their commitment to increase their defense spending. The organization has found itself.

Moreover, Sweden and Finland's impending membership in NATO will represent a major boost to the credibility of its deterrent. Both states have recently increased both their defense spending and the degree of their military alignment with NATO in general, and with the United States in particular. Formally joining the Alliance would constitute a major policy reversal for both, especially for Sweden—which, unlike Finland, has not fought a war in over two centuries. It would bring them into NATO's integrated military command and strengthen the voice of Poland and the Baltic states, which have the most to fear from Moscow.

Indeed, a NATO that includes the two Scandinavian states would turn the Baltic into a NATO lake. Sweden already has bolstered its military presence on Bornholm, the island strategically located in the center of the eastern Baltic Sea. Finland has long had the capability to mine the Baltic; in the Åland islands, it too represents a major barrier to Moscow's breaking out into the North Sea, even before having to transit the Skagerrak and Kattegat straits between Denmark and Sweden. All in all, Russia would find itself confined to the easternmost part of the seas, surrounded by states it perceives as enemies.

Of course, the question is how long NATO's current unity will hold. The longer the war in Ukraine goes on, the more difficult it will be to contain the fissiparous impulses that continue to animate several of NATO's members. It is already clear—indeed, it has been the case

for years—that several NATO members are in no mood to admit either Ukraine or Georgia into the Alliance. Moreover, it is far from certain that states such as Hungary, which has once again returned the increasingly authoritarian Viktor Orbán to its premiership, will be willing to shed their relationship with Russia over the longer term.

### GERMANY TAKES CENTER STAGE

The keys to NATO's future strength and cohesion lie in Berlin and Washington. The Russian attack on Ukraine led Germany's chancellor Olaf Scholz suddenly to reverse his country's post-Cold War decline in defense spending. He committed to spend 100 billion Euros to a special fund for defense programs in its fiscal year 2022 budget.<sup>2</sup> In so doing, he set Germany on a path to exceed its prior commitment to allocate two percent of its gross domestic product to its defense budget. That previous promise had already been noteworthy, since Germany had spent only 1.53 percent of its GDP in its 2021 budget.

Moreover, Scholz broke with previous German policy in two other major respects. Berlin had long resisted pressure from Washington and several European capitals to halt the \$11 billion Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project. Yet, on February 22nd, his government announced that Germany would not certify the gas pipeline, despite the fact that doing so could prejudice Germany's gas supplies and by extension, its economic growth. The decision represented a significant step toward any European effort to achieve energy independence from Russia.

Scholz also reversed Germany's policy not to arm states involved in a military conflict. Initially, Germany had only approved the transfer of 5000 helmets to a beleaguered Ukrainian military. The gesture was widely condemned as risible. Under pressure from its allies, and in the face of ongoing Russian atrocities, Scholz approved supplying Ukraine with increasingly capable weapons, including the Gepard anti-aircraft system.

It is not at all clear whether Germany will sustain its



commitments over the longer term. Germany has yet to halt its gas purchases from Russia. It has only terminated its importation of Russian coal and has dropped its opposition to EU importing Russian oil. Russian gas has been critical to Germany's economic growth, however. As Berlin attempts to reduce its dependence on Russian gas, it will face greater constraints on its budget and pressure to maintain its expansive social programs. These factors could force it to backtrack on its plans to increase defense spending over the medium term. Should that be the case, it could undermine NATO's credibility and ultimately its cohesion.

### A TEST OF AMERICAN RESOLVE

Washington likewise will have to maintain its current determination to prevent Russian aggression in Ukraine and, for that matter, elsewhere in Europe. There can be little doubt that, in the short term, the Administration, egged on by an overwhelming majority in an otherwise bitterly divided Congress, will continue not only to support Ukraine with military and economic assistance, but also work overtime to ensure NATO cohesion. Nevertheless, the Biden team's primary preoccupation remains the Chinese threat to American security, interests and allies in East Asia. Whether Washington will maintain its current focus on Europe, especially if there is a Russo-Ukrainian settlement, is very much an open question.

The Biden administration deserves considerable credit for organizing NATO's united front against Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Although refusing to deploy troops to Ukraine, and initially slow to provide major materiel support to the Ukrainian military, the Administration did step up its supply of handheld Javelin anti-tank systems and Stinger anti-air missiles to Kyiv. As Ukraine continued to hold out against the Russian onslaught, Washing-

ton continuously upped its support; by mid-April, it had committed \$3.2 billion since the beginning of the conflict. Moreover, at the end of April, the Biden Administration requested, and received from the Congress, Lend-Lease Authority enabling the president to transfer weapons systems and other supplies to Ukraine and other Eastern European allies and partners without restrictions. That program had been the linchpin of Washington's support for Britain in 1941 before the United States entered the war in December of that year. Washington's objective appeared to be one of ensuring that Ukraine could hold out for as long as was necessary, until Russia was prepared to negotiate an end to the conflict.

Even before the Lend Lease program was enacted, however, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin stated that America's objective was "to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can't do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine."<sup>3</sup> Noting Moscow's losses in the war, he added that "we want to see them [the Russians] not... reproduce that capability" to invade its neighbors. Austin's pronouncement represented a fundamental change in American policy. Three days later, and underscoring that change, Biden announced that he was requesting the massive sum of \$33 billion in additional assistance for Kyiv. The request incorporated \$20.4 billion in military assistance, as well as \$8.5 billion in economic assistance and \$3 billion in humanitarian aid. Congress ultimately approved a \$40 billion aid package with strong bipartisan support.

The request for defense funds is intended to finance the transfer to Ukraine of additional artillery, armored, anti-armor, and air defense systems, as well cyber capabilities. Most notably, the military assistance package included \$4 billion in foreign military financing (FMF), which would furnish funds to Ukraine for acquiring American systems. The size of the proposed grant would render Ukraine second only to Israel as the largest recipient of American FMF funds.

Whether the Biden administration will be able to maintain the level of commitment that the request implies is, however, far from certain. China remains America's primary long-term defense concern, and the current fiscal year 2023 defense budget request for \$773 billion does not provide sufficient funds to enable the military to devote resources to simultaneously deterring Chinese adventurism and maintaining America's stepped up commitment to NATO.

Congress will likely add at least \$30 billion, and perhaps as much as \$45 billion, with the likely total for America's

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defense budget in excess of \$800 billion. Nevertheless, inflation rates that America has not seen since the early 1980s (and which are unlikely to revert to the low levels of the past decade) will erode defense spending in real terms. Annual increases in spending on defense personnel, as well as real increases in the costs operations and maintenance will also continue to eat into the defense top line. So, too, will the cost of modernizing strategic nuclear forces, as well as missile defenses. As a result, American conventional force levels will not grow commensurately with the increases in spending, but will maintain their secular decline. Given the ongoing demands for deterring North Korea, and maintaining what will still be a major American presence in the Middle East, it is not at all clear how Washington will be able significantly to increase its commitment to NATO's defenses over the medium term, even with likely Congressional funding increases.

