

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND ESTONIA 2022



Estonian Foreign
Intelligence Service

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FOREWORD

DEAR READER,

Troubled times whet the thirst for information that would introduce clarity to the inevitably noisy context of public information. The Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service's seventh annual report strives to meet this goal. We discuss topics we consider important from the point of view of public awareness in Estonia as of the end of 2021.

For the Foreign Intelligence Service, the keywords of 2021 were the Russian military exercise Zapad and escalation in the direction of Ukraine, as well as the hybrid attack staged by the Belarusian regime on NATO's eastern border.

As of the beginning of 2022, our focus remains on the Kremlin's aggression against Ukraine, which has led to the sharpest confrontation with the West in decades and could also lead to Russia exerting pressure elsewhere in the coming months. Although a direct military offensive against Estonia and the other Baltic states is unlikely this year, various types of hybrid crises are probable. We might also see a renewed attempt to weaponize refugees. The presence of Russian forces in Belarus is worthy of particular attention.

Once again, we also focus on China. The unprecedented Chinese reprisal against Lithuania in 2021 points to China's increasingly aggressive foreign policy in our region. In cooperation with the governments and security services of other democratic nations, we must make sure to have a comprehensive assessment of Beijing's ambitions.

One of the main tasks of an intelligence agency is providing the leadership of the country with an early warning of crises. In addition, the Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service provides analysis of broader international developments in diplomacy, energy, influence operations and other areas and assesses their impact on national security. Intelligence agencies' reports are based on information it has gathered and ideally also validated. While speculation can be intellectually stimulating and, in some cases, necessary, it is not the reason why governments have intelligence agencies. There might be countries where governments make decisions based on advice from fortune tellers or crystal balls but I can assure you the Republic of Estonia is not one of them. Here I would like to praise our entire workforce who have done an exceptional job as a team to supply Estonia's leadership with due information and analysis required to make important decisions.

The Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service celebrates its 30th anniversary this year. First established in late 1992 as the Information Service, a unit working from a single office space in Tallinn, it has grown into an intelligence agency with considerable resources and expertise. The mission is to protect Estonia against external security threats. In meeting this challenge, we are not alone, working closely with national and numerous international partner services on a daily basis.

Bravely onward toward the next decades! *Unguibus et rostro* – with talons and beak!

Mikk Marran
Director General of the Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service
Tallinn, 31 January 2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Russia is ready to begin a full-scale military attack on Ukraine. The escalation taking place on Ukraine's borders deteriorates the security of Europe as a whole and demonstrates how the threat of military action has become the primary tool in Russia's foreign policy toolbox. Estonia must prepare for sustained military pressure from Russia. *Read more in chapter 1.1.*
2. The situation in Ukraine today shows the how important Ukraine is in Russian foreign policy thinking. Without Ukraine, Russia's imperial ambitions fall apart. Russia is particularly perturbed by Ukraine's success in crafting a national identity. *Read more in chapter 2.2.*
3. The strategic military exercise Zapad 2021 fits into a pattern whereby the Russian Armed Forces use lessons learned to form new units in the Western strategic direction. *Read more in chapter 1.2.*
4. Intelligence centres of Russian military intelligence (GRU) conduct human intelligence from the territory of Russia, while their area of responsibility extends to Western Europe. Meanwhile, cyber espionage operations conducted by the Russian special services have proved themselves as a well-established and effective way to supply Russian leadership with information on the West's intentions. *Read more in chapters 1.3 and 1.4.*
5. The hybrid attack orchestrated by Belarus is an attempt by Lukashenka to legitimize himself in the eyes of the West using migrants as a weapon, simultaneously serving Russia's interests. In Moldova, Russia is working to restore its geopolitical position and pressure the pro-Western government using energy. *Read more in chapters 2.3 and 2.4.*
6. Russia exploits climate policy as a "soft" subject to positively engage with the West that is otherwise hostile toward it. The reality betrays clear intent to advance Russia's interests alone. *Read more in chapter 2.5.*
7. Supported by overt and covert influence operations, Russia's vaccine diplomacy continued in 2021 with some setbacks. *Read more in chapter 2.6.*
8. The growth of repressions and outright bans in Russian domestic policy allow for more and more parallels with the Soviet Union. The State Duma elections in September 2021 were extensively manipulated. Sanctions against Russia work within the limitations set when they were imposed. The effect of sanctions is demonstrated by the actions of GAZ Group when under the threat of sanctions. *Read more in chapter 3.*
9. Like Russia, China also attempted to use its COVID-19 vaccine to further its geopolitical ambitions. To soften its public image, China has reined in its wolf warrior diplomacy. The cooperation between China and Russia is not as close and friendly as the parties would have it seem. *Read more in chapter 4.*
10. The threat of terrorism in Europe could increase with breeding grounds in Africa and Afghanistan. Radicals already in Europe pose a separate source of danger. Illegal migration from Afghanistan might also increase due to events there, particularly via the Eastern Mediterranean route. *Read more in chapter 5.*



CHAPTER 1

RUSSIAN ARMED FORCES

8

RUSSIA IS READY FOR WAR

Military pressure and threats of war have become key foreign policy tools for Russia.

Russian forces concentrated on the Ukrainian border pose an immediate threat to Ukraine and an ultimatum to the West.

By the second half of February 2022, Russia has created the conditions and capabilities necessary to launch a large-scale military offensive against Ukraine if the Russian leadership so decides.

In autumn 2021 and winter 2022, Russia mobilised 150,000 men on the Ukrainian border, deploying units and capabilities from all its military districts, including the Far East, and all twelve armies. This is the single largest military build-up by Russia in the past 30 years.

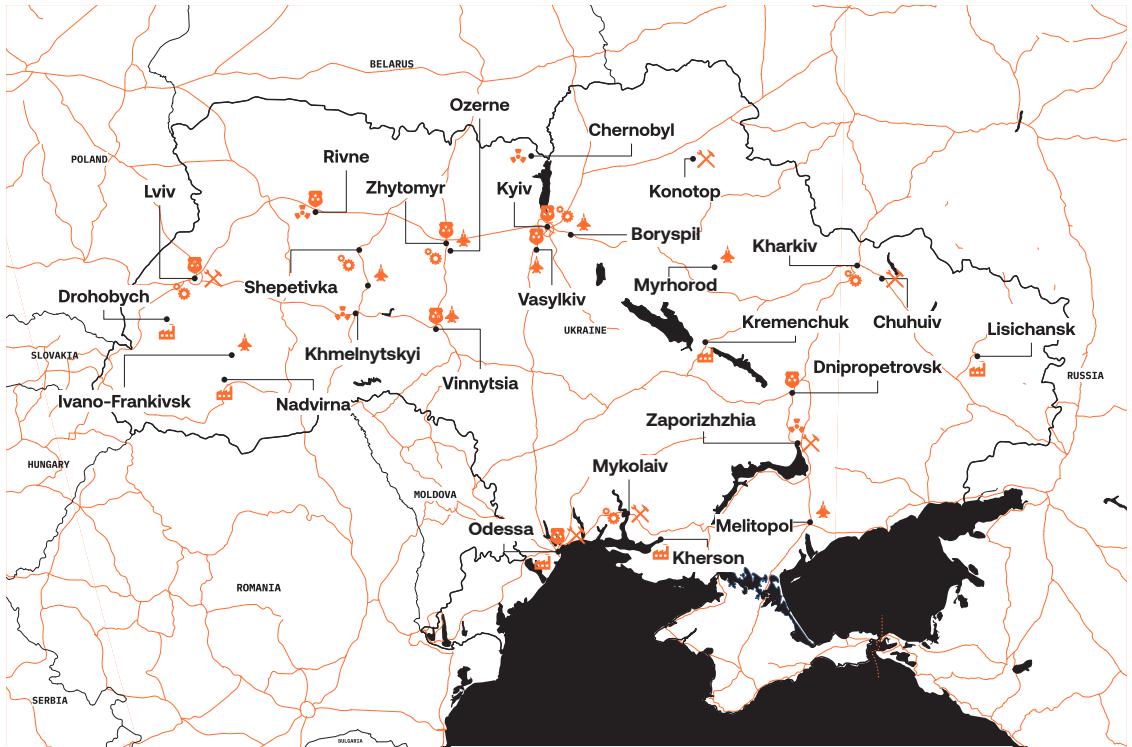
Russia's deployment along the Ukrainian border is the single largest military build-up by Russia in the past 30 years.







In addition to the three motor rifle divisions, one airborne division and one naval infantry brigade permanently deployed in the region, Russia moved more than 60 motor rifle and tank battalions, some ten Iskander missile battalions and more than 30 artillery and rocket artillery battalions to the border with Ukraine. Russia has set up full logistic support for the force groups, bringing in additional command and rear units and forward-deploying munitions in the

Ukrainian direction. The contingent is supported by a regionally dominant air force and Russia's Black Sea Fleet, equipped with Kalibr missiles. Winter 2021-22 saw a significant upswing in the activities of Russian special services and Spetsnaz units against strategically important targets in Ukraine.

Russia deployed some 20,000 troops to Belarus as part of its military preparations. A joint exercise, Soyuznaya Reshimost (Allied Resolve) 2022, was organised to justify, or provide a cover for, deploying forces to the neighbouring country. In addition to manoeuvre units, Iskander missile systems and S-400 anti-aircraft systems were also deployed to Belarus for the first time. Units from three airborne divisions and from all airborne brigades arrived in Belarus. In the future, Russia may continue to maintain a rotating force group on Belarusian territory. This would harm the wider security situation in the Baltic Sea region and for NATO, reducing the preparation time for an attack against the Baltic states.

Should Russia achieve its goals in Ukraine, political and military pressure on the Baltic states could increase.



-  Armed Forces headquarters
-  Air base
-  Aircraft repair factory
-  Armoured vehicles repair factory
-  Oil refinery
-  Nuclear power plant

Targets in Ukraine compiled by Russian intelligence that, if neutralised, can interfere with the command, recovery, and supply of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and Ukraine's energy supply. Russian intelligence also has similar lists for other European countries.

In our assessment, the Russian Armed Forces are ready to embark on a full-scale military operation against Ukraine from the second half of February. Once military readiness has been achieved, only a political decision is required to launch the operation. If Russia chooses war, the level of military threat across Europe will rise. Although war in Ukraine would not pose an immediate military threat to Estonia or NATO, Russia's political and military pressure on the Baltic states could increase in the long term should Russia achieve diplomatic and/or military success on the Ukraine issue. Even if Russia's leadership can be persuaded to desist from military aggression, Estonia and other Western countries must prepare for increasingly sustained military pressure from Russia – direct threats of war have become an integral part of the foreign policy of Putin's Russia over the past year.

EXERCISE ZAPAD 2017 VERSUS ZAPAD 2021

Russia's military capabilities and readiness continue to grow.

The aim of the Zapad exercises is to prepare for a conflict with NATO.

During Zapad 2021, Russia practised the reinforcement of the Kaliningrad Oblast in more detail than ever before.

In 2021, Russia conducted another major strategic exercise in the Zapad series. This exercise, aimed at the western strategic direction, takes place every four years – the previous one having occurred in 2017.

Zapad 2021 was the largest exercise in the series to date. While Zapad 2017 involved an estimated 100,000 troops, Zapad 2021 involved a total of 200,000 troops, 250 aircraft and 760 pieces of equipment, including 290 tanks, 240 weapon systems and 65 warships. According to the Russian Chief of the General Staff, Valery Gerasimov, the exercise held on 13 September 2021 at the Mulino military training area alone involved 20,000 troops, which already exceeds the threshold for observation (13,000) stipulated in the Vienna Document.

Zapad 2021 constituted the largest Zapad exercise to date, with approximately 200,000 troops participating.

The overall scenario was likely not very different from previous exercises in the western direction. There are concrete indications that NATO was still the main adversary. In addition to the Baltic Sea region, the exercise again had an important focus on the northern direction and the Barents Sea.

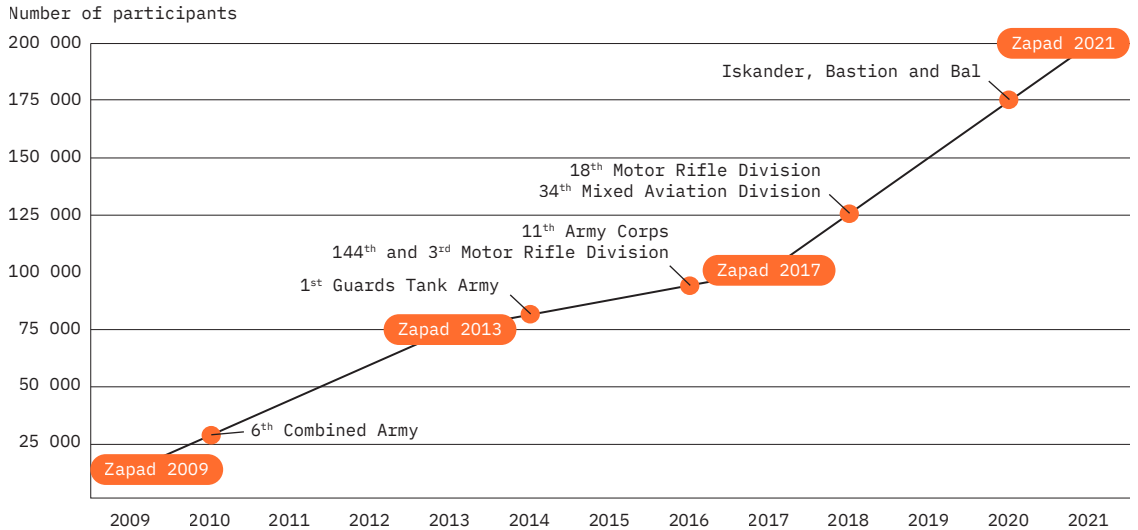
Unlike the Zapad 2017 exercise, this time, Russia did not bring additional troops from other regions to the military training areas along the Estonian border, and the most conspicuous part of the exercise took place at the Mulino training area in the Nizhny Novgorod Oblast. However, it would be a mistake to say that Russia moved the exercise further away from NATO's borders, as Zapad 2021 also took place on the Lithuanian border in the Kaliningrad Oblast, on the Polish border in Belarus, and the Norwegian border in the Kola Peninsula and the Barents Sea. An important airborne exercise also occurred near Estonia at the Strugi Krasnye military training range.

Russia's military capability and readiness continue to show an upward trend. The scale of the Zapad exercise has grown since 2009.

Zapad 2021 showed that Russia's military capability and readiness are still on an upward trajectory, with the exercise scale steadily increasing since 2009. Following the Zapad exercises, new formations have been created in the Russian Armed Forces, likely based on the lessons learned from the exercises. More and more of the prescribed tactical actions are practised in each subsequent exercise, in greater detail and on actual terrain. For example, in 2021, a large-scale night-time air-

borne assault was practised, and Iskander tactical missiles were fired from several regions simultaneously. This was due to the broader deployment of new armaments and equipment and the year-on-year improvement in combat and transport equipment readiness.

Russia's increasing military capability in the Western strategic direction 2009-2021



Exercise "Zapad 2009" took place in 2009, with the participation of approximately 15,000 troops from the Russian armed forces. Foreign countries were not involved in the exercise and most of the exercise was conducted on maps.

The 6th Combined Army was formed in 2010, before that it had existed as a reserve formation. Starting from 2010, the 6th Army has been an active formation, located also in the Leningrad and Pskov oblasts bordering Estonia.

Exercise "Zapad 2013" was conducted in 2013, with the participation of approximately 75,000 troops from the Russian Armed Forces. The foreign countries participating in the exercise included Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

In 2014, the 1st Guards Tank Army was re-established, located in the Moscow area. The tank army is an offensive formation and the only tank army within the composition of the Russian Armed Forces.

In 2016, the 11th Army Corps was formed in the Kaliningrad oblast, the 144th Motor Rifle Division and the 3rd Motor Rifle Division were re-established under the 20th Combined Army, located in the direction of Ukraine.

Exercise "Zapad 2017" was conducted in 2017, with the participation of approximately 100,000 troops from the Russian Armed Forces. Belarusian Armed Forces were involved to a considerable extent both before and during the exercise.

In 2018, the 18th Motor Rifle Division and the 34th Mixed Aviation Division were formed in the Kaliningrad oblast. In 2019, the rearmament of the army missile brigades with Iskander missile systems (SS-26 Stone) was completed, and coastal defence units started using coastal defence missile systems Bastion (SSC-5 Stooge) and Bal (SSC-6 Sennight).

Exercise "Zapad 2021" was conducted in 2021, with the participation of approximately 200,000 troops from the Russian armed forces according to Russia. Foreign countries participating in the exercise included Belarus, India, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan, while Vietnam, China, Uzbekistan, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka attended as observers.

In 2021, the reinforcement of the Kaliningrad Oblast with additional units was practised in more detail than ever before. Approximately 2,000 marines with landing craft and combat equipment were brought into the region. In addition, 900 troops from the 1st Guards Tank Army were flown to the Kaliningrad Oblast in August to receive combat equipment from local depots and to form additional battle groups on the ground. This deployment was likely a test of the speed of the mobilisation system and the creation of reserve units.

