

No One Is Safe: The Information Battlefield of the 21st Century



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ALEKSY
PRZYBYLSKI

The European Union (EU) as a community of nation states was weakened after the immigration crisis in 2015 and after the crisis in the Eurozone in 2010, where Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Greece recorded the greatest recessions. According to the Pew Research Centre surveys conducted among EU member states, a temporary drop in trust in the EU may be observed¹. At the turn of 2013 and 2014, when huge protests erupted in Ukraine against corruption, breaking promises, and generally denying society's hope for a better tomorrow by Viktor Yanukovich, the then pro-Russian president, the weakening of the European Union was exploited by Vladimir Putin's Russia with the invasion on Ukraine².

The phenomenon of so-called "fake news", information war, or disinformation in societies, had already existed. Part of the information war was Radio Free Europe, which was used to transmit a Western narrative in societies behind the Iron Curtain³, or false information about Black people spread by supporters of slavery in the United States when slavery was still legal⁴. Nevertheless, it may be said that the Russian propaganda around Maidan and the subsequent war in Donbass made these concepts appear in the public consciousness. The wars of disinformation between countries continue, and more and more information about other states and their activities is coming to the surface. However, because of the importance of these countries, the actions carried out by Russia and

the People's Republic of China seem to be the most interesting and, at the same time, dangerous for the freedom of the West.

Information wars have gained more significance in the Internet age than they had in the 20th century, when the main sources of information for societies were books, television, and press. As a rule, in the 20th century, it was easier for governments to control an information war in their own backyard, because it was enough to shut down a newspaper, television, or accuse a journalist of spying, or to put pressure on the editorial staff – of course, the application of such measures was dependent on the

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¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/10/14/the-european-union/>

² <https://web.archive.org/web/20180910030305/http://libertarianin.org/o-co-tak-naprawde-chodzi-z-tym-majdanem/>

³ Weiner, T. (2007) *Legacy of Ashes*, Doubleday.

⁴ <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1996/10/thomas-jefferson-radical-and-racist/376685/>

determination of the governments, legal issues, values, or sentiments in a society, only the technical aspect is involved.

One example of such a practice is, though perhaps not very glorious, McCarthyism and the so-called “witch-hunt”, i.e. the search for communists in American society by Senator Joseph R. McCarthy and his special subcommittee of inquiry in the Senate⁵. In the Internet age, however, it is possible to create a strongly decentralized network of propaganda centers, whose founders and owners will be difficult to locate, and even more so, to be stopped by the authorities – even if they are outside the jurisdiction of a given country.

RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA ON THE FRONTLINES

The Russian model of disinformation warfare is based, at least in part, on spreading false information, imposing its own narrative, and influencing political groups and the media – both created by Russians, and those already in existence. The Russian government targets not only extreme right-wing and left-wing parties, but also libertarians and general opponents of the *status quo* are not free of Russia’s tentacles⁶. It can be concluded that the goal of the Kremlin is not so much to seize power in a given country, as to deepen the chaos and divisions between Western countries or within individual countries. Therefore, let us take a look at selected elements of Russian propaganda addressed to individual political centers. One can also point out the propaganda activities of the Russian govern-

ment which are not aimed at a particular group, but at entire societies, such as Russia’s assistance to Italy in the form of providing equipment and military specialists to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. However, after a few days, it turned out that most of the equipment was useless or almost unnecessary, which was also true for Russian specialists, who – according to the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* – are experts in chemical weapons rather than healthcare. The aim was to show Western societies that the Russian model of “democracy” is more effective, and that in case of problems one can count on Russia rather than NATO⁷.

THE RIGHT WING UNDER ATTACK

During the time of EuroMaidan, a narrative driven by nationalist and right-wing politicians and publicists appeared on the Polish Internet, according to which, Maidan was dominated by “Banderites”, Nazis, Jews, and LGBT movements. An attentive reader will immediately catch the contradiction between the Nazis versus the Jews and the LGBT movements⁸, whose extermination was one of the goals of the Third Reich. The “Banderites” were addressed primarily to the Polish right, since it is a term used to describe the sympathizers of Stepan Bandera, a Ukrainian nationalist who co-founded the organization responsible for the slaughter of the Polish people of Volhynia during WWII⁹. The Polish right was also addressed with suggestions to divide Ukraine between Poland, Russia, and