Then there is the question of the 2024 elections. While in the White House, Donald Trump was no great supporter of NATO, and indicated that—if reelected—he would downgrade American participation in the Alliance, perhaps following the lead of Charles de Gaulle and withdrawing the United States from NATO's integrated military command. Trump lost in 2020, but has been dropping heavy hints that he might run again in 2024. Should he return to the White House, the prospects for American support for NATO, and especially for Ukraine, could at that point become problematic. Moreover, a small but growing number of Republicans in the House of Representatives have lost their enthusiasm for both NATO and support for Ukraine.

### FUTURE PROSPECTS

Given economic pressures in Germany, and the uncertain trajectory of American national security policy in the wake of both the U.S. Congressional and presidential elections, it is difficult to adumbrate NATO's longer-term prospects. On the other hand, other major NATO allies – notably Britain, Italy, Poland and Turkey – remain firmly committed to the Alliance's defense spending goals. Moreover, support for NATO remains significant in the U.S. The country today is nowhere near the level of isolationism that dominated public opinion prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

Ongoing German support for a major commitment to NATO will certainly be crucial to maintain the current revival of the Alliance. At the end of the day, however, the

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key to ensuring that NATO remains both cohesive and a credible deterrent to further Russian aggression in Europe will be, as it has always been, American resolve and leadership. Hopefully, whatever the results of the next several rounds of U.S. elections, that resolve will remain firm throughout the remainder of the decade and beyond.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>“Emmanuel Macron warns Europe: NATO is becoming brain-dead,” *The Economist*, November 7, 2019, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/11/07/emmanuel-macron-warns-europe-nato-is-becoming-brain-dead>.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Cameron Hill, “New era: Scholz pledges €100bn boost to German defence spending,” *Euronews*, February 27, 2022, <https://www.euronews.com/2022/02/27/new-era-scholz-pledges-100bn-boost-to-german-defence-spending>.

<sup>3</sup> Missy Ryan and Annabelle Timsit, “U.S. wants Russian military ‘weakened’ from Ukraine invasion, Austin says,” *Washington Post*, April 25, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/25/russia-weakened-lloyd-austin-ukraine-visit/>.



## Assessing Germany's "New Era" in Foreign and Security Policy

*E. Wayne Merry*

Vladimir Putin has finally fulfilled the nightmare that preoccupied the Kremlin in the aftermath of the Second World War: a reunited and rearmed Germany tightly linked to Washington and with an anti-Russian security focus. If his war in Ukraine had no other outcome, its impact on German external and military policy would constitute a disaster for Russian interests. The "New Era" proclaimed by Chancellor Olaf Scholz and his Coalition in Berlin in the wake of Russia's February 24th invasion is almost the antithesis of what Moscow would have expected from a German government led by Social Democrats and containing Greens. For the time being, Russia's friends and partners in German politics, media, finance, industry and labor are silent in the face of Russian savagery in Ukraine. Once again, the Kremlin has pushed a somewhat unwilling German government into the close embrace of the United States, while Berlin's leadership role in Europe works against Moscow's interests.

How long these trends will last depends, first and foremost, on how vigorously Putin pursues his program in Ukraine. German political culture was willing to swallow the 2014 seizure of Crimea and a Kremlin-sponsored insurgency in the Donbas, but cannot abide the overt conquest of the same Ukraine which was devastated by German arms within living memory. German elites have little inherent empathy with Ukraine itself—"Ukraine fatigue" was further advanced in Germany than perhaps anywhere else—but they won't imperil the Federal Republic's vital European and trans-Atlantic relationships in the face of a Russian war which shatters German assumptions about the world in which they live. Hungary may depart from the EU and NATO consensus on Ukraine; Germany will not.

Nonetheless, the much ballyhooed hundred-billion

Euro rearmament program pledged by Scholz and his political partners will be difficult to carry out, as Germans fundamentally believe that serious military capabilities are appropriate for America, France, Britain and perhaps Poland, but not themselves. In part this is the obvious burden of recent German history, but equally it reflects the hope that Mitteleuropa should be a largely disarmed zone of peace between the "hard power" states to its West and East. It also reflects German stinginess and an assumption that, as Germany's security is guaranteed by the United States, it should be paid for by the "scheiss-Amis." No recent German government has delivered more than lip service on its NATO spending obligations, or really thought of its defense budget in terms of operational capabilities, because the guiding assumption for over thirty years has been that an effective German force structure is simply not needed in Europe—and not welcome among Germany's neighbors.

### EASIER SAID THAN DONE

The German stereotype abroad as a warrior culture is the product of a comparatively short period in the nation's history, from about 1870 till 1945. Before then, only Prussia really qualified as an "army in possession of a state". Most German states were noteworthy for their military mediocrity—a view held strongly by the French, who were accustomed to marching across German territories at will for centuries. During the American Civil War, German immigrants concentrated in the Sixth Corps of the Union Army were regarded with contempt by their Confederate adversaries and fellow northerners alike. A prevalent view was that Germans just did not have the makings of good soldiers. That notion endures today within much of Germany, where the profession of





arms enjoys as low a social status as anywhere in Europe. The uniform may garner public respect elsewhere, but German soldiers know to change to civilian clothes before going on a date. Nobody stops a German soldier to thank him for his service and, indeed, many suspect that anyone wearing a Bundeswehr uniform must hold anti-democratic political views.

In this hostile culture, there is little danger that rearmament will bring about the remilitarization of German youth. Indeed, just getting enough young volunteers to staff an enlarged force structure will be a problem. Germany dispensed with conscription in 2011 on the assumption a robust military establishment would not again be needed. Thus, most of the promised increase in defense spending likely will go to high tech (and high-priced) equipment rather than to new battalions. For several years to come, just shifting the force structure from cosmetic to competent will consume much of the new money. The German military is famous for submarines that are not seaworthy (although the same construction yards provided Israel with its superb new submarine fleet), aircraft that cannot fly (except for export) and battle tanks lacking in spare parts and maintenance. A series of defense ministers has struggled to bring the Bundeswehr into shape for deployment, with modest results.