In 2021, more countries participated in the exercise than ever before. While Zapad was mainly a joint Russian-Belarusian exercise in the past, another six countries participated



Russia's president and the commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces Vladimir Putin watching Zapad 2021 through a window, accompanied by the minister of defence Sergei Shoigu and the chief of the general staff Valery Gerassimov.

Source: Alexei Druzhinin /AP

with units of their own (Belarus, India, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan), and six more countries participated as observers (Vietnam, China, Uzbekistan, Myanmar, Pakistan and Sri Lanka). Involving other countries allows Russia to show that it is not an isolated pariah state and that Russia has strong military cooperation with many other nations. However, while these other nations participate in the exercise, it mostly remains on the military-diplomatic level; Russia likely only shares operational plans and substantive cooperation with the Belarusian Armed Forces. Foreign nations likely also utilise a customised scenario for the exercise, which differs from the scenario used by the Russian Armed Forces.

If there are no changes in the current cycle of strategic exercises, the next Zapad will likely take place in 2025. Before that, a joint Russian-Belarusian exercise, Union Shield, Shchit Soyuzu 2023, is expected to take place in our region.

If there are no changes in the current cycle of strategic exercises, the next Zapad will likely take place in 2025. Before that, a joint Russian-Belarusian exercise, Union Shield, Shchit Soyuzu 2023, is expected to take place in our region. Next year, the Vostok 2022 military exercise will probably focus on the Far East. Previous Vostok exercises have shown that the Russian Armed Forces also use that opportunity to practise activities in the western strategic direction.

It is likely that during Vostok 2022 the Russian Armed Forces will be active in all strategic directions. While they maintained a low profile in the western direction during Zapad 2021 for political reasons, things may be different in 2022.

In our assessment Zapad will remain a series of exercises where Russia trains for war against NATO. The formation of new units after previous Zapad exercises confirms the perception that the Russian Armed Forces consider the western direction a priority and are devoting resources to it, using the experience and information obtained during the exercises.

GRU INTELLIGENCE CENTRES

GRU intelligence centres recruit agents in foreign countries to prepare Russian military operations.

The GRU's intelligence centres do not only work against countries bordering Russia but also gather information on other European nations.

The GRU's intelligence centres recruit people with access to classified information - but also ordinary citizens - to have them observe sites of interest to the GRU or carry out other more mundane tasks.

Russian military intelligence, known as the GRU (*Glavnoye (Razvedyvatelnoye) Upravlenie Generalnogo Shtaba Vooruzhennykh Sil RF*), collects information for Russia's political and military leadership on countries and alliances of countries that Russia considers its adversaries or likely adversaries. One of the distinctive features of Russian military intelligence compared with its counterparts in other countries is that, in addition to military intelligence, it also gathers information on the target countries' and regions' economy, politics, technology and ecology. Different intelligence disciplines and working methods are used to gather intelligence.

The GRU spies on countries Russia considers its adversaries.

Like other Russian special services, the GRU conducts intelligence operations against foreign countries both on the territory of the target country and on Russia's own soil (known as "intelligence from the territory"). In the target country, intelligence activities are mainly carried out by intelligence officers working in the Russian embassy (known as the "legal *rezidentura*") or otherwise undercover ("non-traditional cover").



Head of GRU's 15th directorate, Major General Dmitri Pronyagin.

Source: Aleksandr Ryzhman/
Komsomolskaya Pravda.Krasnodar



Five intelligence centres in Western Russia have been operating against Europe for decades:

- the 73rd Intelligence Centre in St Petersburg
- the 264th Intelligence Centre in Kaliningrad,
- the 74th Intelligence Centre in Smolensk,
- the 269th Intelligence Centre in Moscow
- the 1194th Intelligence Centre in Murmansk

GRU's area of responsibility is estimated to be 1,500 km from the Russian border; the presence of agents in more distant locations cannot be ruled out either.

Intelligence from the territory includes cyber and influence operations that have been extensively covered in Western media, as well as signals intelligence and other technical intelligence. Still, traditional human intelligence (HUMINT), or information gathering through human sources, has not disappeared from the GRU's toolbox.

The GRU's human intelligence (*agenturnaya razvedka*, "agent intelligence") is divided into two categories: strategic agent intelligence (*strategicheskaya agenturnaya razvedka*, SAR), which covers for example legal *rezidenturas* and illegals, and operational agent intelligence (*operativnaya agenturnaya razvedka*, OAR).

The main task of operational agent intelligence, curated by the 15th Directorate of the GRU, is to prepare and support Russian military operations abroad using operational-tactical intelligence gathered on the target country. Networks of agents gather the intelligence. With the help of the information provided by the agent networks, the GRU maps the status and developments within the armed forces in the target country, particularly developments related to NATO presence. Information is also collected on the target country's key institutions, critical infrastructure, political situation and public sentiment.

The GRU intelligence centres' area of responsibility west of Russia extends from Scandinavia and the Balkans to Western Europe. Since 2014, the intelligence centres have been operating particularly intensively against Ukraine.

The recruited agents are mostly male, regularly visit Russia and speak fluent Russian.

Broadly speaking, the intelligence centres' networks include two types of agents: those permanently residing abroad and those in Russia. The recruited foreign nationals are primarily men who regularly visit Russia, speak fluent Russian, have a positive or at least neutral attitude towards the current Russian regime and are capable of performing intelligence tasks. The identification of suitable candidates, the cultivation of potential agents and their recruitment, training and further handling is generally carried out inside Russia

to ensure the safety of the operational officers. During the meetings set up in Russia, the agent hands over the information gathered and receives new tasks and instructions, while the handler also collects information about the agent. If an agent no longer has the opportunity to visit Russia, the intelligence centre can arrange a meeting in a third country. To carry out their tasks, the GRU intelligence centres cooperate with other security authorities in Russia, including the FSB, the ministry of the interior, the border guard and the migration service.

Operational officers at the GRU intelligence centres assign tasks to agents depending on their capabilities and access to information. The tasks range from seemingly innocent activities, such as monitoring media and public sentiment in the target country or buying maps, dictionaries and other freely available material, to observing military sites or critical infrastructure and stealing classified information. The agent forwards gathered materials electronically or hands them over to the handler at a meeting in Russia. In the event of a war or similar threat, a communications agent (a permanent resident of Russia) with radio equipment may be dispatched from Russia to agents living abroad to ensure that information is quickly transmitted even if other channels are disrupted.

Since 2014, the intelligence centres have also been organising "agent-combat groups" deployed against Ukraine to carry out bombings and assassinations and prepare arms caches for activation when receiving a signal from Russia (for example, in the event of a major outbreak of hostilities between Russia and Ukraine).

In Ukraine, intelligence centres have organised bombings and murders and prepared arms caches.

Intelligence centres also recruit agents among residents of Russia. These agents receive special training so that they are ready to deploy to a target country in the event of, or in the run-up to, a conflict where they will carry out intelligence tasks (in particular observation) and also prepare to perform diversions or other special tasks. They can operate abroad in groups or as individual agents and are equipped,

How GRU intelligence centres recruit agents

1. Targeting

An intelligence officer identifies foreign residents that regularly visit Russia, would be able to collect information on the intelligence objects and would be motivated to work for Russian special services. Comprehensive information is collected about the potential recruits, which is in turn used to assess their potential motivation and suitability for intelligence work.

2. Cultivation

The basis of successful recruitment is a trusting relationship between the intelligence officer and the target, which may take years to develop. If necessary, intelligence centres set traps to “compromise” the target so they would feel indebted to the person who has “saved” them from a difficult situation. In this stage, the target is usually not yet aware they are communicating with an intelligence officer.

3. Recruitment

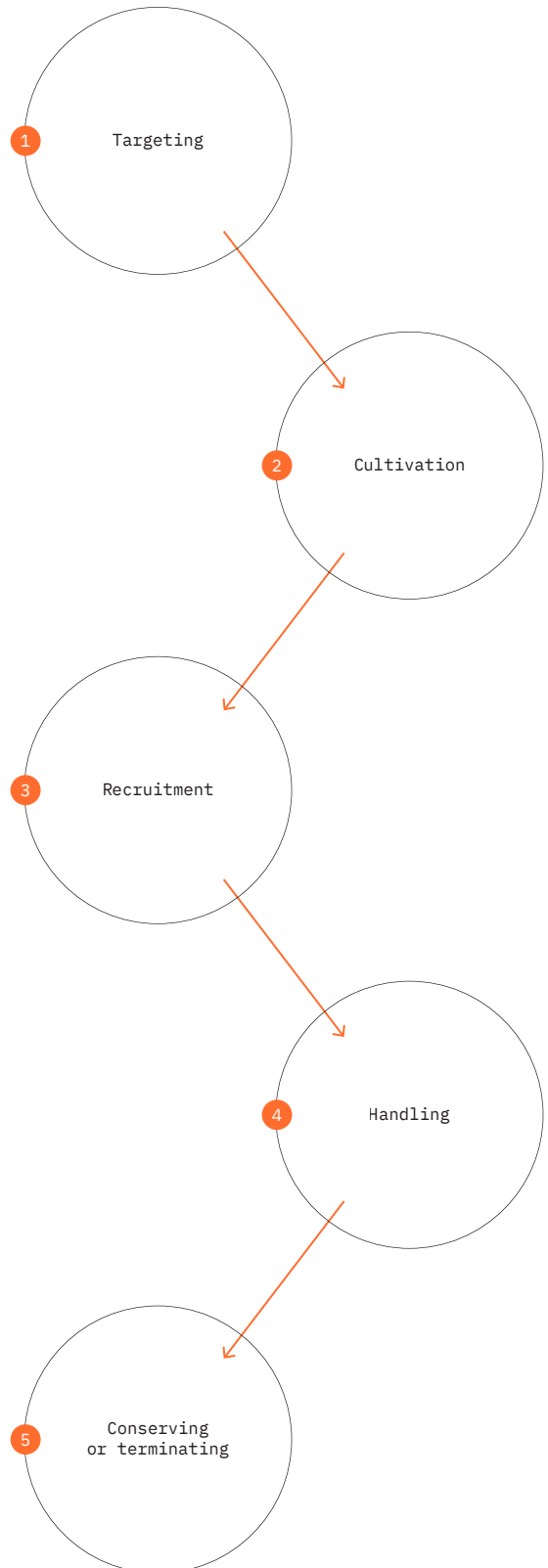
After the relationship with the target has been established, the intelligence officer proposes collaboration. Should the target agree, the agent relationship is generally fixed in writing, and the target becomes an agent for the GRU's operational agent intelligence.

4. Handling

The agent receives training and instructions from the handler as to what and how to do, and also communication equipment and information regarding the next meeting. The agent forwards the collected information electronically and/or hands them over during a meeting with the handler in Russia.

5. Conserving or terminating

There may be various reasons for halting (conserving) or terminating the agent relationship: the agent may turn out to be incapable of gathering intelligence or lose access to the information of interest. The relationship with the agent may also be terminated due to the security situation or changes in Russia's intelligence focus. The agent can not be certain they would be looked after in case of an emergency.





A poster photographed in Russia to celebrate 5 November – the anniversary of Russia's military intelligence service. Even though the GRU claims on the poster that they can see the invisible and hear the inaudible, their own operational security often lets them down.

Source: social media

among other things, with radio transceivers to communicate with their intelligence centre.

The intelligence centres in Kaliningrad and Murmansk also recruit agents from among seamen (known as a “ship agent”, *sudovoi agent*). Among other activities, ship agents carry out visual reconnaissance in port cities worldwide.

Agents generally receive negligible financial remuneration for their assignments or even perform them free of charge. Many operational officers at the intelligence centres are corrupt and keep some of the agents' pay for themselves.

Over the past decade, effective cooperation between intelligence services of NATO member states and partners has led to consistent identification and conviction of agents of GRU intelligence centres in countries bordering Russia.

In our assessment, despite the failures of the GRU, operational agent intelligence remains a persistent threat to the security of Russia's neighbouring countries. Undoubtedly, Russia's intelligence centres will learn from their mistakes, improve their *modus operandi* and continue to conduct operational agent intelligence, which is why we wish to draw the attention of our partner countries and people travelling in Russia to this threat.

RUSSIAN CYBER ESPIONAGE THREATENS ESTONIAN AND WESTERN SECURITY

Russian special services continually conduct cyber espionage operations to gather information in cyberspace.

As cyber espionage is part of routine intelligence work for Russian special services, such activities do not always respond to a specific geopolitical event.

Due to the successes of cyber espionage operations conducted by the Russian special services, the Kremlin likely possesses a good understanding of Western intentions and vulnerabilities.

Russia's cyber espionage poses a major threat compared to most other countries as its special services have a long history of conducting cyber operations and are constantly exploring inventive new ways to breach information systems, develop malware and disguise their activities, while also continuing to use previously successful methods. They consistently invest resources in cyber capabilities and quickly learn from their mistakes, adapt their attack methods, replace exposed attack infrastructure, etc.

EXAMPLES OF RUSSIAN SPECIAL SERVICES' CYBER OPERATIONS THAT WERE PUBLISHED IN 2021:

- 2019-2021 Russian foreign intelligence (SVR) cyber espionage operation. SVR gained access to tens of thousands of information systems of targets through the US company SolarWinds. Other services were used in the attack. The stolen data mainly came from the US. The exact impact is still unknown.¹
- 2017-2020 Russian military intelligence (GRU) cyber operation in France.²
- 2017-2021 Russian influence operations in Europe.³
- 2019-2021 Large-scale GRU cyber espionage operation to brute-force thousands of user passwords for Microsoft services. Both the public and private sectors were targeted.⁴
- 2021 Russian security service (FSB) cyber espionage operations in Ukraine.⁵
- 2021 Repeated SVR phishing campaigns in the West.⁶

The targets of the Russian special services, on the other hand, still lack adequate cybersecurity measures and are more likely to address their shortcomings only after being affected by a cyber operation of significant impact. To date, the targets of cyber operations have unfortunately failed to understand the need to continually maintain and invest in cybersecurity.

1 <http://cisa.gov/uscert/ncas/alerts/aa21-116a>

2 <http://cert.ssi.gov.fr/cti/CERTFR-2021-CTI-005>

3 <http://consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/09/24/declaration-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-european-union-on-respect-for-the-eu-s-democratic-processes>

4 http://media.defense.gov/2021/Jul/01/2002753896/-1/-1/1/CSA_GRU_GLOBAL_BRUTE_FORCE_CAMPAIN_UOO158036-21.PDF

5 <http://ssu.gov.ua/en/novyny/sbu-vstanovyla-khakeriv-fsb-yaki-zdiisnyli-ponad-5-tys-kiberatak-na-derzhavni-orhany-uk-rainy>

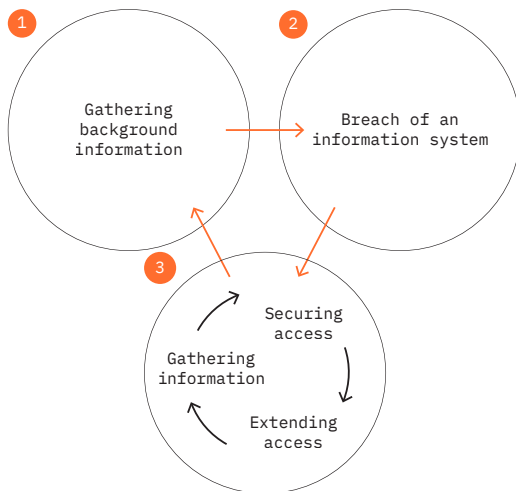
6 <http://cert.ssi.gov.fr/uploads/CERTFR-2021-CTI-011.pdf>

Owing to the Russian special services' activities, the Kremlin likely has a good overview of Western thinking, situational interpretations and concerns. This provides the decision-makers with suggestions on where and how to focus pressure to achieve their foreign policy goals..

STAGES OF A CYBER ESPIONAGE OPERATION CONDUCTED BY RUSSIAN SPECIAL SERVICES

A simplified description of the stages of a cyber espionage operation conducted by Russian special services follows. It is a general description of the Russian special services' cyber capabilities and does not apply to all Russian special services' centres that are capable of conducting operations in cyberspace:

Stages of Russian special services' cyber espionage operation



1. Gathering background information

The special services gather background information about the target and its information systems and devices. This information is used to determine the method of attack.

2. Breach of an information system

The most typical methods of breaching a target's information system include

- phishing emails¹,
- watering hole attacks²,
- exploiting security vulnerabilities,
- using removable media³ infected with malware.

3. Extending and securing access and gathering information

Once the special services have successfully hacked into a computer network⁴, they then seek to map other devices on the network. The objective is to gain the highest access rights to the entire network. After achieving this, it is almost impossible to shut the special services out of it.