⁵ <http://www.authentichistory.com/1946-1960/4-cwhomefront/1-mccarthyism/>

⁶ See: https://cia.media.pl/rosja_hakerzy_wlamali_sie_na_mail_aleksandra_dugina; <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.com/2014/03/pro-russian-extremists-observe.html?f>; <https://www.tango-noir.com/2018/06/16/full-list-of-members-of-the-european-parliament-who-voted-against-the-resolution-on-political-prisoners-in-russia/>

⁷ See: <https://www.polskieradio24.pl/5/1223/Artykul/24-81704,Wlosi-krytykuja-pomoc-Kremla-Rosyjski-ambasador-jatrzy-kto-wam-przychodzi-z-pomoca>; <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,25821028,koronawirus-we-wloszech-podejrzana-pomoc-z-rosji.html>

⁸ See: <http://www.iarex.ru/interviews/44745.html>; <http://www.nawolyniu.pl/artykuly/lysiak.htm>

⁹ See: Motyka, G. (2011) *Od rzezi wołyńskiej do akcji Wisła*, Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie; Mucha, W. (2014) “Oddziały Putina w Polsce”, [in]: *Gazeta Polska* No. 50 (1114), Warsaw.



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Hungary¹⁰, which was reflected in the feelings of resentment that have still existed in Poland and Hungary¹¹. The aim of this was also to sow discord between the Poles

¹⁰ <https://www.rp.pl/Konflikt-na-Ukrainie/181009974-Telewizja-Rossija-1-Polsko-rosyjski-rozbiór-Ukrainy.html>

¹¹ Before World War II, Polish territory included today's Ukrainian lands, mainly those around Lviv. Previously, for several centuries, even larger areas of land in today's Ukraine were within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Many Poles miss those times which are being identified with the peak of Polish power, hence the desire of some to regain, among others, Lviv. The same can be observed in Hungary, whose territory was much larger before the treaty of Trianon in 1920. See, for example: <https://www.dziennikwschodni.pl/lublin/lwow-odzyskamy-banderowcow-ubijemy-skandal-na-meczu-polska-ukraina-na-arenie-lublin,n.1000017997.html>

and Ukrainians¹² – as the Volhynian massacre was also used in Ukraine¹³. Needless to say, right-wing circles are the victims of Russian propaganda not only in Poland, but also in other European countries.

A good example is the German far-right party Alternative fuer Deutschland (AfD), which is known for its nationalist and anti-Islamic stance¹⁴. AfD is an interesting case for liberal circles, because it was initially a pro-market, pro-American, and pro-NATO party¹⁵, followed by a turn in the party platform in 2015, which was opposed by one of its founders, Bernd Lucke¹⁶.

The party representatives had contacts with the staff of the Russian embassy at joint conferences and attended pro-Russian events, such as the one devoted to the liberation of Yugoslavia from Nazi occupation in Serbia¹⁷. AfD admitted that Russia wanted

¹² In 1943, groups of Ukrainian nationalists attacked Poles in Volhynia, where tens of thousands of people died. The Polish inhabitants of Volhynia retaliated against the Ukrainians, killing several thousand of the latter. There is still a dispute between Poles and Ukrainians about the interpretation of these events. See, for example: <https://www.newsweek.pl/swiat/andrzej-duda-chce-odbicia-lwowa-prezydent-ofiara-propagandy/tepp99>; <https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/58637/Polacy-chca-odebrac-Ukraincom-Lwow.html>

¹³ <https://kresy.pl/wydarzenia/regiony/ukraina/fake-news-ukrainie-polska-chce-rb-onz-uznania-rzezi-wolynskiej-ludobojstwo/>

¹⁴ See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/18/world/europe/germany-afd-alternative-bjorn-hocke.html>; <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/interview-with-frauke-petry-of-the-alternative-for-germany-a-1084493.html>; <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37337927>

¹⁵ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/anti-migrant-anti-muslim-and-anti-merkel-germanys-afd-set-to-enter-parliament/>

¹⁶ <http://m.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/afd-bernd-lucke-spricht-sich-fuer-afd-beobachtung-durch-verfassungsschutz-aus-a-1250739.html>