The concept of force deployment is itself the problem, as the German military is still designed to operate at home, in a country surrounded by allies, rather than for expeditionary operations. After German unification, then-Chancellor Helmut Kohl pledged that the unified Bundeswehr would not operate anywhere Hitler's Wehrmacht had done, leading to jokes there would be precious few places in or around Europe it could deploy. The experience of German units in Afghanistan was illustrative of the deployment problem as they operated under rules of engagement which effectively prevented much genuine contribution to the NATO mission in that country. A mere handful of combat encounters provoked huge controversy at home and questions as to what the German soldiers were in fact doing in Afghanistan. The answer, as reported in the media, was getting fat, as soldiers were prohibited from anything like ef-

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fective patrolling but were liberally supplied with beer. Often it was the German soldiers themselves who complained about their rules of engagement as they watched soldiers from other NATO contingents actually doing what soldiers are supposed to do, engage an enemy.

As the “New Era” German military develops, a key question will be: “to do what?” Given the challenge from what Scholz bluntly calls “Putin’s war,” the answer will not be peacekeeping duties for the United Nations or other out-of-area activities. The Bundeswehr will almost certainly be deployed into eastern NATO countries to reinforce their capacities and to act as military tripwires in case of Russian invasion. It seems reasonable to anticipate that German units will be deployed, as now, in Poland and the Baltic republics, but potentially also in Finland with its extensive landmass bordering Russia. Interoperability with allies will be the keynote, but perhaps with a nagging doubt whether future German governments will allow deployments into genuinely high-risk environments.

All German deployments outside the Federal Republic will be in shared operations, with partner countries or within NATO operations, and never—ever—alone. The essence of German policy since the time of Chancellor Konrad Adenauer has been to develop a European Germany, rather than to pursue a Germanic Europe.



That principle goes double in military deployments and operations. No German unit commander wants his national flag to be flying without a cluster of Allied flags alongside it. The object is to make countries with unpleasant memories of feldgrau uniforms comfortable with the hellgrau and English-speaking units of the “New Era.” In that environment, the presence of the Stars and Stripes is more than welcome.

### THE LIMITS OF RESOLVE

Yet it is precisely with the Americans that the “New Era” may encounter difficulties. Despite the generally excellent relations between the Coalition leadership and the Biden administration, the leading Social Democratic Party retains considerable grassroots hostility toward the United States—not to mention significant residual sympathy toward Russia and a desire to restore “normal” relations with it. However, it is not only on the German Left that many believe U.S. pushing of NATO expansion over several administrations is behind the current crisis. Former Christian Democratic Chancellor Angela Merkel is said to regard as perhaps her biggest regret in office her failure to prevent the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest from promising Alliance membership to Ukraine and Georgia. Merkel had delivered two public statements in advance of the summit pledging German opposition to the idea, which was shared by France and some other European members. In the event, however, American pressure prevailed, with President Putin an eyewitness. It is widely believed in Germany that if Merkel had held the line against NATO membership for the two former Soviet states (or at least not promised it so unequivocally) that the current crisis could have been avoided.

In addition, it is common in Germany to blame the overthrow of the legal and recognized (if odious) pro-Russian Ukrainian government in 2014 on American interference. Again, it should be kept in mind that “Ukraine fatigue” was well advanced in Germany, where almost all elites gave more priority to good relations with Russia. This was nothing new, but a continuation of a post-War German elite sense of historical obliga-

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tion to Russia and discomfort with America.

Hence, while Germany today is fully engaged in support for Ukraine and in collective sanctions against Russia, Germans across the political spectrum hope the measures are temporary and that some form of detente can develop, and the sooner the better. German public debates lack the intense hostility toward Russia characteristic of the U.S. Congress and American media. Germans tend to see the Ukraine war as a policy blunder by Putin and his associates, but not yet as a collective national evil comparable to their own during the Third Reich. Most Germans hope for a major reversion of Russian policy in far less than the twelve years their own society required, and at much less cost. If hope springs eternal anywhere, it is in Germany about Russia.

Beyond the hopes lies the reality that the German economy is tied to Russia in ways many American commentators do not understand. The German manufacturing export economy is one of the most energy-intensive in the world and cannot remotely be sustained by renewable sources. Even German nuclear energy—if retained, which it almost certainly will not be—is no answer, as electricity is not the problem. Most German residential and office heating is done with natural gas, while the industrial sector also is fueled by hydrocarbons, especially the core chemicals component.



Germany, in other words, developed its dependency on Russian oil and gas supplies for sound economic reasons. There are no adequate alternatives within the European region or even beyond except at significant price premiums. The Germans opted for piped Russian gas rather than American LNG for reasons of both price and quantity.

Indeed, they still do. Recently the united voices of German industry, finance and labor called for the continuation of the energy relationship with Russia, despite the vivid images from the war in Ukraine. In an irony, the continuing flow of Russian gas through the Soviet-era pipeline across Ukraine to Germany is an asset for Ukraine, in that it allows the Coalition in Berlin to maintain a policy of firm support for Kyiv, which a German economy in deep recession after a gas transit shutoff might not. Difficult though it may be for many in Washington to comprehend, in Germany both the political Left and Right almost desperately want a return to something like “normal” ties with Russia, to include opening of the completed but unused Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline to keep German homes warm and German industry busy through mid-century.

### CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Any German with a high school Abitur is aware of worse periods in relations with Russia than today. Unlike Americans, Germans do not think about Russia in terms of global strategy, but as permanent neighbors and in terms of difficult but necessary neighborhood relations. The “New Era” in German policy does not alter this perspective, although the current leadership in Berlin is very sober about what may lie ahead. German commentators do not speak about giving Putin an “off ramp” so much as about not painting their own country into a corner with no viable options to engage whatever Russia may emerge from the Ukraine war.

Berlin certainly has fewer illusions about Russia than it did a few months ago. But it is under no illusion whatever that Russia will simply go away. For Germany, then, the “New Era” is new insofar as it represents a huge disappointment compared with what Germans expected from this century. However, it is not so new in light of previous centuries of German-Russian relations and conflicts.



## Confronting Europe's Energy Insecurity

Victoria Coates

Significantly curtailing energy exports by one of the world's largest producers—Vladimir Putin's Russia—is undoubtedly a weighty action, and one that will have wide-ranging consequences for global markets, particularly in Europe. But it is a justified response to the Kremlin's savage invasion of Ukraine. It also represents a strategic opportunity for the United States. Alas, it is one that the Biden administration is squandering.

### LOSING THE ADVANTAGE

Open the newspaper or turn on the television today, and you'll find ample evidence that Americans are concerned by sharply rising energy prices. However, there is far less discussion or examination of the Biden administration's chosen response to the current crisis. That's a shame, because the White House plan—bridging imports from rogue regimes such as the Islamic Republic of Iran and Nicolas Maduro's Venezuela, while accelerating an aspirational transition away from fossil fuels—represents a false choice, and one that will only increase our energy vulnerability while weakening the very economic strength that has so dramatically isolated Putin.