While working to extend their access rights, the special services also seek to install "backdoors" in the target's network in case they lose access through the original entry point. If the special services also lose their backup entry points to a permanent target, they will launch a new cyber operation.

Third – and this is the primary purpose of a cyber espionage operation – they secretly gather data from the target's information system.

Once a system has been breached by the Russian special services, there is often no remedy other than rebuilding the network from scratch.

¹ Read more on these in our 2019 report

² Read more on these in our 2020 report

³ This includes thumb drives, external hard drives and the like

⁴ The Russian special services act similarly when targeting an email account: they seek to secure access and collect information, including user data as well as the emails themselves. If the email account itself is of no interest, it will be used in attacks against other targets, such as sending phishing emails to the account's contacts

It is important to remember that information intended for internal use, which is not protected as strongly as state secrets, also often has high intelligence value. Holding a sufficient amount of internal information may ultimately be equivalent to having access to a state secret.

Memos marked for internal use often contain valuable information for Russia on how government agencies operate, cooperate, interpret events and make decisions.

A cyber espionage operation is largely a series of automated processes. Human involvement is limited to, for example, establishing whether the targeted person and the information on the target's devices are of interest. If not, the special services either delete their malware from the information system or use it to attack other targets of interest. In most cases, they employ various techniques to disguise their activities, such as using third-party devices to attack and gather information or breaking their malware down into components that are loaded into the targeted information systems at different times from different servers.

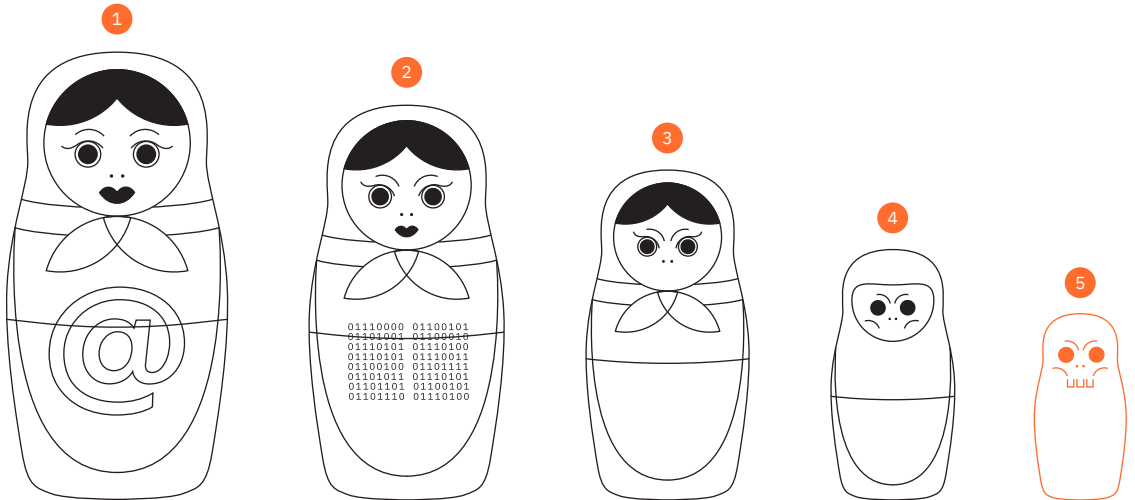
WHAT HAPPENS AFTER A BREACH?

The Russian special services use many different types of malware in their cyber operations. We will describe a method that we observed on the personal computer of a former civil servant.

The breach likely occurred when the person opened an attachment in a phishing email. The attachment only contained an initial malware component. The rest were downloaded to the computer from various locations on the internet. The malware components are like the pieces of a matryoshka doll. By opening each piece, the target launches the files inside it, which in turn transfers a new malware component performing another specific task. Once all of the malware is installed on the target's computer, regular information transfers to a server controlled by the Russian special services will begin.

In our assessment, Russian special services will continue their cyber espionage operations against Estonia and other Western countries into the foreseeable future. It is a well-established and efficient method of espionage. Therefore, the cyber threat from Russia will remain, but it can be mitigated by implementing cybersecurity measures.

How Russian special services break into a computer



1. Phishing email

When clicking on the phishing email's attachment, only one part of the malware is installed on the target's computer, and other parts are downloaded from different locations on the Internet.

At this stage, the malware checks for the existence of a cybersecurity program, and if it is detected, it will immediately stop.

This aims to prevent cyber-savvy users from foiling the Russian special services' cyber operation.

2. Decoy document

The target is then shown a decoy document to lower its vigilance and confirm that everything is in order.

3. Creates unique ID

After gaining access, a unique ID is created for the computer, according to which it is possible to distinguish and identify the target. The malware also begins to transmit information from the computer to the attacker and adjusts the settings so that when the computer is restarted, the malware is also relaunched.

The purpose of the Russian special services is to isolate infected devices and ensure access.

4. Infects removable media

The malware searches for computer-connected removable media devices and network disks on a computer network, installs its software, and tries to steal information.

How additional malware parts are loaded varies with each cyberattack.

5. Steals information

Once the malware has fully installed itself on the target's devices, Russian special services will be able to regularly move information from the target's computer to a server they control and will have secured backup access.



CHAPTER 2

RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY

24

THE ‘POSITIVE’ IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON RUSSIA’S FOREIGN POLICY

Russia’s leadership believes that foreign policy based on Western democratic values belongs in the ash heap of history.

We will see continued hybrid attacks in 2022.

Russia is preparing to raise the stakes in Ukraine.

While its people continue to suffer at the hands of the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia’s self-confidence in foreign and security policy has enjoyed a “positive” boost. Russia’s leadership is increasingly confident that the social and political contradictions accompanying the pandemic will once and for all consign Western foreign policy, based on human rights and democratic values, to the dustbin of history. The world is returning to the past – back to “normalcy” as the Kremlin sees it – to politics based on the interests (or spheres of interest) of great powers. Soft power will be sidelined, and military capability along with the determination to use it will prevail. This situation favours authoritarian states whose leadership is not accountable to the free media and under no obligation to hold fair elections. The demands regarding security guarantees Russia made to NATO and the United States in December of 2021 are carried by this spirit and backed by the looming threat of military action along the Ukrainian border.

Russia is more and more willing to test the principled resolve and unity of Western democracies, as democratic values represent both an enemy and a threat to the Russian leadership. Russia itself tends to suffer from a deficit of these values – the rule of law, human rights, fair elections, free media. The fears of the Russian leadership are justified, as these principles can become contagious if left unchecked among the population. The reason is simple enough: unlike an actual virus, they tend to enhance citizens’ quality of life and dignity significantly and are therefore attractive to people. All authoritarian regimes are faced with this problem in one way or another and, time and time again, respond by stepping up repressive measures, the foreign policy equivalent of which is to constantly cultivate the image of an external enemy. At times, this can amount to a hysteria of war.

Consequently, Russian leadership is relieved that the repressive measures taken over the past year have effectively neutralised the population of neighbouring Belarus and deprived it of its fundamental democratic rights. This allows Alyaksandr Lukashenka to focus on a hybrid attack against his EU neighbours while the Kremlin has his back. We will see continued hybrid attacks in 2022.

Russia sees itself as a global superpower but fears democratic countries on its borders.

The situation is different in Ukraine. In 2021, articles essentially denying Ukraine’s right to sovereignty were published under the names of both Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev. In 2021, Russia



On 26 April 2021, Estonia was named as one of the so-called unfriendly countries on the Russian television programme "60 minutes".

Source: Rossiya-1 programme "60 minutes"

demonstrated that it considers military pressure on neighbouring countries a legitimate policy tool, as it has assembled a massive military force along the Ukrainian border. For Russia, Ukraine, with its democratically elected president and government, represents a strategic problem that it needs to address before it is too late. Against the backdrop of the pandemic, Russia is likely to sense an opportunity and prepare to raise the stakes.

BUFFER ZONE AGAINST THE WEST

Russia sees itself as a global superpower on an equal footing with the United States and China but fears democratic countries on its borders. Institutions in such countries are less vulnerable and more difficult to influence or control. One of the national security indicators used by Russia is the extent of institutional control over its neighbouring countries. For the neighbours, this inevitably implies relinquishing some of their sovereignty, especially in foreign and security policy.

In our assessment, Russia sees the current international situation as a strategic opportunity to impose its security demands on the West. Its primary target is Ukraine, where the threat of military escalation, backed by Russian forces already at the border, will remain real throughout 2022. Diplomatic talks with Russia also affect Estonia's security, particularly if proposals to limit NATO's posture along its Eastern flank are discussed.



Russia's buffer zone against the West includes Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. Belarus has already given up its sovereignty, Russian-controlled Transnistria damages Moldova's opportunities, and Ukraine is squarely in Russia's sights.

UKRAINE – THE LINCHPIN OF RUSSIAN IMPERIALISM

Ukraine is the linchpin that keeps Russian imperial ambition together.

Ukraine's progress in fleshing out a national identity for itself troubles Russia the most.

Russia has clearly lost some of its attractiveness, which the Kremlin regards as a threat to national security.

The Ukrainian leadership has managed to significantly reduce Russia's influence in the country.

In various statements and articles published in 2021, the Russian leadership made it clear that they considered Ukraine's domestic and foreign policy positions unacceptable. Russian strategists are realising that merely manipulating conflicts in neighbouring countries is not sufficient to sway them towards integration with Russia. The shocks in an otherwise stable-looking Belarus in 2020 were enough for the Kremlin to surmise that their example and model was not working, regardless of how strong the links, or even chains, tying the countries together. The unrest in Kazakhstan in early 2022 opened another fissure in Russia's integration model. Russia needed to resort to its Armed Forces to stabilise both Belarus and Kazakhstan. The internal conflict in Kazakhstan was calmed by sending in Collective Security Treaty Organisation troops. While Russia also readied its contingent to quell the popular protests in Belarus, Lukashenka, fearful of losing his authority, suffocated the protests mainly through the brutal violence of his own apparatus.

However, the continuing aggression against Ukraine has not produced the desired result for Russian leadership. Ukraine's westward integration has not been halted. Last year, Ukraine took significant steps towards securing its statehood and sovereignty, which worried the Kremlin and probably led to the view that hopes of a change of course by Ukraine were fading.



As the continuing aggression against Ukraine has not produced the desired result, Putin intends to use even more extreme methods.

Source: Alexey Nikolsky / AFP

Despite the eight-year Russian occupation of Crimea, Ukraine established the international Crimea Platform on 23 August 2021, not allowing the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia to be overlooked or forgotten. Despite Russia's fierce opposition, the participation of 46 countries in the Platform was a painful setback for Russia, and it had punitive measures in store for at least some of the joining countries.

The Ukrainian leadership has managed to significantly reduce Russia's political and economic influence in the country. Russian interference in Ukraine's domestic politics is overt and ongoing. Still, due to restrictions on the activities of a number of influence agents and their economic leverage, Russia can no longer be confident that it could activate enough collaborators to bring about change in Ukraine when it needs to.

However, Ukraine is critical for Russia to pose convincingly as a superpower, at least in Eurasia. Ukraine is the linchpin that keeps Russian imperial ambition together.

In an article published on 12 July 2021, "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians", President Vladimir Putin openly explained his logic as to why Russia should not allow Ukrainians – and probably also many other nations – to make their own decisions and choose their own path of development. Ukraine's progress in fleshing out a national identity for itself troubles the Russian president the most. President Putin sees this as a "forced change of identity" but seems to forget the numerous actions Russia has taken against Ukraine to induce such national consolidation in the first place.

In spring 2021, Russia caught the attention of the US and a summit was held; now, the bar is set much higher.

The Russian president acknowledges with exceptional candour that "forced assimilation" and the formation of a Ukrainian state "aggressive towards Russia" are effectively comparable to using weapons of mass destruction against Russia. According to Putin, "the number of Russian people may decrease by hundreds of thousands or even millions" as a result of such a division between Ukrainians and Russians. With this conclusion in mind, it is perhaps unsurprising that the Russian leadership intends to use even more extreme methods to stop Ukraine – methods that threaten the security of Europe.

By concentrating forces on the Ukrainian border in spring 2021, Russia caught the attention of the US and a summit was held; now, the bar is set much higher. Russia is challenging European security as a whole and deploying an unprecedented contingent at Ukraine's borders to back this up. By threatening to subjugate Ukraine militarily, Russia seeks to force free democracies to accept its understanding of the European security architecture. If successful, there is nothing to prevent Russia from continuing to use this threat in the future.

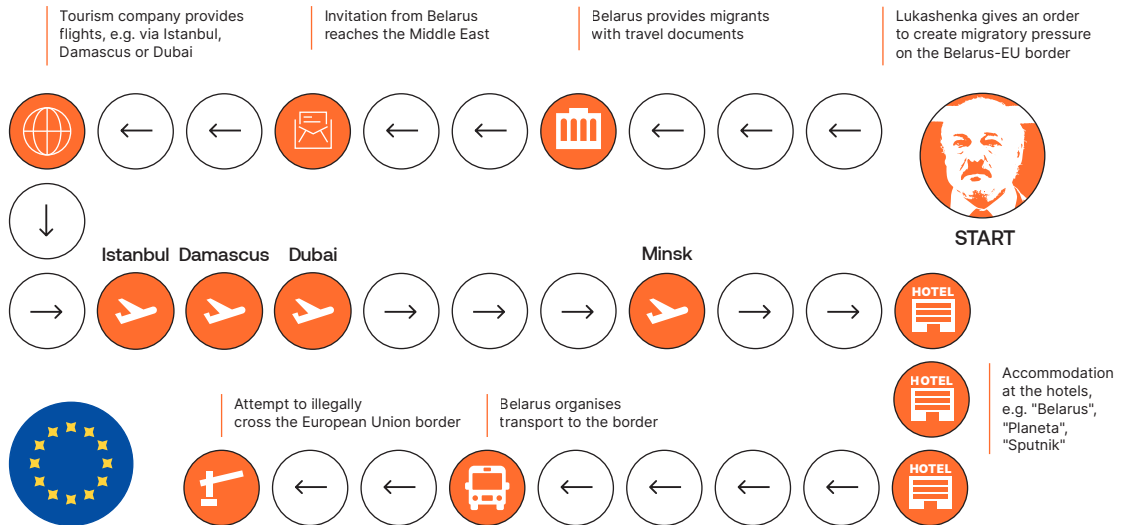
In our assessment, both Russia's threat and possible aggression have a long-term impact on European security. In the event of an attack, the possibility of incidents and miscalculations will increase in the region more broadly. If Russia's threat leads to success, the changing security arrangements may allow Russia to make even more ambitious demands to achieve its goals in the future.

ALYAKSANDR LUKASHENKA'S HYBRID WAR AGAINST THE WEST

Alyaksandr Lukashenka did not succeed in using a hybrid attack to force the European Union to recognise him as a legitimate head of state.

Russia preferred to stay in the background in the migrant gambit orchestrated by Belarus, watching Belarus burn all its bridges with the West.

Lukashenka's negotiating position with the Russians has weakened considerably, as he can no longer present the West as an alternative to Russia.



Belarusian authorities arranged for thousands of migrants to be transported from their countries of origin to the borders of Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia. Belarus issued them fast-track visas, the state-owned company Belavia flew many of them to Minsk, from the airport they were sent to hotels. Afterward, they were transported to illegally cross the border. In the event of a failed attempt, they were forced to cross the border from elsewhere.

In the aftermath of the forced diversion of a Ryanair flight by the Belarusian regime in May 2021 and the subsequent new sanctions imposed by the European Union, Alyaksandr Lukashenka launched a massive hybrid attack against EU member states. Lukashenka intended to punish the EU for imposing sanctions and supporting the Belarusian opposition. He aimed to force the EU into political negotiations to legitimise his regime and break Belarus out of international isolation.

The Belarusian foreign ministry and tourism offices provided the migrants with travel documents and accommodation in state-owned or private hotels in Belarus.

For this to happen, Lukashenka facilitated the transport of thousands of migrants, mainly from the Middle East, to Belarus and then to the EU's external borders. Migrants were flown to Minsk by both scheduled and charter flights by airlines such as the Belarusian national carrier Belavia and US-sanctioned Syrian airline Cham Wings. In cooperation with Middle Eastern tour operators, the Belarusian foreign ministry and tourism offices provided the migrants with travel documents and accommodation in state-owned or private hotels in Belarus. They were then taken to the EU border, where Belarusian border guards gave them instructions on crossing it. The border guards used violence against the migrants, stole valuables from them and demanded bribes of up to \$1,000 per person if they wished to return to their home country.

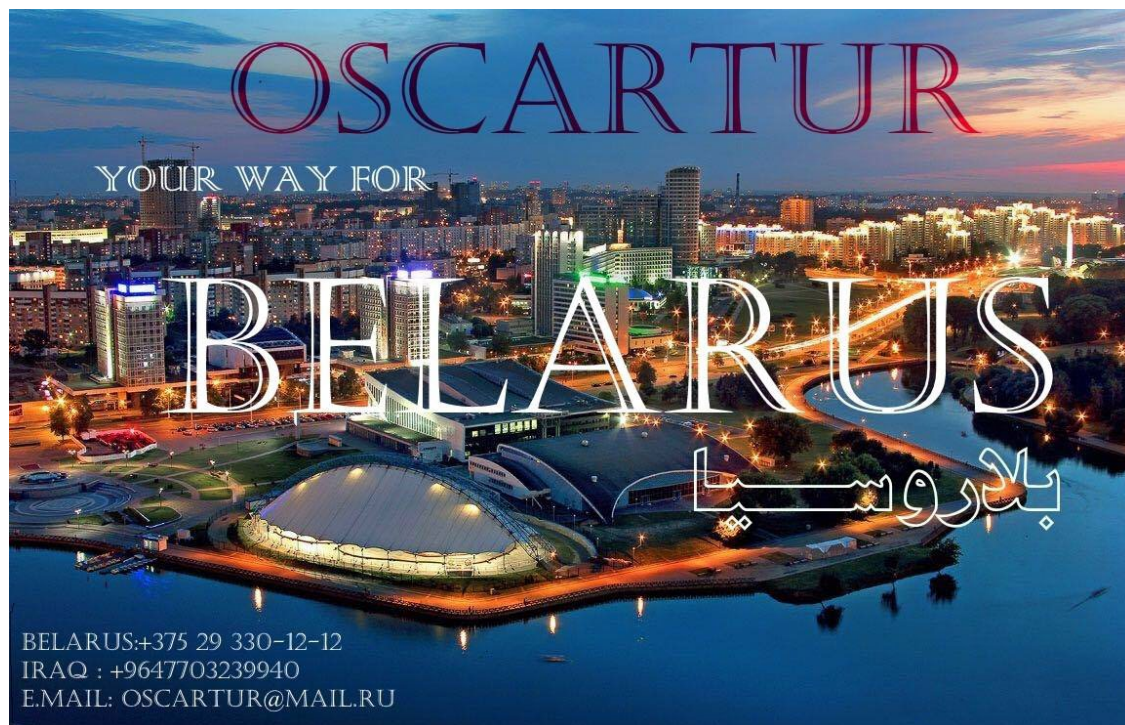
Belarus also conducted information attacks against its neighbours. State media coverage on the ground attempted to shape and disseminate their narrative of the border events for audiences abroad.. Distorted information was used to accuse Western countries of causing migratory pressure and human rights violations. Unsurprisingly, footage of migrants being escorted from one location to another at gunpoint by Belarusian border guards was removed from the video clips.

Although Russia remained in the background of Lukashenka's hybrid attack, confining itself mainly to public support for the brother nation and blaming the situation on the West, the Belarusian regime's actions served Russian interests. The EU was pressured using Belarusian resources, draining both sides. By acting against the EU, Lukashenka lost even the slightest chance to manoeuvre between the West and Russia. As a result, Russia's negotiating position with Lukashenka became even more potent.

Although Russia remained in the background, Lukashenka's hybrid attack served Russian interests.

Against the backdrop of the hybrid attack, Russia used the opportunity to pressure Lukashenka into signing economic integration programmes within the Union State of Russia and Belarus framework on 4 November 2021. Russia needed to show the public it was making progress in the three-year-long protracted negotiations from which references to political integration had already been removed. Due to the vagueness of the programmes, Lukashenka will probably seek to delay the implementation of the agreements for as long as possible, debating every last detail. Lukashenka only needs the Union State as a semblance of an alliance that can be used to his benefit at any moment.

Lukashenka's hostility towards the West will grow in 2022 in our assessment, as his hybrid attack has not had the desired effect. Lukashenka will likely try to reuse as well as find new means to force the West into negotiations and thus recognise his legitimacy. The Kremlin is probably not interested in directly engaging in Lukashenka's ventures, as long as they do not lead to problems for Russia.



Screenshot from the webpage of Belarusian tour operator Oscartur, which organises trips for potential migrants from Iraq to Belarus. The word "Belarus" is displayed in Arabic along with a telephone number in Iraq.

Source: social media

A PIVOTAL YEAR FOR MOLDOVA

The election victory by pro-Europeans in Moldova was a geopolitical blow to Russia.

The Kremlin is actively working to oust the current Moldovan leadership.

Russia uses gas supply and energy security as a means of pressure.

From Moscow's point of view, Moldova's geographic location between Romania and Ukraine is strategically important. If Russia were to "lose" Moldova, the "hostile sphere of influence" of the West would extend uninterruptedly from Romania to the Russian border. However, as long as Moldova remains a neutral strip of land wedged between Romania, a member of NATO, and Ukraine, which wants to integrate with the West, the strategists of the Russian General Staff can sleep much more peacefully – especially if this land strip also houses Russian military bases (in separatist Transnistria).

The strategists of the Russian General Staff can sleep much more peacefully with Russian military bases in Transnistria.

However, Russia's interests in the Black Sea region suffered a setback in 2021, when pro-European forces gained power in Moldova. Snap parliamentary elections on 11 July 2021 were overwhelmingly won by the pro-European Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS, *Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate* in Romanian), which took a total of 63 seats in Moldova's 101-member parliament. The pro-Russian Electoral Bloc of Communists and Socialists won only 32 seats, while the party of the internationally wanted oligarch Ilan Shor won only six.



President Maia Sandu (pictured right) and other pro-European forces in Moldova have reason to watch their back. The former leader of the country's pro-Russian politicians, Igor Dodon (center), may be considered out of the game, but the Kremlin continues to try and gain control over Moldova's domestic and foreign policy.

Source: Maksim Andreev / NewsMaker

Before the parliamentary elections, pro-Russian political forces had also lost the presidency; in the November 2020 presidential election, Maia Sandu won against Igor Dodon, the incumbent head of state. Before becoming president, Sandu was the head of PAS and a leader of pro-European political forces in Moldova.

Igor Dodon, on the other hand, was the de facto leader of the pro-Russian Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM, *Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova* in Romanian), even while he was officially above party politics as head of state.

The loss of power by pro-Russian political forces may have been all the more disturbing to the Kremlin since, as of the end of 2019, Igor Dodon had subjugated virtually the entire Moldovan executive branch, including the Security and Intelligence Service, and his party, the PSRM, had a majority in parliament. Dodon used this power, among other things, for illegal surveillance of his political opponents.

The fact that the Socialists and Dodon spent a significant amount of their time and energy fighting for power with other pro-Russian politicians may also have played a role in their defeat. Dodon's list of political enemies included people such as Renato Usatîi, mayor of Bălți, Irina Vlah, governor of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, and Ion Ceban, mayor of Chișinău (who is also a member of the PSRM).

Russia will not accept pro-European rule in Moldova and is actively working to oust the PAS and President Sandu.

At the same time, Russia will almost certainly not accept pro-European rule in Moldova and is actively working to oust the PAS and, if possible, President Sandu. And the Kremlin has various levers of influence it can use to undermine Moldova's current leadership. The most significant of these are probably Moldova's dependence on Russian energy supplies (especially natural gas) and the frozen conflict in Transnistria (especially Russia's military presence in the region). However, other key "tools" include the Moldovan Orthodox

Church under the Moscow Patriarchate, the pro-Russian Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, and Russian-language television and other media.

In October 2021, a gas crisis broke out in Moldova. After the expiry of a supply agreement with Gazprom, Russia increased the price of natural gas sold to Moldova severalfold and reduced its gas supplies to Moldova. This crisis was not a bureaucratic misunderstanding or an economic trade dispute. Instead, it was a deliberate choice to exert political pressure by Russia.

In our assessment Russia will continue to seek ways in order to undermine the credibility of the pro-European government in Moldova and restrict the political choices of the Moldovan government.

CLIMATE NEUTRALITY THE RUSSIAN WAY

To achieve climate neutrality, Russia reforms as little as possible but uses big words.

Russia takes steps to do what is good for its economy while showing how great it is for everyone else.

Russia is positioning to be the rule-maker, not letting anyone else dictate terms.

For a long time, the Russian leadership considered climate change insignificant and questioned the human factor as its cause. At a press conference in late 2019, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that no one knew the real cause of climate change. This convenient position is no longer tenable, as climate issues are increasingly at the heart of international politics. Russia wants to influence the global climate debate, which requires a clearly defined climate policy. Ranking fourth in the world in terms of carbon dioxide emissions inevitably puts Russia in an uncomfortable position. At the same time, Russia is increasingly experiencing the effects of climate change in the Arctic – for example, in May 2021, temperatures on the Barents Sea coast were anomalously higher than in some parts of the Mediterranean.

According to Russia, climate neutrality is a policy imposed by the West. The most important thing for Russia is to avoid new international climate commitments that would force it to fundamentally change its oil- and gas-based economic model, as this could weaken the political regime and pave the way for social unrest. In 2020, 30% of Russia's declared state budget revenues came from fossil fuels, including \$40 billion from the sale of gas to Europe. Therefore, Russia's development hangs on these revenues. Another thing to bear in mind is that the Russian leadership does not see climate change as an existential threat to humanity nor to its security but rather as one important issue to be addressed among many others. Russian confrontation with the West culminated in December 2021 when Russia vetoed the UN climate and security resolution, claiming it to be a Western attempt to politicize climate policy.

The most important thing for Russia is to avoid changes in its oil- and gas-based economic model.

This stance does not mean that Russia is not interested in more climate-friendly solutions, such as green technology, investment in cleaner energy or scientific cooperation with Western countries, in the Arctic, to name a few. In this way, Russia can present itself to the West as being cooperative and, simultaneously, finance projects for which it lacks funds from the state budget. However, the Russian leadership is still arrogant and sceptical about renewable energy. For example, during the Russian Energy Week in October 2021, the Russian head of state questioned the reliability of renewable energy sources.

Over the past year, Russia has approved climate and environmental programmes, development plans, projects and laws aimed at, among other things, measuring carbon emissions, supporting climate research, and encouraging the reduction of CO₂ emissions. This push is because the entire topic has been out of focus in Russia until recently, and it has become necessary to define the basic principles of the policy approach. For example, at the November 2021 COP 26 UN Climate Change Conference Russia committed to achieving carbon neutrality by 2060, similar to Chinese commitments. At the same time, Russia's strategy in the Arctic, adopted in October 2020, remains in force, with a stated intention of increasing Russian oil production by 66% by 2035 compared to 2018. In other words, parallel to transitioning to a more climate-friendly economy, Russia will continue to export fossil fuels in the same volumes.

Regarding climate policy, the Russian president has pointed out the need to continue using and exporting natural gas, which Russia claims will also ensure Europe's energy security. Vladimir Putin has also argued that nuclear energy has a smaller carbon footprint than solar energy. This "greening" of natural gas and nuclear energy is directly related to Russia's own economic and export interests. In addition, the Russian leader has referred to forests as an important tool for reducing the carbon footprint. At the Saint Petersburg Economic Forum in 2021, Putin stated that Russia's forests could absorb several billion tons of CO₂ a year, with Deputy Prime Minister Viktoria Abramchenko later specifying this to be 2.5 billion tons. As Russia's annual carbon emissions are about 1.7 billion tons, the president sought to send the message that the carbon problem will be solved and "eliminated" by Russian nature.

Russian researchers will have to prove that Russian forests can fully neutralise the country's carbon emissions.

Russia does not want to accept terms dictated by the West nor international organisations regarding standards, reporting or climate goals. That is why Russia is critical of, for example, the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, viewing it as a threat to its trade and economy. Russia wants to independently develop its own methodology for calculating CO₂ emissions and gain international recognition for its proposals. This will likely force Russian researchers to focus efforts among others on proving that Russian forests can fully neutralise the country's carbon emissions. Paradoxically, this



Climate activists demonstrating against the establishment of the fund for climate and environmental protection in Germany. The fund was to be supported by Nord Stream 2 and is perceived as an example of "greenwashing".

Source: Odd Andersen / AFP

must be done in a situation where forest fires in Siberia are becoming more widespread and lasting longer, causing the release of carbon dioxide and methane and contributing to global warming.

Russia is willing to mobilise other countries to jointly oppose Western measures, including initiatives of the European Union. This is both an economic battle and part of an ideological opposition to the West. Russia is looking for allies from both the developing world and among major industrialised countries such as China and India. Even Western countries have disagreements on means to achieve climate neutrality. Among the EU member states, for example, there are differing opinions on how green nuclear energy is. Russia can deepen such rifts through public and covert influence operations.

In January 2021, a climate discussion with experts from the Baltic Sea region was secretly affiliated with Yevgeny Prigozhin, one of Russia's best-known curators of influence campaigns.

Russia is also able to create or exploit tensions within Western countries. In January 2021, the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern state parliament in Germany voted in favour of setting up a climate and environmental fund in which Nord Stream 2 was to invest 20 million euros, further committing to continue to support its activities with 60 million euros. One of the reasons for setting up the fund was to circumvent possible US sanctions. German environmental activists saw this as an example of greenwashing.

Climate issues are attractive to Western interlocutors - Russia can use this to shape debates without the audience initially understanding or realising that Russia is abusing the topic to exert influence in other policy areas. The initial discussion on environmental topics creates a trusting and friendly atmosphere and provides Russia with contacts that it can later exploit for other foreign policy purposes. In January 2021, a climate discussion was held virtually with environmental experts from the Baltic Sea region. However, what was not publicised was the event's organisers' affiliation with AFRIC (Association for Free Research and International Cooperation), a shadow organisation run by Yevgeny Prigozhin, one of Russia's best-known curators of influence campaigns in the West.

In our assessment, Russia is using Western countries' interest in climate issues to steer debates in a way that benefits Russia. To this end, it uses both overt as well as covert influence operations. Russia's concept of climate neutrality is based on natural gas, nuclear energy and forests. This concept is also lobbied internationally. At the same time, Russia considers it important to develop an "independent" system for measuring its carbon footprint and obtain recognition from other countries and organisations. Having its own system would allow Russia to statistically demonstrate a reduction in carbon emissions while effectively continuing with its current economic model.

VACCINE DIPLOMACY AS A WEAPON IN THE KREMLIN'S GEOPOLITICAL ARSENAL

Russia's ruling elite has exploited the COVID-19 pandemic to realise its geopolitical ambitions.

Vaccines intended for domestic use have instead been used to advance foreign policy aims.

Russia's vaccine diplomacy has involved extensive state-led influence operations.

OPPORTUNISM ON THE FRONT LINE OF THE PANDEMIC

During the first pandemic wave, the Kremlin made its opening gambit toward its geopolitical goals when it offered a “helping hand” to countries experiencing a shortage of personal protective equipment.

The most notable example of the Kremlin's “mask aid” was a military convoy of medical supplies sent to Italy in March 2020. The seemingly genuine relief effort to the then-epicentre of COVID-19 in Europe turned out to be a deliberate information operation that paved the way for further pandemic-related stunts by the Kremlin. Under the guise of sending aid, using the slogan “From Russia with Love”, the Kremlin spread messages in the media that Italy had been abandoned during hard times and that there was no solidarity within the European Union. To this end, it used everything from misrepresented images of public sentiment in Italy to outright lies.



Алексей Пушков  @Alexey_Pushkov

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Senator Alexey Pushkov, Chair of the Interim Commission on Information Policy and Cooperation with the Media of the Russian Federation Council, claimed on social media that the Polish authorities would not allow Russian planes transporting humanitarian aid to Italy to cross its airspace due to blind hostility towards Russia. This false statement, quickly refuted by the Polish government, ultimately only caused a headache for Russian diplomats in Warsaw, who were bombarded with follow-up questions from journalists.

Source: Twitter

The Kremlin's mask diplomacy stunt in Italy was rendered more cynical by the fact that, at the same time, Russia's medical staff was already suffering from a lack of protective equipment. In many places, hospital workers were forced to fight the virus without masks and other protective equipment.

The goal of Russia's influence operations is to show itself as a powerful force who is ready and able to alleviate the global crisis.

When the Kremlin itself was finally forced to use diplomatic channels to ask for help with mask supplies from other countries, including Italy, the primary concern of the diplomatic corps were the optics of a major provider of aid suddenly appearing to reclaim its aid supplies.

The diplomats' concerns were justified because the broader goal of Russia's influence operations during the first wave of the pandemic was to bring the country to the forefront of the global fight against the coronavirus – to show itself as a powerful force ready and able to alleviate the global crisis.

These efforts culminated in August 2020 as President Vladimir Putin announced that Russian scientists had produced the world's first efficient COVID-19 vaccine.

VACCINE MARKETING THE RUSSIAN WAY

In parallel with reports of the launch of Russia's first COVID-19 vaccine, Sputnik V, the Kremlin triggered its state-controlled arsenal of influence measures, the most notable of which was a large-scale concealed smear campaign against rival Western vaccines.

The campaign, led by the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), which oversaw Sputnik V's production and supply agreements, and its head Kirill Dmitriev, who is close to Putin, was not only designed to promote Sputnik V but also to highlight the potential health threats posed by Western vaccines.