The problem is even more severe for Europe, which is alarmingly dependent on energy imports from Russia.<sup>1</sup> Yet private industries and governments are remarkably and voluntarily shunning Russian products,<sup>2</sup> thus sending the clear message that they will not be complicit in financing Putin's murderous aggression against his neighbor. This organic, global movement is a massive strategic opportunity for the United States to lead actions that further damage Putin's reeling economy. Such a course of action is in no way incompatible with a responsible domestic energy policy even though it involves fossil fuels; in fact, it represents a second strategic opportunity for America to provide coordi-

nated leadership with other friendly energy-producing nations as a way of insulating our partners and allies from Putin's pain.

While Europe's public recognition of the fact that Putin sees energy as a weapon of coercion is welcome, it took years (if not decades) to get to this degree of dependency. It will cost hundreds of billions of Euros to reverse it. It will also require a fundamental shift the current U.S. energy posture toward one that reflects the reality that dealing with climate issues cannot be outsourced to rogue regimes who do not care about the climate. The United States can continue to play a leadership role on climate (the Trump administration, for example, oversaw the largest reduction of emissions in history<sup>3</sup>), but only if we do not shackle our efforts to the world's largest polluters, notably China.

The Biden administration's bizarre assertion that there is nothing it can do domestically to replace the pariah Russian barrels, and therefore must import from Iran and Venezuela to offset prices, is simply untrue. More productively, President Biden could issue a waiver to the 1920 *Maritime Security Act* (also known as the *Jones Act*) to allow non-U.S. ships to help move existing domestic oil and gas to the relevant refineries and markets to offset Russian imports. President Trump issued such a waiver after 2017's Hurricane Harvey severely disrupted energy flows from the Gulf of Mexico. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has triggered the most significant geopolitical crisis in Europe since World War II, and if Harvey deserved a waiver, the invasion undoubtedly does as well. At least for the duration of the Ukraine crisis, this could be the energy bridge the administration claims to seek, and might well prompt a badly-needed broader review of the Jones Act.

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## BANKING ON CARACAS

In another bizarre move, President Biden announced in late May that his administration would be relaxing sanctions on Venezuela's energy sector in an effort to increase oil imports to America by granting Chevron a license to begin discussions with Nicolas Maduro's regime.<sup>4</sup> As well as bringing down U.S. energy prices, this policy change will purportedly coax Maduro away from Cuba and Russia and into the American sphere of influence.<sup>5</sup> While both goals are desirable, the strategy being employed to achieve them is patently absurd. After all, there are no guarantees that Chevron will come to a deal with Maduro, who has burned the oil major badly in the past.<sup>6</sup> And even if the oil were to start flowing, it is of a very dark and dirty grade that will only exacerbate the environmental impact of using it. Furthermore, the United States does not even recognize the Maduro regime as the legitimate government of Venezuela, due to its endemic corruption, oppression of the Venezuelan

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people, and deep and inexorable ties to Cuba and Russia, who guarantee Maduro's security and tenure in office. That means that, even if he wanted closer ties with America, Maduro is in no position to pursue them.

In the very likely event that Venezuela does not prove to be a white knight, the obvious and prudent course would be to initiate a whole-scale initiative to surge U.S.

domestic production. Throughout this energy crisis, the Biden administration has insisted on coordinating with energy vulnerable consuming nations, such as India and Japan, and even at times China. But rather than limiting ourselves to defensive coordination with other energy consumers for cosmetic actions such as sporadic releases from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, the United States should be working proactively with our fellow *producing* nations not named Russia, Iran or Venezuela. Rather, we should be working with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Canada, Mexico, and Norway to ensure global markets are adequately and reliably supplied.

The Trump administration embarked in a similar effort in the summer of 2018, after the Significant Reduction Exceptions were ended on Iranian oil exports. By coordinating closely with allied producers, first and foremost Saudi Arabia with its swing capacity, the U.S. was able to meet the market for Iranian oil with barely a budge in prices. At the moment, OPEC+ is dictating production levels that are already largely committed,

so there is scant spare supply to surge to Europe. But some OPEC members have signaled a willingness to have independent discussions with the U.S. Such renewed engagement would also do useful work repairing relationships with these partners, who have been alienated by President Biden's antagonistic posture towards fossil fuel producers, and pave the way for more formal coordination to ensure the stable, plentiful flow of energy from the U.S. and our allies.

### TOWARD A LONGER-TERM VISION

Such short-term fixes, however, should be only the beginning of a systemic review of our national energy policy and initiate a new campaign to responsibly develop and foster the extraordinary natural resources with which the United States is blessed. The Biden administration

rightly points out that these steps will take time, which should only increase the urgency of starting immediately. Reviving the Keystone Pipeline would be a start, but it is only one piece in a much larger infrastructure program that would include the Mariner East pipelines and Marcus Hook Industrial Facility in Pennsylvania, for example, to provide additional natural gas to both



the domestic market and Europe. The planned expansion of additional export facilities in the Calcasieu and Sabine Passes in Louisiana, as well as in Corpus Christi and Port Arthur Texas, should be fast-tracked and protected from frivolous legal persecution to ensure more clean, reliable U.S. supply to the global natural gas market. Going forward, the moratorium on energy exploration on federal land should be ended so new resources can be developed.

Internationally, the Biden administration's self-defeating policy of prohibiting any U.S. government support for foreign fossil fuel projects<sup>7</sup> must be immediately reversed. The rumored selective exemptions now being contemplated by the White House will not be enough.<sup>8</sup> It must be fully repealed to send the clear message that we are no longer in the embarrassing position of having to beg natural gas producing allies such as Israel for increased exports to Europe – which we did less than a month after the administration publicly ended support for Israel's proposed eastern Mediterranean pipeline to Europe. Israel just announced a timely and strategic significant increase in development in its gas resources,<sup>9</sup> and the United States should be the partner of choice for these projects, not relegated to the sidelines by Biden administration policies.

Post-Brexit, Great Britain has a significant opportunity to develop its considerable North Sea oil and gas resources freed from EU regulations, which would be another critical source for Europe, and the proposed policy to shelve a "windfall tax" if industry makes the necessary investments to support this increased production would have been a welcome development had Boris Johnson not gotten cold feet due to his political woes and opted for the tax instead.<sup>10</sup> For its part, the EU is starting to reverse some damaging policies, such as the shuttering of civil nuclear plants, but these moves need to be followed by investments in expanded modern plants in the future. All of which highlights that America should be promoting projects that increase friend-

**Rather than limiting ourselves to defensive coordination with other energy consumers for cosmetic actions such as sporadic releases from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, the United States should be working proactively with our fellow producing nations not named Russia, Iran or Venezuela. Rather, we should be working with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Canada, Mexico, and Norway to ensure global markets are adequately and reliably supplied.**

ly supplies to our allies and encouraging our private industry to participate in them in the long term so they are executed safely and responsibly.

#### EYES TO THE FUTURE

The global rejection of Russia's oil in the wake of the invasion of Ukraine should be America's historic opportunity to finally take full advantage of our new status as one of the world's energy giants. The crisis has served as a much-needed wake up call for our European allies that reliance on Russian supplies is an intolerable strategic vulnerability. But rather than cozying up to tyrants in Tehran and Caracas for imported oil, the U.S. can and should reward partners and allies for their collective economic condemnation of Putin's aggression by strategically ramping up our energy exports while encouraging them to responsibly develop their own supplies.

In so doing, the United States can point the way toward a brighter, more secure future.



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## Is Europe Getting Serious about Russian Disinformation?

*Elizabeth Robbins*

The U.S. State Department's Global Engagement Center (GEC) identifies five pillars of "Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem." In declining order of visible connection to Russia, these are: (1) official government communications, (2) state-funded global messaging, (3) cultivation of proxy sources, (4) weaponization of social media, and (5) cyber-enabled disinformation.<sup>1</sup>

Russian President Vladimir Putin's propaganda and disinformation efforts across these five pillars have had substantial domestic and international effects. However, the ongoing information war between Russia and the West has been sharply intensified by Russian aggression in Ukraine, which has prompted European nations to launch efforts to suppress the Kremlin's ability to promote its point of view.

### RUSSIA'S APPROACH TO DISINFORMATION

Russia uses disinformation to justify its military aggression by claiming its actions are "defensive" and "retaliatory." The goal of these efforts is to intimidate foreign governments into inaction, create uncertainty about the correct version of events, and erode public trust in Western media, liberal democracy, and government institutions. They are tools that the Kremlin has used to great effect in the past.

GEORGIA: In 2008, Russia invaded the neighboring Republic of Georgia in order to counter Tbilisi's so-called "aggression" against two breakaway provinces, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Ethnic groups in both areas had chafed under Georgian rule since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, but neither are comprised of ethnic Russians, and both sought political autonomy rather than Russian control. However, the Kremlin was threatened by Georgia's significant overtures

toward the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the United States. Accordingly, Russia's official description of the five-day Russo-Georgia war as a "peace enforcement" operation was pure disinformation. Russia subsequently recognized the two regions as independent, and local governments under the sway of the Kremlin then expressed their intention of either being represented by the Russian Federation or joining it outright.

CRIMEA: Less visibly, in 2014, Russian disinformation created the conditions that supported the bloodless, non-traditional invasion and subsequent annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula. Russia deployed unmarked Russian special forces (known locally as "little green men") to foment a political coup and control access to Crimea's local parliament, the Supreme Council.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, that body passed a referendum—deemed illegal by a Ukrainian court—to request joining the Russian Federation. Then, in March, Crimea held a dubious referendum in which nearly 96 percent of participants voted in favor of uniting with Russia—a stunt denounced as an illegal, unconstitutional sham by Ukrainian and Western powers. Regardless, Putin then gave a Kremlin address<sup>3</sup> hailing the referendum results, and citing a Russian poll that showed 95 percent of Russian citizens believe that "Russia should protect the interests of Russians and members of other ethnic groups living in Crimea." Therefore, Putin requested that the Russian Federation "admit" (annex) the "Republic of Crimea" and the city of Sevastopol. On April 26, 2022, Putin revisited the illegal annexation of Crimea when he told UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres that "the entire problem emerged after a coup d'état staged in Ukraine in 2014... This was followed by the situation with the expression of their will by the residents of Crimea and

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Sevastopol. ... they made a decision on independence and then turned to us with a request to join the Russian Federation.”

## THE CASE OF UKRAINE

Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine reached a new low in official justifications for brutal aggression. In January, when Putin massed forces along the Ukrainian borders with Russia, Belarus, Moldova, and Crimea, Russian officials repeatedly insisted there were no plans to invade their western neighbor. The presence of 100,000 Russian troops equipped with tanks and heavy artillery was explained as a military exercise, which were expanded to land drills with Belarus and Black Sea naval drills in early February.

Russia justified the ensuing February 24th invasion by making at least four false claims across all five pillars:

**Russia uses disinformation to justify its military aggression by claiming its actions are “defensive” and “retaliatory.” The goal of these efforts is to intimidate foreign governments into inaction, create uncertainty about the correct version of events, and erode public trust in Western media, liberal democracy, and government institutions. They are tools that the Kremlin has used to great effect in the past.**

1. Ukrainians are actually Russians. In July 2021, Putin published an essay<sup>4</sup> entitled “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians.” He claimed that Russians and Ukrainians are “one people—a single whole” and “true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia.” However, the truth is that Ukraine is a much older civilization than Russia, and Ukraine is a fully sovereign nation.

2. Ukraine requires de-Nazification, disarmament,

and liberation. In the days leading up to the invasion, Russian state media ran disinformation “false flag” videos that appeared to show Ukrainian forces attacking Russia. Putin expanded on this justification by stating: “The purpose of this operation is to protect people who, for eight years now, have been facing humiliation and genocide perpetrated by the Kiev regime. To this end, we will seek to demilitarize and deNazify Ukraine, as well as bring to trial those who perpetrated numerous bloody crimes against civilians, including against citizens of the Russian Federation.”<sup>5</sup>

3. NATO provoked Russia. On February 24th, Putin explicitly blamed the “fundamental threat” of “eastward expansion of NATO, which is moving its military infrastructure ever closer to the Russian border” for his decision to move militarily against Ukraine. He continued, “Those who aspire to global dominance have publicly designated Russia as their enemy. They did so with impunity. Make no mistake, they had no reason to act this way.”<sup>6</sup>

4. It’s not a war. On February 24th, Putin ordered “a special military operation” against Ukraine<sup>7</sup> – careful language similar to his previous use of “counterterrorism operation” in Chechnya, or Russia’s offer of “fraternal assistance” by “a limited contingent of troops” to Afghanistan. Two days later, Russia’s media regulator (*Roskomnadzor*) accused media outlets of “inaccurate information” and ordered the deletion of coverage that used the terms “invasion,” “assault,” or “war.” Further, it began requiring exclusive use of official sources.

Despite these narratives, most in the West rightly view Ukraine as the victim of Russian aggression. Putin’s explanations for why he invaded are not satisfactory, nor can he explain why his forces are committing war crimes or failing to bring the conflict to a conclusion.