Launched publicly in Russia's state media and covertly in the global social media sphere, the campaign focused on memes with discrediting content that were supposed to look like a citizens' initiative reflecting widespread public opposition to "suspicious" Western vaccines. The campaign was primarily targeted at major developing countries, such as Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, India, Egypt and Indonesia.

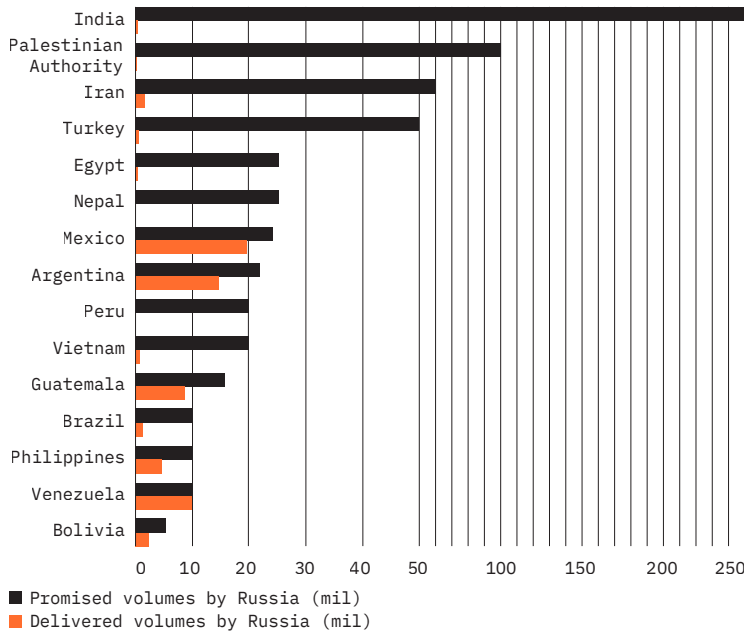
The power of the Kremlin's dark PR was most strongly felt by the British pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca, whose vaccine, developed in collaboration with Oxford University scientists, was dubbed the "monkey vaccine" by Kremlin propaganda. To improve the vaccine's public image, the name was changed to Vaxzevria.

It is important to note that the choice of AstraZeneca as a target was far from random. At the time, it was among the most promising Western vaccines, with the greatest number of global advance supply agreements in place.

The smear campaign was backed by spectacular Sputnik V propaganda events for foreign medical experts as well as supply negotiations, which had become commonplace for Russian diplomats. RDIF management guidelines stipulated that it be explicitly emphasised that there is a risk of getting poor vaccines from the West that have not been tested on humans.

To help with its vaccine diplomacy efforts, the Kremlin also deployed an extensive network of influential individuals ready to lobby Sputnik V with the encouragement of the Russian authorities. These included Russian oligarchs with contacts abroad, former top politicians in the West, as well as prominent figures from business and entertainment communities around the world. The latter included people such as Argentine millionaire and film producer Fernando Sulichin, who acted as the Kremlin’s salesman in vaccine talks with the Argentine and Brazilian authorities, and with whom there were serious plans of producing a documentary film about the triumph of Sputnik V, to be directed by Sulichin’s close friend, Hollywood director Oliver Stone, who has himself successfully worked with the Kremlin in the past.

Promises related to the delivery of Russia’s Sputnik V versus the volumes delivered



Advance supply agreements of tens and hundreds of millions of Sputnik V doses for developing nations were meant to celebrate the global triumph of the Russian vaccine and perpetuate the image of Russia as a benevolent actor in the fight against coronavirus.

In reality, slightly more than 10% of the agreed-upon volume has been delivered, partly using vaccine stocks initially meant for Russia’s domestic population.

Source: Statista.com; open source

SETBACKS

The Kremlin's vaccine diplomacy efforts and widely publicised supply agreements for hundreds of millions of vaccine doses convey the impression of Russia's success in the fight against coronavirus. The reality however is different. Various machinations may have ensured initial reputational success, but maintaining this seems extremely difficult, if not impossible.

As early as April 2021, the RDIF found itself backed into a corner with supply agreements. Due to the lack of sufficient production capacity, it had to begin rescheduling agreements and reducing delivery volumes. Many countries have received only a small fraction of the vaccine supplies promised to them, and some none at all.

Many countries have received only a small fraction of the vaccine supplies promised to them, and some none at all.

Things have reached a point where foreign supply obligations are being met at the expense of Russia's domestic vaccine stocks: to calm foreign markets, and under pressure from the Russian Security Council, "extra doses" have been taken from vaccine stocks originally intended for Russia's domestic population. Such opportunism clearly shows where the real priorities of the Russian power elite lie in this crisis.

The authorities' miscalculation regarding the Russian population's usual susceptibility to state propaganda also promises to be fatal to the initial success. The intensive slander of Western vaccines proved to be a double-edged sword, as it made a large section of the Russian population distrustful of all vaccines. Globally, Russia remains at the forefront in terms of both deaths from coronavirus and low vaccination coverage.

However, there are also those in the Russian power elite who understand the seriousness of the situation and have become more active in restricting the export of vaccines for fear of domestic setbacks from overzealous vaccine diplomacy. But instead of helping to resolve the crisis, this has created two different camps among the Russian leadership – proponents and opponents of continuing active vaccine diplomacy – each of whom is trying to exert their influence to suppress the interests of the other side.

Despite everything, it is in our assessment likely in the Kremlin's interest to continue its vaccine diplomacy efforts to cast itself as a major international player. However, its lack of vaccine production and supply capacity and the increasingly critical situation of the coronavirus epidemic in Russia offer no good prospects for this. Therefore, the Kremlin may continue to back its investments in vaccine diplomacy using extensive state-led influence operations.



CHAPTER 3

RUSSIAN DOMESTIC POLICY

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RUSSIA'S DOMESTIC POLITICAL SITUATION: BACK IN THE USSR

In 2021, repressive measures used to pressure critics of the government in Russia reached levels unprecedented in the past 20 years.

The authorities aim to completely subdue the opposition and suppress the remaining free media. These goals, the methods used to achieve them, and the social processes taking place under increasing pressure present ever-clearer parallels with the Soviet period.

At the same time, the unprecedented scale of repression shows the regime cannot and dare not deal with its political opponents and critics in any other way but increased pressure and outright bans.

Although administrative measures to discourage or punish opposition activists and journalists harrying the central government have coincided with most of Vladimir Putin's tenure, the levels reached in 2021 merit a rather direct comparison with the methods once used in the Soviet Union.

Russia's central government has almost completely stopped disguising the real motives behind pressuring its political opponents. Classifying key organisations linked to Alexei Navalny as extremist organisations mark a new milestone – while various fabricated accusations had been used to obstruct these organisations before, declaring them extremist in the spring of 2021 was done with no effort to disguise the political motivation behind this. Already at the start of the legal proceedings, the authorities stated that these organisations were “engaged in creating conditions for destabilising the social and socio-political situation under the guise of liberal slogans”, with an alleged long-term aim of dismantling the constitutional order. The verdict was drafted under the direct supervision of the Presidential Administration of Russia; the politicised and farcical trial once again warranted clear parallels with the Soviet period. The Presidential Administration also played a key role in initiating and passing a bill banning individuals affiliated with organisations designated as extremist from running in elections. The legislative proceedings appear to have taken place at an accelerated pace so that the law could enter into force before the autumn election was announced. In another sign of urgency, the methods used to pressure the opposition were ramped up along the way, reflecting a relatively rapid change in the ruling elite's risk assessment – the previously planned activities were no longer considered sufficient, and new measures were introduced on the fly, with barely enough time to put them into practice effectively.

Almost all opposition players and government critics with public visibility found themselves under significantly increased pressure from the authorities in 2021. The entire arsenal of administrative measures was put into service, including fabricated administrative and criminal charges, and designating the targets as foreign agents or

In 2021, nearly every slightly visible opposition figure and critic of the regime were repressed more forcefully than before.

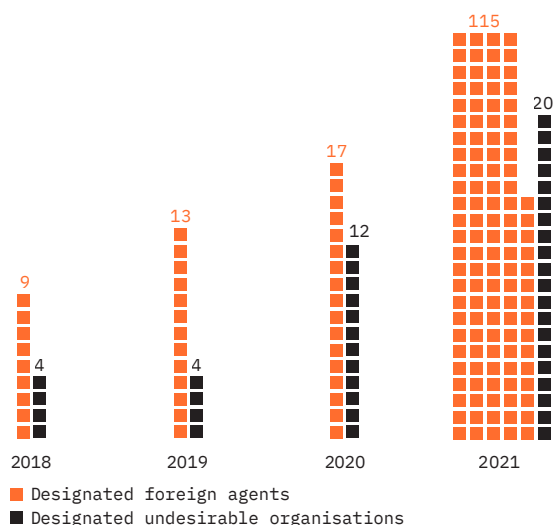
undesirable organisations. This tendency to completely subdue the opposition again harks back to the Soviet era.

Putin's regime was particularly active in muzzling the press, intending to suppress any independent media completely. Administrative methods continue to be used to force independent media outlets to cease activities. At the same time, the regime also seeks to limit information published in independent outlets from finding its way to other media, primarily by wielding the cudgel of foreign agent designation. The state media's editorial policy is already on a par with

communist practices – the topics covered and the positions taken are decided entirely by the Presidential Administration. The events of 2021 showed the Putin regime would ideally like to achieve a Soviet-type status quo in the near future – a complete absence of alternative media.

The foreign agent designation is in use in Russia since 2012, when a law allowing politically active NGOs receiving foreign funding to be labeled took effect. A separate legal framework for designating media outlets as foreign agents took effect more recently, in 2017. The conditions that have to be met in order to be branded a foreign agent have repeatedly been changed – and in recent years, simplified – while the restrictions and obligations that come with being designated as a foreign agent have consistently become more burdensome. This includes labeling any print or online publication issued by a foreign agent and even extending that obligation to any media outlet citing a foreign agent. For online publications that have been branded foreign agents, the designation has significantly reduced their advertising revenue as well as their network of sources. Regulations in force today also allow for the designation to be used for natural persons.

The number of designated foreign agents and undesirable organisations between 2018 and 2021



Since 2018, the number of organisations officially stigmatised by the authorities has started to increase again as a reaction to increasing criticism. This trend has persisted and worsened over the years.

While in 2020, the number of organisations labelled as foreign agents increased relatively smoothly, in 2021, the number soared along with the increase in force and pressure mechanisms implemented to quell freedom of thought and civil society. Media outlets were primarily labelled as foreign agents: independent media channels Dozhd and Meduza were included on the list, among others.

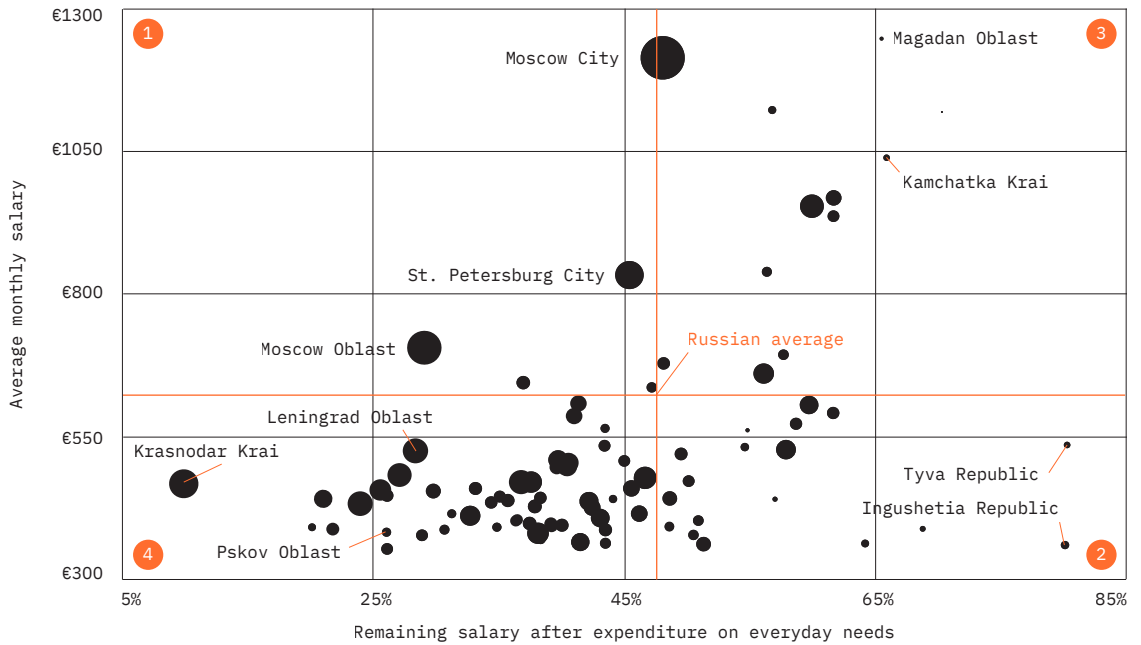
Source: Russian Ministry of Justice, OVD-Info

RUSSIA'S REGIONAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

A modest standard of living for the majority of the population continues to be part of reality under Putin's regime. Russia's socio-economic situation is characterised by great variability – the levels of income and household spending can differ significantly from region to region. The average monthly salary in the federal subjects (oblasts, krais, republics, and federal cities) varies from €350 to €1,200. However, wage levels cannot be directly linked to subsistence, as spending can also vary greatly from one region to the next. About half of Russia's average gross monthly income of €630 per capita remains after spending on everyday needs, which means a four-member household can make ends meet when at least two household members are employed, and two are dependants. This statistical average is derived from the income levels of two groups of regions that occupy two extremes: on the one hand, the city of Moscow and high-income mining regions, and on the other hand, peripheral regions with low wages but relatively high living costs with a total population of about 90 million (or 62% of the population).

In our assessment, the Russian ruling elite's ever fiercer attacks against the opposition and the remaining free media showed that it cannot and dare not deal with its political opponents and critics by any other method but increasing repression and outright bans. Although the sharp spike in repressive measures can be associated with the 2021 State Duma election – growing dissatisfaction and the increased activity of government critics created the need to suppress the opposition quickly, in time for the election – the new levels of repression, unprecedented in Putin's years in power, appear to be here to stay.

Russia's regional socio-economic situation



Source: ROMIR, Rosstat

1. The income of nearly 10% of the population in Russia is higher than the national average gross income (630 euros), but their living expenses are also higher than the average. This means that after spending on everyday needs, people will be left to use less money than average.

Such a socioeconomic situation most often reflects the inhabitants of the city of St. Petersburg and the Moscow Oblast. In total, it describes the socio-economic situation of 15 million people of Russia.

2. At the same time, nearly 10% of the Russian population has an income less than the national average gross income (630 euros), but their living expenses are also lower than the average. This means that after spending on everyday needs, people will be left to use more money than average.

There are 15 million people in Russia in this socio-economic situation, for example, in the Republics of Tyva and Ingushetia.

3. Nearly 18% of the Russian population have an income higher than the country's average gross income (630 euros) and have lower than average living expenses. This means that after paying fixed costs, people will be left to use more money than average.

In such a socio-economic situation, the largest population is in the city of Moscow and in the mining regions, in the whole of Russia a total of 26 million people.

4. The income of most residents of Russia is lower than the national average gross income (630 euros), and their living expenses are higher than average. This means that after spending on everyday needs, people will be left to use less money than average.

In total, it reflects the socio-economic situation of 90 million people of Russia.

THE 2021 STATE DUMA ELECTIONS

As expected, manipulations were used in order to secure the desired result for the ruling elite in the 2021 State Duma 'election'

Though formally still imitating the democratic process, including free elections, the credibility of the regime has diminished further

United Russia would certainly not be able to succeed at a comparable level if faced with real political competition without administrative support or a biased, controlled state media

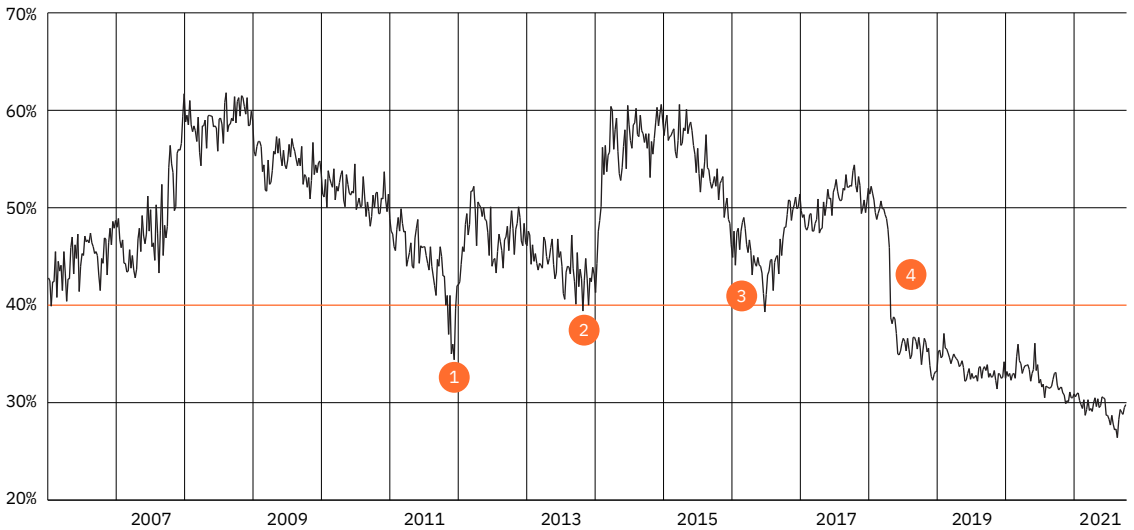
The State Duma election in September 2021 was a mere formality because any political opposition independent of Russia's central government had been completely barred from the election. In terms of restriction of free speech and repression of the opposition, the 2021 State Duma election can be considered the most undemocratic in Vladimir Putin's years in power. Formally, the election fits the mould of the Russian ruling elite's well-worn practice of imitating the democratic process, but in reality, political legitimacy has significantly diminished. This is another trend indicating a growing similarity between the current political regime's modus operandi and that of the Soviet regime.