As the war has progressed, Russia has made additional false claims, including:

Russian atrocities are fake news. Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Maria Zakharova gave a March 17th press conference alleging that NATO is disseminating fake videos of atrocities in Ukraine. Further, she said that the Mariupol theater bombing is



a “lie” and “Russian forces don’t bomb cities and everybody is well aware of that.”<sup>9</sup> Subsequently, Russian authorities claimed that war crimes have been staged or committed by Ukrainians as a provocation, such as the massacre of Bucha civilians that emerged on April 1st.<sup>10</sup> These accounts have been easily debunked through Western media reports, Ukrainian social media, and satellite images.

Ukrainians are losing nerve. Soon after the invasion, Russian State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin told Russian state media that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had fled Ukraine with his entourage.<sup>11</sup> As another example, on March 16th, hackers posted a deepfake (manipulated with artificial intelligence) video on a Ukrainian news website and social media that appeared to show Zelenskyy announcing the surrender of Ukraine.<sup>12</sup> Another faked social media post spread by Russian websites purports to show Zelenskyy’s teenage daughter calling her father a Nazi and murderer.<sup>13</sup>

### THE EUROPEAN RESPONSE

European countries have taken action individually and collectively to curb Russia’s digital access to their citizens. In May 2021, the European Council discussed strengthening the Union’s and Member States’ ability to counter hybrid threats, including disinformation, to counter foreign interference and influence operations.<sup>14</sup> This and other discussions have crystallized a range of actions, some already taken and some still notional, which can cumulatively push back on Russia’s “fake news” offensive in the Eurozone.

Banning *RT* and *Sputnik*: *RT* (previously *Russia Today*) and *Sputnik* are a global network of state-funded, state-directed channels that “play an important role within Russia’s disinformation and propaganda ecosystem,” according to the U.S. State Department.<sup>15</sup> In 2012, *RT* editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan helpfully admitted that the network was “conducting the information war... against the entire Western world.”<sup>16</sup> Maxine Audient, author of a book about *RT*, has noted that content is anti-Western and “extremely one-sided, even manipulative” in its bias toward the Russian government.<sup>16</sup>

**The best defense is a strong offense. The EU’s most effective means to resist Russian disinformation is to ensure its citizens have access to a wide range of digital media reporting on Ukraine, and accurate statements from their government leaders.**

On February 3, 2022, Germany banned *RT Deutsch* over a license dispute. In retribution, Russia announced that *Deutsche Welle* would be banned from operating in Russia.<sup>18</sup> While Germany’s stated reason was legal rather than editorial, Russia’s tit-for-tat response likely gave pause to other countries considering similar actions but seeking to maintain access within Russia.

However, on February 24th, Poland announced that it too would ban *RT*, *RT Documentary*, *RTR Planeta*, *Soyuz TV*, and *Russija 24* “in connection with the commencement of hostilities by the Russian Federation in Ukraine, due to security and defense issues of the Republic of Poland.”<sup>19</sup> And on February 27th, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced a ban on “the Kremlin’s media machine in the EU.” She said that “the state-owned *Russia Today* and *Sputnik*, and their subsidiaries, will no longer be able to spread their lies to justify Putin’s war,” and that the EU was “developing tools to ban their toxic and harmful disinformation in Europe.”<sup>20</sup> Wide-ranging sanctions on the distribution of content took effect on March 2nd, with officials acknowledging the possibility of “leakage” reaching European viewers on other channels, such as online venues and social media.

Further, UK media regulator Ofcom revoked *RT UK*’s broadcasting license on March 18th for breach of its impartiality rules.<sup>21</sup> And the Russian embassy in the UK reserved the right “to respond respectively with regard to the activity of British media in Russia.”<sup>22</sup>

Landmark EU Legislation: In March and April, EU officials finalized an agreement in principle on two legislative initiatives setting rules governing digital



services in the EU – the Digital Markets Act (DMA) and the Digital Services Act (DSA).<sup>23</sup> Both are expected to be implemented in mid-2023 or early 2024. The laws will require big tech companies with more than 45 million users—such as Google, Meta, Amazon, YouTube, and TikTok—to regulate their platforms more strictly. The DSA will require companies to provide users easier ways to flag problems while being more transparent and accountable for disinformation, hate speech, incitement to violence, deceptive techniques, and other harmful content on their platforms.

Already, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube have taken steps to address Russian disinformation by identifying Russian state media accounts to their users, a tactic with only mixed success given that content can be posted to VPNs and proxy sites. In addition, Meta restricted the Facebook accounts of four Russian media outlets on February 24th, resulting in *Roskomnadzor* admonishing it and restricting traffic.<sup>24</sup>

Tracking China's Coverage: The People's Republic of China has invested nearly 3 billion Euros (\$3.16 billion) into European media firms over the past 10 years,<sup>25</sup> which could present indirect challenges in countering Russian disinformation. China's state-controlled media have enthusiastically amplified Russia's official messaging on the war, to include calling it a "special military operation" and alleging that reports of Russian

atrocities in Mariupol and Bucha are hoaxes. Chinese coverage has focused on Russian aid, avoiding mention of civilian casualties or international condemnation of Russia. Chinese reporters have even embedded into Russian military units.

However, China's sympathetic and false coverage is evolving as the war drags on, jeopardizing global food security and the Chinese economy. CCTV began mentioning civilian casualties from Russian attacks in the third week of the war, and Xinhua published an extensive April 30th interview with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba in which he strongly criticized the Kremlin.<sup>26</sup>

The EU's 2021 trade deal with China did not rectify discrepancies in access rights to media and news operations between European and Chinese investors.<sup>27</sup> The degree to which European firms with Chinese backing are influenced and constrained in their operation by their Chinese owners is unknown, but this dynamic illustrates that there are many channels through which Russia can promote its false war narrative.

Promoting truth: The best defense is a strong offense. The EU's most effective means to resist Russian disinformation is to ensure its citizens have access to a wide range of digital media reporting on Ukraine, and accurate statements from their government leaders.

Many European outlets have used their broad access to Ukraine to provide a steady stream of first-hand witness accounts of the situation on the ground there. Social media posts from Ukrainian citizens have offered compelling insights into the grueling conditions they must endure, including damaged homes and injured or dead loved ones. Russian soldiers themselves have foolishly offered their own social media fodder, such as streaming live on TikTok, with predictably bad results for them. European media have also broadly reported the content and imagery of President Zelenskyy's frequent, relatable social media posts and press conferences, as well as the graphic videos he has screened to the U.S. Congress and United Nations.