To manipulate election results and to completely neutralise political competition, essentially the same methods were used as in previous years. Still, several elements were applied much more aggressively than ever before. The main methods used were:

- Administrative tools to suppress the political opposition's organised activities. These were utilised more intensively in 2021 than before.
- Barring unwanted candidates from participating in the election using formal pretexts. This has long been one of the ruling elite's most effective tools to ensure election results. The first serious setback in the use of this tool only occurred during the Moscow City Duma election in 2019.
- Biased media coverage of political parties and the muzzling of media outlets broadcasting views unsuitable for the power elite – another tool used much more forcefully in 2021.
- Direct support from the state apparatus to United Russia.
- “Administrative mobilisation” or pressuring state employees to vote as required.
- Obstruction of independent election observation.
- Falsifying election results.

The official results of the State Duma election were as expected – with the help of manipulation, a constitutional majority was ensured for the ruling political party, United Russia. The lower number of seats in the Duma compared with the 2016 election is explained by the ruling elite’s heightened caution due to the recent presidential election experience in Belarus. Given United Russia’s modest ratings, they shied away from announcing the same result as in the previous Duma election.

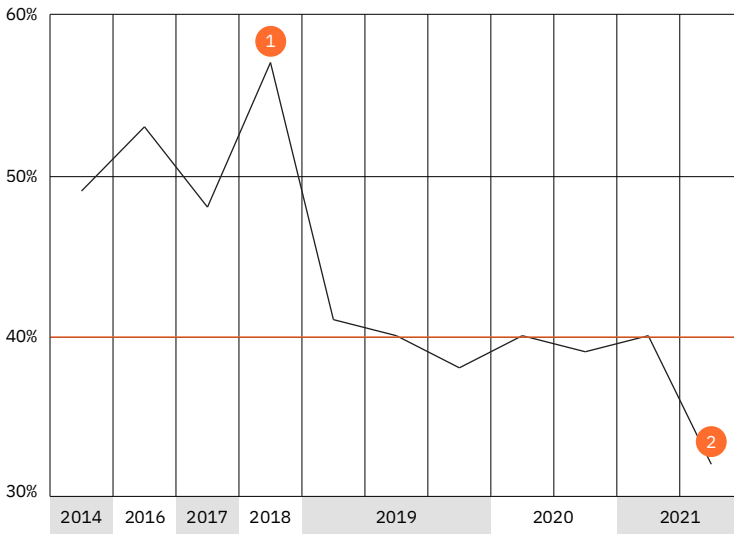
Electoral ratings of United Russia between 2006 and 2021



1. Before 2018, the electoral ratings of United Russia mostly stayed above 40% and the only time the ratings declined below that level was in 2011-12. It was the culmination of a long-term decline in the popularity of the party, which had started in 2009. Late 2011 and early 2012 saw one of the first more serious slumps in Putin’s power system. The peak of that crisis was the extensive demonstrations motivated by the falsification of the results of December 2011 Duma elections.
2. In the first half of 2012, the ruling elite managed to improve the image of United Russia rather swiftly. Due to the presidential elections scheduled for March 2012, the first half of 2012 witnessed vigorous activity to maximise the popularity of the ruling elite, which led to positive results for United Russia. However, the success was short-lived and by autumn 2013, the electoral ratings of United Russia were once again around 40%.
3. The latest and also one of the longest lasting peaks in the popularity of United Russia was brought about by the annexation of Crimea in 2014. However, euphoria faded by early 2016 when the popularity of the party decreased below 50% in January and continued to decline further. The timing was inconvenient – in autumn (September) 2016, elections to the State Duma took place, prior to which the electoral ratings had once again decreased to 40%.
4. Over the next few years, electoral ratings of the party improved. Another steep decline in the approval ratings of United Russia, which the party has not yet recovered from, resulted from the 2018 pension reform, which raised the retirement age. The popularity of the party was measured with a survey which asked potential voters to point out which political party they would vote for if the elections took place the following Sunday.

Source: VCIOM

Electoral ratings of Vladimir Putin between 2014 and 2021



1. The latest peak in Vladimir Putin's electoral ratings was at the time of the 2018 presidential elections, when the impact of Crimean events was still evident and his popularity had been nurtured with active propaganda and manoeuvres of political technology.
2. However, the 2018 pension reform resulted in a sharp decline in popularity. Putin's electoral ratings have not recovered since and in 2021, there was another rapid decline. Due to lower ratings, it is no surprise that the ruling elite of Russia regards the use of force as the main instrument for maintaining power.

Source: Levada

While Vladimir Putin's personal electoral ratings have consistently been higher than those of Russian governmental institutions, they have also started to dip downwards in the last few years. The chart above visualizes this trend. As opinion polls are used by those in power to gauge the societal mood, it's undoubtedly true that growing repression in society is a reflection of the negative numbers: if other methods do not work, a heavy-handed response is deemed necessary to hold onto power. Putin's waning support also shows that assertions of Putin's perpetual reign or support that is autonomous of anything happening within Russia do not ring true.

In our assessment, manipulation played a decisive role in achieving an election result suitable for the ruling elite. United Russia would certainly not be able to succeed at a comparable level if faced with real political competition without administrative support or a biased, controlled state media. The ruling elite's efforts to restrict free speech and repressing the opposition in 2021 are as convincing a proof of this as can be.

THE IMPACT OF SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

The sanctions imposed so far have indirectly impacted Russia's overall economic situation and directly impacted the sanctioned individuals.

It is important to remember that thus far sanctions have been used against specific, well-defined targets.

The long-term indirect effect of sanctions is manifested as curbs on the transfer of sensitive technology and broader financial sanctions progressively diminish a country's competitiveness.

When imposed in 2014, the sanctions were designed to target specific individuals in Russia due to their specific actions. While sanctions also have a broader impact extending to Russia's economic situation, they primarily affect a narrow group of targets – natural and legal persons – or, at most, specific economic sectors. So the phrase “sanctions against Russia” is somewhat simplistic, if not misleading.

Eight years later, however, the world tends to forget the 2014 narrative of precision targeting and often expects the sanctions to show an impact on Russia's broader economic situation. While such an impact is visible – notably the deterrent effect on potential foreign investors and the fact that Russia is trailing in technology – the impact is indirect, which of course does not diminish its effect on the Russian economy.

However, it is above all the direct targets of the sanctions that should be examined, analysing the behaviour of the individuals and companies subject to the sanctions. The sanctions' impact varies according to the extent that the sanctioned individuals need to act in the context of international relations. Individuals who never travel outside Russia may not perceive the sanctions as acutely as an oligarch with extensive relations with the West. The impact of international sanctions on subjects with broader business relations is confirmed by the fact that it has motivated members of the Russian elite to inform the West about their business and political rivals' cooperation with the Kremlin, in the hope of using the sanctions to damage the interests of their competitors. The sanctions have a divisive effect among Russia's elite and provide a tool for internal power struggles beyond the possibilities of the local instruments used so far.

Sanctions divide the Russian elite by providing an additional instrument for their internal power struggle.

Second, the deterrent effect of sanctions must be considered. In other words, events that have not taken place are also an achievement of the sanctions. It is likely the situation with violations of international law by Russia and other countries would be significantly different without sanctions regimes.

Curbs on technology transfer and broader financial sanctions have an important impact on technological innovation. The useful life of any technology can be extended, but not indefinitely. A technological lag steadily erodes a country's competitiveness and impact on the world around it, and this is how the increasing indirect impact of sanctions becomes notable over time.

The long-term effect of sanctions is however also its weakness. Sanctions are a difficult tool to use effectively in turbulent times where an aggressor might pursue and fulfil its objective in days or weeks while sanctions take months to implement and years to have an effect. Therefore a shift in the design of sanctions toward shorter-term, larger-scale instruments could occur.

In our assessment, the servicing of Russian oil production, processing and export by Western companies remains the Achilles' heel that has so far not been addressed. Applying sanctions to these sectors would have a strong negative effect on Russia. Half of Russia's exports are linked to energy carriers and the other half relies on the competitive advantage of low-cost energy input. The late US Senator John McCain's recognition of Russia as a "gas station masquerading as a country" has not lost its meaningfulness over time.

WHAT ARE RUSSIAN CARS MADE OF?

On 6 April 2018, the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) expanded the list of sanctions against Russia to include the Russian carmaker GAZ Group. Initially scheduled for 5 June, the implementation of sanctions was pushed back to 23 October and eventually, after negotiations, replaced by a general licence allowing GAZ Group to continue operations, provided that the company's owner Oleg Deripaska (the sanctions against whom were the reason the company was subject to proceedings in the first place) leaves the management and separates his business interests from GAZ Group.

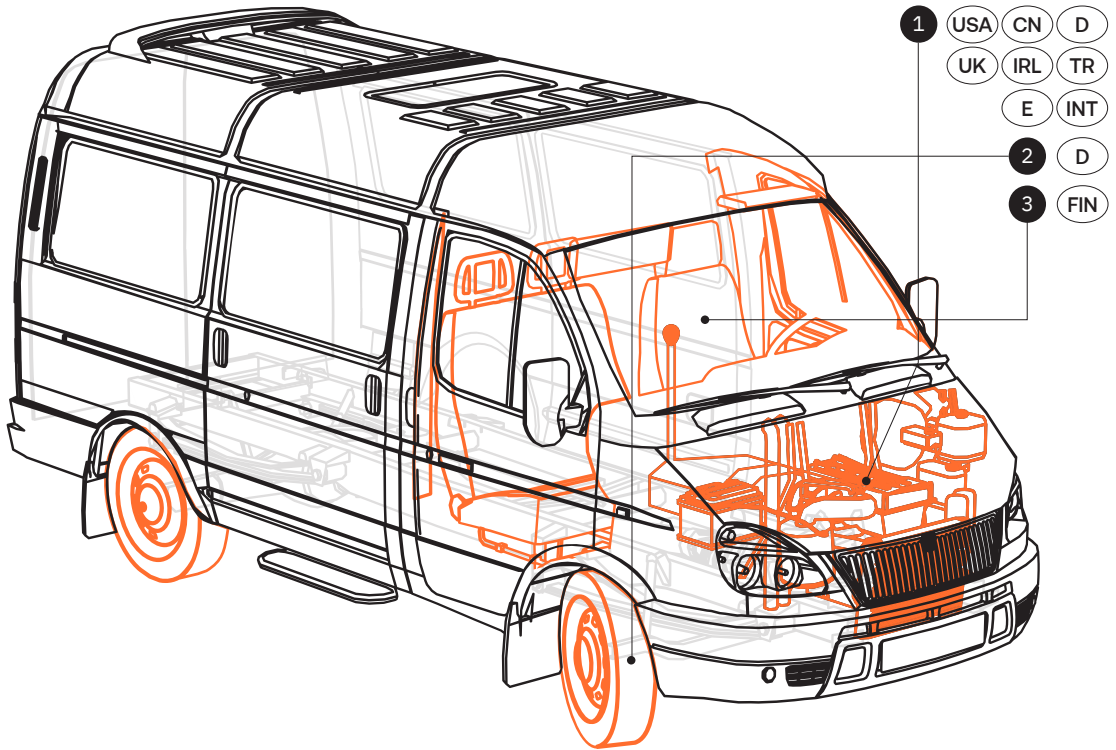
The spring and summer of 2018 were a stressful time for GAZ Group's management. It was supposed to achieve the impossible: find a replacement for Western subcontractors who supplied parts for almost all the major technical components of a modern vehicle but could no longer deliver them to Russia due to sanctions. The management called on the entire anti-sanctions repertoire to save the company: legal and diplomatic efforts, smuggling, masking the supply chain through intermediaries, re-painting and re-coding components, transferring subcontractors' production to Russia, etc.

Resolving the problem by technical means was hopeless; even if they had successfully concealed all the supply chains, the question would have remained – how do you ensure warranty, maintenance and road safety certification for vehicles made of “unknown components”?

“Import substitution” – a familiar concept in Russia's economic vocabulary referring to shedding dependence on Western technology – is largely an illusion based on the notion that it is possible to decouple your economy from the rest of civilisation in the 21st century. GAZ Group was a great example to illustrate how few Russian parts there are in a Russian car. Notably, even the plywood was transported to the factories through the forests of Northwest Russia from 1,500 km away in Suolahti, Finland. OFAC's sanctions would have effectively put the company out of business.

“Import substitution” - referring to shedding dependence on Western technology - is largely an illusion.

Where do components for Russian cars come from?



1.

Diesel Engines

United States/China (Cummins)

Electronics: ABS, TCS, ESP – Germany
(Robert Bosch GmbH)

Gearboxes

Germany (NDGS Diesel Gearbox Service)

Gear components

Germany (FZ Friedrichshafen AG); multinational (Eaton Automotive Com/Sys)

Turbochargers, transmission

Germany, United Kingdom, Ireland (BorgWarner)

Hydraulics

United States(Parker Hannifin)

Transmission belts, hydraulics

Turkey/Spain (Gates Endustriyel / Gates P.T)

2.

Ball bearings

Germany (Shaeffler GmbH)

Brake drums, brake discs, hydraulic cylinders

Germany (Fritz Winter Eisengießerei)

3.

Plywood

Finland (MetsäWood)



CHAPTER 4

CHINA

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CHINA'S POLITICIZED VACCINE DIPLOMACY

China's rhetoric and behaviour contradict each other when it comes to vaccines.

China is using vaccines as a pressure tool in the service of its foreign and security policy goals.

The success of Western vaccines has reduced the leverage of Chinese vaccines.

In 2021, China constantly reiterated that life-saving vaccines should not be “contaminated with the political virus”. However, China's behaviour throughout the year showed the opposite.

When Western countries began to mass vaccinate their populations at the beginning of the year, the Chinese state-controlled media disproportionately spotlighted the first deaths and the public's hesitations about the new vaccine. Conspiracy theories about the COVID-19 virus having escaped from a United States military laboratory in Fort Detrick, Maryland, were actively disseminated.

There is a widespread perception among Chinese foreign ministry press officials that media is not necessarily there to spread facts, but rather to use little tricks to distort the picture, advance the Chinese narrative, and direct media coverage towards topics suitable for China. The goal is to get people talking and find like-minded people in the West who agree with China's eccentric views.

Chinese Foreign Ministry press officials consider the press as a tool to advance the Chinese narrative and use tricks to distort the picture.

Western social media channels are helping to spread the Chinese narrative, with Chinese diplomats, journalists and foreign missions actively creating new accounts over the past year. At the same time, Western accounts on Chinese social media are being deleted more and more vigorously since these, according to the Chinese leadership, are spreading lies and disinformation. China is also repeatedly reciting the claims that it is being bullied and mistreated.

According to massive media coverage in China, the West has also been unfair towards the health of humankind as a whole by distributing coronavirus vaccines only to its own citizens. China, on the other hand, began distributing its vaccine around the world in early 2021. Chinese foreign missions were instructed that both local and international media must cover the arrival of Chinese vaccines.

At the same time, the Chinese prime minister's office was well aware that the Chinese vaccine may not be particularly effective. This knowledge reached the prime minister's office as early as October 2020, when masses of vaccinated Chinese workers fell ill at a facility with 2,000 workers in Vladivostok. China started vaccinating its citizens working at foreign sites against COVID-19 as early as June 2020. It made vaccination

against COVID-19 a requirement for employees of state enterprises to work abroad. Over time, however, it became apparent that many did not develop antibodies after vaccination, and as in Vladivostok, masses of people caught the virus. This information was relayed to the prime minister's office.

The Chinese prime minister's office became aware of the vaccine's possible inefficacy in October of 2020, when a large number of Chinese workers at a factory in Vladivostok became ill.

However, a few months later, China supplied its vaccines to other countries. While doing so, it insisted on a liability waiver, meaning that the responsibility for the efficacy and any possible consequences of using the Chinese vaccines lay with the country of destination rather than the manufacturer or the Chinese government. China was thus free from any accountability.