Reaching Russians: Yet, since the Russian people are a principal target of Kremlin

**On February 27th, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced a ban on "the Kremlin's media machine in the EU." She said that "the state-owned Russia Today and Sputnik, and their subsidiaries, will no longer be able to spread their lies to justify Putin's war," and that the EU was "developing tools to ban their toxic and harmful disinformation in Europe."**



disinformation, Europe must not only defend itself but also push the truth into Russia. For its part, Moscow has been increasingly intolerant of western reporting. In August 2021, the Kremlin expelled the BBC's Russia correspondent after 20 years of service, reportedly in retaliation for Russian journalists not receiving visas from the UK.<sup>28</sup> Subsequently, in November 2021, it also expelled the Russia correspondent for the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant*, ostensibly for "administrative violations."

The few remaining independent Russian media outlets are also being silenced. One week into the offensive, two independent Russian broadcasters were forced to cease operations—the radio station *Echo of Moscow* was "liquidated" by its board while the television station TV Rain suspended operations indefinitely. In early March, Russia enacted a law banning "fake" news about the military with violators facing up to 15-year jail terms, for example, for describing the conflict as a war. And on March 28th, the *Novaya Gazeta* newspaper, an independent voice for the last 29 years, suspended operations after *Roskomnadzor* gave it a second warning.

Online, a digital iron curtain has left Russians unaware of what is really happening in Ukraine. More than one thousand foreign websites and social media have been restricted, leaving official state broadcast media as the main source of news. Russia's casualties, including the loss of a ship, have been unreported, underreported, or dismissed.<sup>30</sup> Savvy Russians are turning to virtual private networks (VPNs) by the hundreds of thousands to break through the curtain for news and entertainment.<sup>31</sup>

The EU should make every effort to bolster the technical and other means for Russian citizens to hear outside voices. For example, an independent version of the *Novaya Gazeta* named *Novaya Gazeta Europe* was started in Riga, Latvia, with a goal of reaching both domestic and international audiences in both Russian and English.

### EUROPE IS LEADING

Russia has failed to frame its war with Ukraine in a way that resonates with the European public, and EU citizens have access to independent media

reports, social media, and government messaging to understand the terrible reality of this unnecessary and brutal war. Despite the Kremlin's ceaseless efforts, no amount of Russian disinformation can counter this basic truth. Moving forward, the EU has made significant progress in attempting to better regulate online content available to its citizens and counter the full range of disinformation.

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## For Ukraine, Necessity Is the Mother of Invention

*Sydney Duckor*

Russia's current war against Ukraine is inherently asymmetric in nature. Moscow clearly possesses more firepower and personnel than does Kyiv. Yet, close to half-a-year since the start of the conflict, Ukraine has managed to hold its own against Russia's superior military might. It has done so in part because its battlefield prowess has been augmented by new tactics and non-kinetic forms of warfare—capabilities that, with Western support, have helped Ukraine stand its ground.

### CYBER OPERATIONS

Cyber operations are a common tactic of hybrid warfare and have historically been used by Russia against its adversaries, especially Ukraine. As a result, in the current conflict, Ukraine and its allies have made concerted efforts to secure cyberspace and subvert Russia's efforts in that domain. Anti-Russia cyber operations, carried out by Kyiv and its supporters in the West, can be observed at both the state and non-state levels, and have been both preventative and retaliatory in nature.

As one of its primary measures, Ukraine erected a volunteer-based "IT Army"—the first of its kind.<sup>1</sup> The pro-Ukrainian IT Army forces organized themselves on Telegram, an encrypted messaging service used by both Ukrainians and Russians. Members of the IT Army were told to conduct distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks against Russian state natural gas giant Gazprom, as well as against banks, news websites, and official government websites.

The IT Army has carried out a number of successful missions, including releasing a file<sup>2</sup> containing the names, addresses, phone numbers, and passport numbers of over 100,000 Russian soldiers, as well as preventing sophisticated cyber attacks on the Ukrainian power grid.<sup>3</sup> In one of its most strategically

consequential feats, Ukraine jammed Russia's wireless military-communication technology<sup>4</sup> and disabled 3G services, forcing Russians off secure communication platforms.

The United States and other actors have pitched in as well, preventatively removing malware to protect against Russian cyberattacks.<sup>5</sup> The malware, had it not been removed, would have allowed Russian military intelligence to access private computers and exploit them for surveillance or even destructive attacks. Notorious hacker group Anonymous also joined the fray, declaring war on Russia<sup>6</sup> and subsequently leaking the database of Roskomnadzor, Russia's state censor, as well as hacking RuTube, a popular Russian video platform. The latter operation shed light on RuTube's invasive monitoring of users and its cooperation with the FSB (Russia's internal security service) thereby providing Ukraine with intelligence to exploit in its information operations.

Various hackers have also used cyber breaches to make political statements. Russia's TV and online platforms were hacked on Victory Day (Russia's celebration of the Soviet Union's defeat of Nazi forces) to display anti-war messages,<sup>7</sup> while hacktivists also breached the online GPS of Putin's superyacht, changing its call sign to "anonymo" and its destination to "FKPTN."<sup>8</sup> Efforts such as these serve a different purpose than do DDoS or attacks that damage infrastructure. They raise awareness, boost morale, and even double as psychological operations. And Ukrainian cyber operations have evolved in nature since the start of the war. Crucially, these successful attacks against Moscow help to hammer home another point: that Russia is not untouchable, and neither is its cyberspace.



## INFORMATION OPERATIONS

Information operations have been at the crux of Kyiv's strategy throughout its contemporary relationship with Russia, and are especially prevalent today. Through them, Ukraine is seeking to control the narrative surrounding the war. So far, it is succeeding.

In its foreign policy, Moscow has historically relied on a predictable disinformation cycle – one designed to create a pretext for its actions and deny responsibility for its unethical behavior. Consequently, leading up to the war, Washington, London, and several other European allies worked closely with Ukrainian officials to circulate intelligence tailored to preempt Moscow's propaganda. The West's declassification campaign outlined, in detail, how Russia would attempt to justify its invasion, effectively “prebunking” any Russian attempts at denial and deception. The goal of releasing this intelligence was not to stop the attack from happening. Rather, it was to prime the global population for the false narratives that Russia would inevitably push. Additionally, it forced Russian forces to delay the invasion, buying Ukraine time to stockpile weapons and its allies time to put together several robust sanction packages.