At the same time, the world was uncertain about the efficacy of the Chinese vaccines, as the manufacturers did not publish the relevant data for a long time. The Chinese state instructed vaccine manufacturers to share data selectively and on the principle that the manufacturer should send the information directly to Western media outlets, which the Chinese media would then in turn be obligated to quote for their own audiences.

Having drawn a lot of attention to vaccines with its vast production capacity and mass media coverage, China decided to exploit this. For example, Chinese vaccines were delivered as a "reward" to countries that, in accordance with the wishes of the Chinese leadership, changed their position in international organisations on the cultural genocide perpetrated against minorities in Xinjiang.

When cajoling did not work, China began to work aggressively with the Islamic member states in the UN Human Rights Council to get them to change their positions. This was done by Chinese ambassadors in the target countries, mainly through the local foreign ministries and by Chinese foreign ministry officials in Beijing.

When it became clear to China in mid-2021 that its vaccine triumph had run its course and countries' interest to buy Chinese vaccines was waning, Beijing opted for blackmail.



The assistance provided by the Communist Party of China under its vaccine diplomacy tagline "For Shared Future" stems from China's hegemonic desire to restore a community of vassal states led by Beijing.

Source: imago images/Xinhua

For example, citizens of some countries were required to get a Chinese vaccine in order to obtain a Chinese visa. The Chinese foreign ministry has publicly denied this. Still, when Ukrainian citizens, for example, applied for a Chinese visa, they were required to present a certificate of immunisation with a Chinese vaccine. Of course, the vaccine could only be administered in Ukraine, forcing the Ukrainian government to approve and purchase the Chinese vaccine. There are more examples like this from other countries. Blackmail was a method used for the distribution of the vaccine worldwide.

However, the principle of “a Chinese vaccine for a Chinese visa” was not applied universally. No such requirement was imposed on EU citizens, for example. However, China looked for an EU member state through which to obtain approval for its vaccine from the European Medicines Agency. Hungary and Austria were selected as states through which China could try to reach the European Medicines Agency.

Chinese workers involved in overseas projects began to demand the BioNTech vaccine through Fosun Pharma; this led to the vaccine being banned.

China itself was strongly opposed to Western vaccines. For example, when Chinese workers involved in overseas projects began to demand the BioNTech vaccine through Fosun Pharma due to dissatisfaction with Chinese vaccines among state enterprise employees and diplomats, China banned the vaccine. Despite this, Chinese diplomats and employees of state enterprises living abroad eventually began to seek Western vaccines.

While Chinese vaccines have undoubtedly saved and will continue to save millions of lives, alongside this positive aspect China is aggressively trying to strengthen its influence by any means possible, including through politicised vaccine diplomacy. Considering its so-called mask diplomacy in 2020 saw Chinese state media claim that personal protective equipment should be supplied only to countries that are not critical of China, it is very likely that with a highly effective vaccine, China would have used it to exert pressure on other countries. However, thanks to the success of Western science, this effort failed, and the countries that initially bought Chinese vaccines switched to Western ones in quick succession. Kuwait even banned anyone vaccinated with the Chinese vaccine from entering the country without an additional injection with a Western vaccine.

It is our assessment that China’s behaviour throughout 2021 confirms its desire to use strong-armed, underhanded, and politicised vaccine diplomacy to undermine Western positions.

TARGETED RESPONSES TO CRITICS

China has begun to rein in its ‘wolf warrior diplomacy’.

Instead of sweeping criticism, it now responds to accusations with personalised objections.

By reassessing its strategy, China hopes to create a more positive image for itself.

A new pattern emerged in China’s verbal responses to public accusations aimed against it in 2021. From the spring of 2018, China had been applying so-called “wolf warrior” diplomacy, mainly expressed by Chinese spokespeople hurling aggressive attacks at critics of China. A salvo of lofty Marxist vocabulary from Chinese literature classes was used to carpet bomb opponents of the Chinese narrative. This style of diplomacy was named after a popular Chinese action movie – *Wolf Warrior 2* – in which a lone Chinese soldier fights American mercenaries.

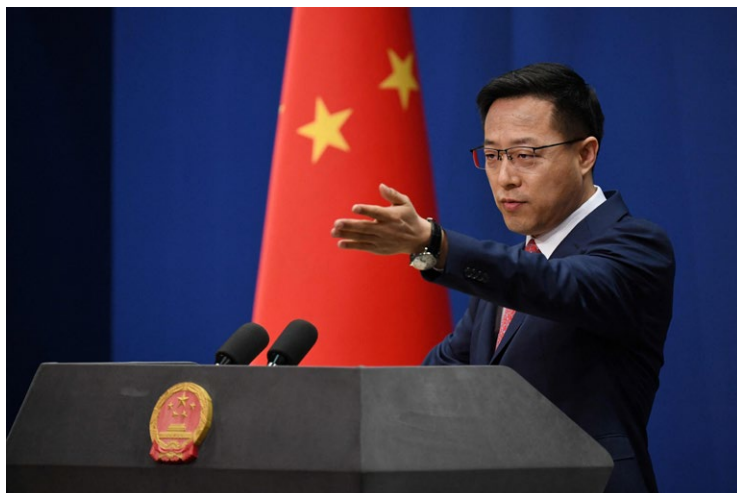
The past year saw China reassess its “wolf warrior diplomacy” and introduce measured responses. Recent opinion polls in the West have shown that China’s image has become significantly more negative over the past couple of years. Due to this trend, Chinese leadership has sensed the need to use a softer, more targeted approach.

The Chinese leadership has sensed the need to use a softer, more targeted approach due to its image becoming significantly more negative.

When responding to criticism now, China addresses specific people or names them in its responses. The personalised response is expected to silence the author of the criticism and show that China’s outrage has been provoked by a specific individual or group and is not directed against all foreigners.

There are several examples of such personalised condemnation from the last year aimed against targets in our region. The Chinese embassy in the Czech Republic criticised the Prague-based think tank Sinopsis, calling its analysts “so-called experts on China”. In Norway, a personal reply was sent to the editor of *Aftenposten* after the newspaper published a statement supporting the Hong Kong publication *Apple Daily* on its front page. The Swedish newspaper *Jönköpings-Posten* received a prompt objection to its editorial criticising China from the Chinese embassy. A Swedish journalist and a member of parliament have also received threatening letters from the Chinese embassy to their personal email addresses.

However, China does not limit itself to verbal threats and is also prepared to use force to disproportionately escalate a conflict situation. For example, China planned to demand that Denmark hand over two members of parliament for having assisted a Hong Kong democracy activist and two other individuals who had criticised China. The Danish



The current spokesperson of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Zhao Lijian is one of the first Chinese diplomats who started cultivating "wolf warrior diplomacy" with Marxist exhilaration. It was decided in Beijing that Zhao Lijian, who at the time of his declarations was working the Chinese embassy in Pakistan, would serve as a great symbol for China's new foreign policy. He was subsequently transferred from Islamabad to the headquarters of the Foreign Ministry behind the Chaoyang Gate (the Gate Facing the Sun).

Source: Greg Baker / AFP

security service took the threat seriously, advising these individuals not to travel to China or China-friendly countries where local authorities could arrest and extradite them to China if requested.

The tactic of personalised responses was solidified in 2021 with unprecedented sanctions imposed by China on ten individuals and four associations in the European Union. Five of the ten people are members of the European Parliament, three are members of national parliaments, and two are experts on China.

China is also willing to go beyond rhetoric, planning to demand the extraditions of four people from Denmark, including two members of parliament.

In this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that the Chinese embassy in Estonia sent unsolicited copies of a propaganda publication, China Watch, to a number of personal email addresses in Estonia. The embassy has evidently been collecting the personal email addresses of Estonian citizens to use them when it deems necessary. The Mission of China to the European Union regularly sends out copies of a much more professional-looking publication with similar content.

There have been new trends in China's influence operations over the past year, but the dialling back of its aggressive and sweeping "wolf warrior diplomacy" does not indicate a weakening of its positions – it merely shows that China has reassessed its strategy. A calibrated media war now accounts for an even more significant part of China's efforts to achieve its strategic goals.

CHINA-RUSSIA RELATIONS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The friendship between China and Russia is a masterfully crafted facade.

In almost every field we have studied, the actual situation conveys distrust and competition.

As things stand, the two countries' interests can only converge up to a certain point.

The rapprochement of China and Russia that began in 2014 against the backdrop of the Ukraine crisis has continued and, in some areas, intensified somewhat during the COVID-19 pandemic. There is closer collaboration in security and influence activities as well as economic cooperation. During the COVID-19 crisis, China and Russia may have seemed ready to move beyond just being on good terms to a new level of an alliance. However, the increased number of high-level visits and joint political statements, the hints at a possible military alliance, and the avoidance of mutual criticism point not so much to the emergence of a China-Russia alliance as to an alignment of pragmatic objectives, highlighted by the crisis, which both are trying to exploit. On closer inspection, the image of friendship between China and Russia turns out to be a clever facade hiding the inequality and mutual distrust between the two superpowers.

China labels countries as those submitting to its hegemonic ambition or those opposing it. Russia is no exception.

Russia's "turn to the East" was driven by the need to reduce the impact of EU and US sanctions on its economy and the Kremlin's desire to give the impression of non-subservience to Western pressure, both domestically and internationally. This is essential to preserve the image of President Vladimir Putin, who intends to stay in power. China was, and continues to be, much less interested in warming the relationship with Russia. This stance is primarily due to the Chinese Communist Party cadre's ambition to expand its reach and rally like-minded countries around itself as a counterweight to the US-led international system of the West. However, the desired outcome of

China's new world order – Xi Jinping's "community of common destiny" – rules out full partnerships. In this system, China treats any other country either as a subordinate or an opponent to its hegemony, applying a "stick and carrot" method equally to all of them, according to the circumstances and its objectives. Russia is no exception, and the Russian elite is well aware of this.

The official Russian media channels describe China and Russia as the two greatest global powers, but in reality, Russia lags far behind China in most areas, especially economically. Despite China's steadily growing share in Russian foreign trade and the EU's decreasing share, Russia's trade with the EU is still almost twice the size of its trade with China. Chinese investment in the Russian economy also remains far behind



The closer cooperation between China and Russia during the Covid-19 pandemic is based on pragmatic goals, resulting from the confrontation of the two countries with the West. In reality, the leaders of China and Russia perceive the threats emanating from one another, which is why the relations between the two countries are not as good as they wish to demonstrate.

Source: Alexander Zemlianichenko /AP

European investment. Russia's growing exports rely on natural gas and oil, which Russia was forced to sell to China at below-market prices because of falling oil prices during the pandemic. To maintain relations with China, Russia must make a lot of concessions and compromises, both on the prices of natural resources and on clauses in cooperation agreements, which China, aware of its advantageous position, often seeks to change to its benefit. The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has deepened this asymmetry.

In technology, China has overtaken Russia in many spheres but still depends on Russian military technology to some extent, especially in the production of aircraft engines. There is very close cooperation on developing artificial intelligence (AI). Several Chinese tech companies are active in the field of AI in Russia, Huawei having the most significant presence. Both China and Russia would like to reduce dependence on Western technologies and work together to achieve that. At the same time, cases of espionage in favour of China that came to light in Russia during the pandemic show

that, despite the desire to give the impression of effective cooperation, there is a lack of trust between the two countries. Russia is aware of the threats posed by China, and by disclosing espionage cases, sends a signal to its alleged partner.

Cases of spying in favour of China that became public during the COVID-19 pandemic in Russia betray the distrust behind the facade of ever-growing cooperation.

In the field of military cooperation, China considers Russia's combat experience highly useful, especially because it has very little itself. This lack of experience is why China is interested in joint military exercises with Russia. The joint exercises between the two countries also serve other objectives – to act as a deterrent to NATO countries and for China to intimidate countries with which it has territorial disputes or considers an integral part of China (Taiwan).

Despite the shared desire to give joint exercises names suggesting broad military cooperation, such as the Zapad/Interaction-2021 exercise in China in August 2021, joint Chinese-Russian activities in the field of security still fall short of coordinated cooperation. In fact, Zapad/Interaction-2021 only shares a symbolic link with the major exercise Zapad-2021 conducted in Russia and Belarus. By presenting themselves as a partnership, China and Russia seek to manipulate the international community and strengthen their image and position. Still, they also realise that forming a real alliance would require actions and concessions that neither is prepared to make.

Much tension occurs in international relations between China and Russia whenever China gains significant influence at the expense of Russia. For example, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is becoming a platform where China and Russia engage in a power struggle under the pretence of good relations between member states. China has begun to assert itself much more forcefully in the SCO, upsetting Russia, which sees the SCO countries of Central Asia as its sphere of influence. China's attempts to use vocabulary that imposes its foreign policy agenda on countries in the Russian sphere of influence worry Russia. This dynamic also confirms the imbalanced partnership between the two great powers as China ignores Russia's wishes in its policy-making.

At the same time, Russia is trying to resist Chinese attempts to force it to endorse China's policy statements and concepts on which the two have no common understanding or agreement. For example, joint statements are co-signed on the condition they also explicitly mention Russian strategic interests. China's previously neutral and restrained foreign policy has become much more aggressive in the last few years, and Russian diplomats have experienced this first-hand. Occasionally, China has broken agreements with Russia, and Chinese diplomats have behaved disrespectfully towards their Russian counterparts.

China's behaviour confirms that it is pursuing its objectives not only by pressuring Western countries that criticise it but also by forcefully, and sometimes cunningly, demanding explicit support for its policies from Russia – a country with which it has seemingly good and trusting relations. Russia, which wants to put pressure on the West by making the international community believe that its good relations with China could lead to a powerful economic and military alliance, hides all diplomatic differences from the public and tries to solve problems with patient negotiations behind the scenes. At the same time, the Russian leadership is concerned about the growing imbalance in relations with China and is doing all it can to defend its right to shape its foreign policy independently.

Еще не конец. Литва поплатится за представительство Тайваня

24 ноября 2021 | 17:20



“It is not over yet. Lithuania will pay for the Taiwanese representative office” – in addition to Kremlin’s propaganda, Russian propaganda outlets active in the Baltic states are also disseminating the narrative designed by Chinese authorities.

Source: Baltnews

Appearances are very important for Russia. The Kremlin’s official media reports extensively on cooperation with China, spotlighting the positive aspects and skirting the differences. In the Russian media, China and Russia are often treated in the same context to give Russia more weight in the eyes of domestic audiences.

Russian propaganda channels also spread pro-China sentiment among Russian-speaking people living in the EU and across the territory of the former Soviet Union, spreading the Chinese official narrative as well as the Kremlin’s talking points. The proliferation of Chinese propaganda in Russian propaganda channels over the past year is mainly due to the Kremlin’s desire to use it to turn both the COVID-19 crisis and the US-China confrontation to its advantage. China’s propaganda is aimed first and foremost at the local Russian-speaking population and exacerbates their already widespread Euroscepticism, anti-NATO sentiment and mistrust of democratic values. In the Baltic states, with a tiny Chinese community, the Russian-speaking population is probably a very receptive audience for Chinese propaganda..

Chinese propaganda amplifies euroscepticism, anti-NATO sentiment and mistrust of democratic values among the Russian-speaking population in the Baltic states.

The Chinese official media reports on the frequent meetings between Chinese and Russian leaders and avoids criticising Russia while not over-emphasising the partnership aspect or confirming speculations about an alliance between the two countries. Instead, it seeks to convey that China will cooperate with any country that agrees to its terms, irrespective of size, reputation or relations with other countries. The situation is somewhat different in Western social media, where Chinese diplomats refer to Russia as a partner and share their Russian counterparts’ messages. This has occurred, for example,

when promoting vaccines produced in either country or cooperating to provide humanitarian assistance to other countries in the COVID-19 crisis, as well as in criticising countries perceived as a common enemy and their policies. The disinformation spread

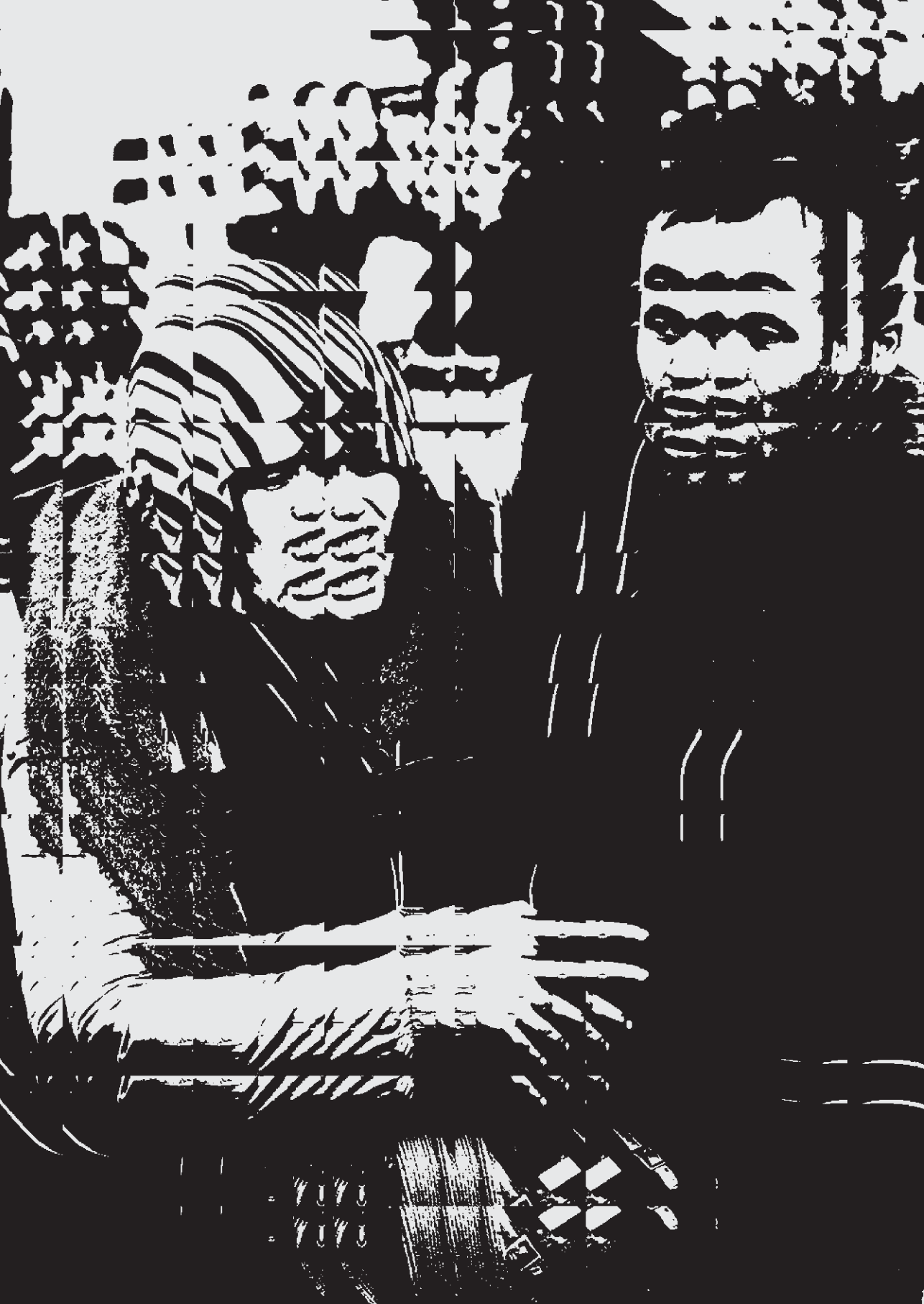
by Chinese social media users is similar in content and rhetoric to Russia's, but this should not be seen as a sign of coordinated cooperation.

During the pandemic, Russia has exploited the topic of a rapprochement between China and Russia as a propaganda weapon, gladly using it for blackmail. However, the softening of Western policies towards Russia and the renewal of dialogue with Russia on its terms is highly unlikely to change Russia's aggressive policy. Russia's demands would probably grow, the policy towards its neighbouring countries would become even more aggressive, and the Kremlin would present all this as its great achievement, which would become very handy in upcoming election campaigns.

A rapprochement between China and Russia is only possible up to a certain point. Although speculation about a China-Russia alliance originated in Russia, Russians also realise that joining China in an alliance would make them a satellite state – something the Kremlin seeks to avoid under any circumstances.

China, in turn, is wary of Russia, perceiving it as an unstable and unpredictable nation with the power to undermine the stability necessary to pursue China's economic interests. China is also critical of Russia over its inability to take control of the COVID-19 epidemic. Although the Chinese media refrains from drawing attention to it, Russia's problematic situation with the virus is blamed on irresponsibility and lack of organisation.

Russia and China will continue pragmatic cooperation in the short term in our assessment. Russia's dependence on China, and proportionately China's influence over Russia, may increase in the longer term. Russia will then likely start looking for ways to minimise the risks. Unity and consistency in US and EU policy towards China and Russia would go a long way to reducing the risks arising from their rapprochement.



CHAPTER 5

TERRORISM AND MIGRATION

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THE THREAT OF TERRORISM IN EUROPE

The spread of religious extremism in Europe is fuelled by the continuing armed conflicts in the Middle East and Africa.

Radicals already in Europe are a source of danger.

In Estonia the level of terrorist threat is currently low.

THE IMPACT OF THE EVENTS IN AFGHANISTAN ON THE TERRORIST THREAT IN EUROPE

The Taliban's victory in Afghanistan has encouraged terrorist groups and Islamic radicals worldwide. Islamic terrorists see the United States leaving Afghanistan as the capitulation of a major power and a victory for jihadism. Afghanistan has the potential to become a global hub for radicals to conduct their training, propaganda, equipment and development activities.

Afghanistan has the potential to become a global hub for radicals.

The Islamic State (IS) has been weakened following the loss of the territory of the caliphate. However, the organisation has succeeded in developing a network of branches around the world, through which it continues its ideological and physical expansion, seeking to divert attention from its defeats, motivate fighters and recruit new members. IS highlights the activities of its branches via its propaganda channels, thus demonstrating its broad reach and inciting fighters to attacks that threaten European countries and interests. Islamic radicals' extensive and effective agitation to organize attacks against the West will continue to pose a serious threat to European security.

IS's Khorasan Province (IS-K) in Afghanistan uses radicals in Europe to incite violence, and plan and carry out attacks. In recent years, IS-K has successfully incited radicals from Central Asia and North Caucasus to attacks, but these have, fortunately, been



Fighters of the so-called Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K) Province in Afghanistan.

Source: social media

thwarted in preparatory stages. In April and May 2020, a group of Tajik nationals who had arrived in Europe as refugees were arrested in Germany, Poland and Albania for planning attacks under the guidance of IS members in Syria and Afghanistan. As IS-K continues to call for attacks against the West, Islamic radicals from Central Asia, inspired by these calls, may continue to target the Western citizens and interests in the region and also carry out attacks in Europe. The threat lies primarily in individuals incited by IS propaganda, who, like the Uzbek radical who carried out an attack in Stockholm in April 2017, are supported and guided by members of the terrorist organisation.

Al-Qaeda has weakened significantly since its heyday, lacking a convincing leader and having lost influence competing with IS in recent years. Since the 2005 London attack, it has not managed to carry out any large-scale attacks in Europe. Al-Qaeda sees the Taliban's victory as an opportunity to gain an advantage over IS, win back members who have sworn allegiance to IS, and carry out terrorist attacks on American and European targets outside Afghanistan.

TERRORIST BREEDING GROUNDS IN AFRICA

The spread of religious extremism in Europe is fostered not only by the continuing armed conflicts in the Middle East and Africa but also by the fact that there are still countries where the government lacks control of part or most of its territory, such as Somalia. What makes such countries a source of danger is the combination of religious extremism, international crime and terrorism. In such countries, terrorists skilfully exploit the region's endemic problems and ethnic conflicts by recruiting members from within vulnerable communities.

Following the departure of international security forces, radicals operating in the Sahel may start planning attacks in Europe.

The Sahel continues to be a significant breeding ground for terrorism. The crisis in Mali has escalated into a regional conflict, extending to neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger. Under French leadership and with the support of international security forces, including the Estonian Defence Forces, there has been a successful effort to curtail the general capabilities of regional terrorist groups with ties to Al-Qaeda and IS, prevent a significant expansion of the Islamic radicals' operating area, and limit the increase of the migration flow stemming from the deteriorating security conditions and the movement of radicals to Europe. With the departure of the international security forces, which will provide terrorists with increased freedom of action, radicals operating in the Sahel may start planning attacks outside the region, including in Europe.

The IS branch in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), active in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, has already shown the potential to incite radicals to carry out attacks in Europe. The branch's activities have been presented as a success story in IS propaganda, with ISGS offensive operations praised and fighters encouraged to carry out attacks on France and its allies, who they claim are leading a "Christian operation" in the Sahel. The radical who attacked police officers in Colombes near Paris on 27 April 2020 under IS's instructions had sworn allegiance to the head of ISGS, Abu Walid al-Sahrawi, and sought to use his terrorist attack to draw attention to the need to establish Sharia law around the world.

In the province of Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, at least 3,000 people have been killed in attacks, and some 800,000 people have been forced to flee since 2017 due to intensified activities by extremist groups with links to IS. Although Mozambique has recently made progress in counter-terrorism thanks to the contributions of other countries, Islamic extremists are still able to recruit fighters from outside Mozambique – from other countries and refugee camps in the region – thus threatening the territory of neighbouring Tanzania.

ISLAMIC STATE TERRORIST THREAT IN EUROPE

The coronavirus pandemic has been both a hindrance and a boon for IS in Europe.

IS has been weakened by the loss of caliphate territory but its desire to carry out attacks in the West remains. The terrorist organisation continues to exploit radicals in Europe to incite violence, plan attacks and carry them out.

Security agencies in many parts of Europe have been able to prevent attacks planned by IS fighters, and many radicals have been arrested at the time of planning their attack. The ability of Islamic radicals to carry out attacks in Europe has also been hampered by the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting travel restrictions. At the same time, the economic and social consequences of the pandemic (isolation, rising unemployment, distance learning, increased computer use, etc.) have created a fertile ground for recruiters to promote radical Islam, particularly among minors and those in difficult social and economic circumstances or suffering from mental health problems. IS continues to call for attacks to be carried out in every possible way with readily available means, targeting security forces, churches, hospitals, pharmacies, malls, shops, parks and other places where people gather.

The overall level of terrorist threat remains high in Europe, and the likelihood of an attack by militants encouraged by IS is particularly high in countries with large Muslim communities.

In the coming years, in addition to Islamic terrorism – and often in response to the fear created by Islamic terrorism – European security will also be affected by the increasingly global and coordinated recruitment efforts of right-wing extremists. Far-right radicals incite violence through social media, online platforms and social networks by exploiting emotive topics such as Islamic terrorism and illegal migration, which will remain relevant for years to come. Individuals who are inspired by far-right attacks and violent propaganda and see themselves as part of a global movement are particularly dangerous.

Despite the persistent terrorist threat in Europe, it is our assessment the risk of terrorism is currently low in Estonia. International terrorism poses a high potential risk primarily for Estonian citizens abroad.



On 27 April 2020, an attack on police officers was carried out in the Paris suburb of Colombes by a radical guided by IS. The act of terrorism was meant to draw attention to the need to impose Sharia law worldwide.

Source: Florian Loisy and Olivier Bureau / Le Parisien

MIGRATION FROM AFGHANISTAN

Internal migration in Afghanistan has doubled; leaving the country is challenging.

The Eastern Mediterranean route (Afghanistan–Iran–Turkey) remains the cheapest and preferred option for migrants.

Travelling through Russia, Belarus, or Ukraine is more expensive and complicated.

In the first half of 2021, internal migration in Afghanistan doubled, with more than 300,000 Afghans leaving their homes, mainly due to drought and security concerns in rural areas, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Migration from Afghanistan to neighbouring countries, particularly Iran and Pakistan, increased. The mass exodus of people from Afghanistan is not in the interest of the Taliban, which came to power in August 2021, as this hampers the country's functioning, and the regime has sought to prevent mass emigration. Leaving Afghanistan is also challenging, as many Afghans do not have the money or documents required to cross the border and need to use the help of traffickers. If the security situation does not deteriorate and the Taliban behaves more moderately than when it came to power in 1996, the number of people leaving the country will be lower than predicted by the UNHCR, especially if the provision of humanitarian aid (including the presence of the UN) continues on the ground in Afghanistan.

The level of migratory flows from Afghanistan depend on the security situation and the policies of the Taliban-led government.

Even as the Eastern Mediterranean route (Afghanistan–Iran–Turkey) is the cheapest and therefore preferred route for illegal migrants heading to the EU from Afghanistan, a rapid increase in the number of Afghan migrants along the route is curbed by the long distances involved and the need to pay charges to cross borders. It takes migrants several months to reach Turkey and it is difficult to complete the journey without the help of traffickers. Afghan refugees have gathered in Turkey and the Balkans, awaiting an opportunity to enter the EU as illegal entry into the Schengen Area has become increasingly challenging due to measures taken against illegal migration. According to the European Commission, the first half of 2021 saw 3,200 Afghan citizens illegally crossing the borders of EU countries, which is 41% less than in 2020. A majority of them arrived in the EU via the Western Balkans by using the help of human trafficking networks.

Restrictions imposed due to the coronavirus pandemic continue to hamper overall migration to Europe, including illegal immigration from Afghanistan. The measures resulting from the pandemic are temporary, and their effect on illegal migration is short-term. As restrictions ease, migration from Afghanistan will likely increase primarily via the Eastern Mediterranean route. This will probably not lead to mass border crossing comparable to that caused by the Syrian crisis when 821,000 refugees from Turkey entered Greece in 2015. The flow of illegal migrants to the EU will likely remain lower even if the situation in Afghanistan escalates at the same time as restrictions are eased,



The Eastern Mediterranean route (Afghanistan–Iran–Turkey) is the cheapest and therefore preferred route for illegal migrants heading to the EU from Afghanistan.

spreading out over a longer period compared with the migration flows from Syria and Iraq between 2015 and 2016.

With the easing of restrictions, migration flows may increase not only along the Eastern Mediterranean route but also on the alternative Eastern land route. This would entail a journey to the EU via Russia, Belarus or Ukraine. However, the prospects for this route are hampered by the need for a mediation network and high charges. Moreover, Afghanistan's northern neighbours have stepped up border controls, limiting the crossing options. It is therefore likely the increase on the Eastern land route, a more costly alternative, will remain marginal compared to the Eastern Mediterranean route.

Estonia is geographically remote from the major illegal migration routes. The main goal of migrants from Afghanistan so far has been to reach Germany, which has the largest Afghan community in Europe. However, with a significant Afghan community in Sweden, the flow of refugees to Estonia could increase if Scandinavia became the main destination for Afghans.

In our assessment, migratory pressure on Europe from Afghanistan will remain in 2022. Still, we do not expect to see migration on a scale like the 2015 Syrian crisis or a sudden mass concentration of Afghan refugees on European borders. Tensions in international hotbeds of conflict that affect migration are a potential source of instability for both Estonia and the EU more broadly.

SUMMARY

1. Russia is ready to begin a full-scale military attack on Ukraine. The escalation taking place on Ukraine's borders deteriorates the security of Europe as a whole and demonstrates how the threat of military action has become the primary tool in Russia's foreign policy toolbox. Estonia must prepare for sustained military pressure from Russia. **Read more in chapter 1.1.**
2. The situation in Ukraine today shows the how important Ukraine is in Russian foreign policy thinking. Without Ukraine, Russia's imperial ambitions fall apart. Russia is particularly perturbed by Ukraine's success in crafting a national identity. **Read more in chapter 2.2.**
3. The strategic military exercise Zapad 2021 fits into a pattern whereby Russian Armed Forces use lessons learned to form new units in the Western strategic direction. **Read more in chapter 1.2.**
4. Intelligence centres of Russian military intelligence (GRU) conduct human intelligence from the territory of Russia, while their area of responsibility extends to Western Europe. Meanwhile, cyber espionage operations conducted by the Russian special services have proved themselves as a well-established and effective way to supply Russian leadership with information on the West's intentions. **Read more in chapters 1.3 and 1.4.**
5. The hybrid attack orchestrated by Belarus is an attempt by Lukashenka to legitimize himself in the eyes of the West using migrants as a weapon, simultaneously serving Russia's interests. In Moldova, Russia is working to restore its geopolitical position and pressure the pro-Western government using energy. **Read more in chapters 2.3 and 2.4.**
6. Russia exploits climate policy as a "soft" subject to positively engage with the West that is otherwise hostile toward it. The reality betrays clear intent to advance Russia's interests alone. **Read more in chapter 2.5.**
7. Supported by overt and covert influence operations, Russia's vaccine diplomacy continued in 2021 with some setbacks. **Read more in chapter 2.6.**
8. The growth of repressions and outright bans in Russian domestic policy allow for more and more parallels with the Soviet Union. The State Duma elections in September 2021 were extensively manipulated. Sanctions against Russia work within the limitations set when they were imposed. The effect of sanctions is demonstrated by the actions of GAZ Group when under the threat of sanctions. **Read more in chapter 3.**
9. Like Russia, China also attempted to use its COVID-19 vaccine to further its geopolitical ambitions. To soften its public image, China has reined in its wolf warrior diplomacy. The cooperation between China and Russia is not as close and friendly as the parties would have it seem. **Read more in chapter 4.**
10. The threat of terrorism in Europe could increase with breeding grounds in Africa and Afghanistan. Radicals already in Europe pose a separate source of danger. Illegal migration from Afghanistan might also increase due to events there, particularly via the Eastern Mediterranean route. **Read more in chapter 5.**