Repetition and sheer volume made the West's declassification strategy successful in combatting Russia's narratives. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, U.S. President Joe Biden, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, and many other high profile leaders all took pains to publicize Moscow's plans. The Ukrainian Defense Ministry, for instance, disclosed materials dating back a month prior to the invasion that indicated Putin's premeditated plans, thereby chipping away at claims that his intentions were not preconceived.<sup>9</sup>

The goal of this effort is not solely to undermine Russian messaging. Ukrainian information operations have also focused on highlighting Moscow's incompetence on the battlefield and its war crimes against civilians. Ukraine's security service and civilian sleuths intercepted and released communications between Russian military members that detail just how poorly Russian operations were being conducted. On one of many intercepted calls,<sup>10</sup> a soldier can be heard complaining of starvation, poor logistical planning, and even detailing war crimes he witnessed. Other recordings contain audio of soldiers admitting to the atrocities they

themselves committed. These leaks serve a strategic purpose: It is harder to maintain that you are liberating Ukrainian civilians from Nazis when recordings confirm that your soldiers are murdering and assaulting children. By stringing together declassified intelligence, social media content, satellite imagery, metadata, and other information found on the internet, Kyiv and its sympathizers are able to project the reality of what is happening on the battlefield.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS

The power of morale cannot be underestimated as a determinant in the outcome of war. So, too, in the current conflict, psychological operations have come to be relied upon by the Ukrainian side as it seeks to demoralize Russian troops, reinforce its own fighting spirit, and potentially sway Russian sentiment toward their cause. Ukrainians have undoubtedly excelled in this domain.

Kyiv's “hearts and minds” campaign taps into feelings of apprehension among some Russian soldiers. Psychological operations aim to drum up international support and win the backing of people globally. To do so, Ukrainians and pro-Ukrainian forces have popularized heroic Ukrainian war stories, most notably, the tale of the soldiers of Snake Island and the exploits of the “Ghost of Kyiv.” Ukrainians have effectively turned these tales, exaggerated or not, into culturally iconic and inspirational battle cries. The final words of the soldiers of Snake Island can now be found throughout pop culture, on apparel being sold for charity, and on roads all over Ukraine. The spread of these stories has boosted morale among Ukrainian troops and united others across the world behind the Ukrainian cause.

Additional ways in which Kyiv has waged psychological warfare on invading forces is by altering traffic signs to intentionally confuse Russian soldiers. On one occasion, troops were mocked and asked if they need a “tow back to Russia” after their tank broke down.<sup>11</sup> Russian soldiers were also greeted with skulls and coffin graphics on billboards as they attempted to storm the country. All of this ridicule has been subsequently uploaded to social media sites for the world to see. Ukrainian service members also have used facial recognition to identify Russian casualties and prisoners of war, after which Ukrainian fighters called their families in order to inform them.<sup>12</sup> These operations have the cumulative



**Ukrainian information operations focused on highlighting Moscow's incompetence on the battlefield and its war crimes against civilians. Ukraine's security service and civilian sleuths intercepted and released communications between Russian military members that detail just how poorly Russian operations were transpiring.**

effect of sending a clear message to Russian soldiers that they are not welcome in Ukrainian territory. When already facing low morale, the constant hostile environment Ukrainians have established for Russian forces becomes even more effective at undermining Russian resolve.

Lastly, pro-Ukrainian civilians from many countries have worked to highlight the incompetence of Russian troops. Doing so not only serves as a method of countering disinformation; it also works to humiliate and undermine confidence in Russian leadership. Journalists and even lay Twitter users have posted graphics<sup>13</sup> detailing the number of troops, tanks, aircraft, and other equipment lost by the Kremlin as a way of exposing Moscow's failures. There exist a plethora of media posts, such as "Russia's 'Amazing Incompetence' in Ukraine,"<sup>14</sup> which (though in some instances made purely for comedic value) work to sway public opinion. And as Russia's incompetence has been repeatedly ridiculed, a cultural shift has occurred and Russia is now seen as a far less formidable opponent.

#### COMMERCIAL TECHNOLOGY USE

Although Moscow undoubtedly has a more daunting military arsenal, Kyiv has fought back with several new and innovative commercial technologies that have helped level the playing field between the two sides.

To meet the demand for essential supplies, for instance, Ukrainians have employed commercial 3D printers given to them by Polish 3D printing firm Sygnis.<sup>15</sup>

These printers, relatively compact, versatile, and adaptable, are providing a massive advantage in wartime. As Russians sabotage supply and delivery routes, 3D printing has emerged as a partial solution to logistical complications for the Ukrainian side.

Ukrainians are innovating in their exploitation of existing technological capabilities as well. In what has by now become a famous episode, one Ukrainian man used stolen Apple AirPods to track the movement of Russian troops. The man then flagged the location for Ukrainian intelligence services, allowing Ukrainian forces to pinpoint the location of the Russian soldier that took them—as well as his battalion.<sup>16</sup> That information was then used to corroborate projections about new Russian encroachment on the Donbas.

Similarly, cell phone subscriptions are being used to uncover the whereabouts of Russian soldiers by triangulating roaming signals as they connect to Ukraine's cellular network.<sup>17</sup> Due to the fact that Russians resorted to using cell phones after their communications systems broke down, crippling their operational security, the West has been able to create maps detailing troop positioning. Mistakes with communications have also resulted in the death of several generals in the Russian military.

The breakdown in Russian operations resulting from poor communication tactics demonstrates the importance of resilient and secure communications. It draws a sharp contrast to the success that Ukraine has had with its communication systems. Kyiv now boasts Starlink terminal systems, hailed by one soldier as having "changed the war in Ukraine's favor."<sup>18</sup> Thousands of Starlink terminals are helping keep the internet online in combat zones and have several other advantages. According to Elon Musk, Starlink is preferable in this conflict because the terminals have a reduced heat signature and lengthier lifespan. Additionally, Starlink is more easily portable than the alternative, and can even maintain a signal while on a moving vehicle. These modifications mean that Starlink still functions in poorly connected rural areas when operating drones, a helpful feature now that Ukraine's aerial reconnaissance team uses commercial octocopter drones to carry out precision strikes on targets hiding in villages at night. The willingness of Kyiv to embrace cutting-edge commercial technology provided by its benefactors is another reason for its accomplishments.





## THE UKRAINIAN EXAMPLE

As the war wages on, the world is witnessing an evolution in 21st-century battle tactics, including an increased emphasis on cyber, information- and psychological operations, and the importance of adaptable commercial technology. Though outnumbered and outgunned, Ukrainians have brought formidable force to bear. Through its efforts, Kyiv has become an important test case of how hybrid and asymmetric warfare tactics can help level the playing field for smaller states on the modern battlefield.

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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The opinions expressed in the *Defense Dossier* (ISSN 2165-1841) are those of the author(s) alone and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the American Foreign Policy Council.

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