¹⁷ See: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/german-populists-forge-deeper-ties-with-russia-a-1089562.html>; <http://www.thelocal.fr/20141124/frances-far-right-turns-to-russia-for-9-million-loan>; <https://www.facebook.com/annavero.wendland/posts/578-087682366813>



AFD IS AN INTERESTING CASE FOR LIBERAL CIRCLES, BECAUSE IT WAS INITIALLY A PRO-MARKET, PRO-AMERICAN, AND PRO-NATO PARTY

to bribe them with loans and gold, although they claim they refused. In March 2016, the party received generous donations from anonymous donors, including thousands of election signs and millions of copies of a free campaign newspaper. AfD's treasurer does not rule out that the donations were financed by Russia¹⁸. The members confirmed that in 2017 a delegation of the party flew a private jet to Moscow, which had been paid for by the Russian government¹⁹.

Alexander Gauland, the then vice president of AfD, was a guest at the Russian embassy in Berlin and took a trip to Russia in 2015, financed by Konstantin Malofeev, a Russian Oligarch. There he met with, among others, Alexander Dugin, a Russian neo-fascist who

is regarded as the Kremlin's chief ideologist and has contacts with many pro-Russian politicians and activists in the West²⁰. Gauland is also known for his infamous words that "Crimea has already been Russian once, and is Russian again. It will never return to Ukraine"²¹.

Udo Hemmelgarn, a member of AfD and German parliament, is known for his support for the Assad regime and his demand that Germany support the Russian presence in Syria. In 2019, Hemmelgarn organized a secret trip of four AfD parliamentarians to Syria²².

The media also reached documents according to which Marcus Frohnmaier, an AfD MP and a former head of the party's youth group, was to be supported by Russia. The correspondence between a former Russian counterintelligence officer and a member of the Russian Parliament, which the media has acquired, shows the idea of organizing meetings between Russians and representatives of right-wing political parties from Europe, supporting their media campaigns, and organizing demonstrations. He was also a guest of the Russian side in the occupied Crimea and in occupied Donbass, where he met with Manuel Ochsenreiter, a neo-Nazi, an observer of the 2014 elections in Crimea, and the president of the German Eurasian Research Center²³ – *nota bene*,

¹⁸ See: <http://europe.newsweek.com/putins-envoys-seek-influence-european-radicals-297769>; <http://europe.newsweek.com/putins-envoys-see-influence-european-radicals-297769>; <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/german-populists-forge-deeper-ties-with-russia-a-1089562.html>

¹⁹ <https://www.thelocal.de/20180522/russian-payment-for-afd-leaders-private-jet-is-shocking-critics-say>

²⁰ See: <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/german-populists-forge-deeper-ties-with-russia-a-1089562.html>; <https://www.rferl.org/a/greek-syria-deep-ties-russian-eurasianist-dugin/26818523.html>

²¹ <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/german-populists-forge-deeper-ties-with-russia-a-1089562.html>

²² <https://www.tagesschau.de/investigativ/ndr-wdr/afd-syrien-103.html>

²³ See: <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/german-populists-forge-deeper-ties-with-russia-a-1089562.html>; <https://www.dw.com/pl/afd-dementuje-pow%C4%85zania-z-mateuszem-piskorskim/a-40152456>

AfD asked for a “like” for the Center on its official fanpage²⁴. Later, Manuel Ochsenreiter became Frohnmaier’s assistant. The AfD MP focused, among others, on the opposition to sanctions on Russia, the status of the Crimea, and the war in Ukraine²⁵.

Frohnmaier also fostered a partnership between AfD youth and Young Guard (YG), the youth of Putin’s party. YG is known for its anti-Western and anti-LGBT views²⁶.

The Russian television channel RT, a propaganda tube outside Russia, has promoted AfD politicians in programmes for the German and international audience²⁷. They also invite to their programs, for example, Ken Jebsen – who is linked to the magazine *Compact*, which is associated with AfD²⁸ – and was presented as an independent journalist in the RT. Jebsen said on air, among other things, that the West must “act on the case of the fascists from Kyiv”²⁹. During the 2017 election, Russian television stations in Germany promoted AfD exclusively, and also distributed disinformation that hit the Merkel government³⁰. For example, Russian



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²⁴ https://www.facebook.com/afdgrzabg/posts/z6775-78315714929?_rdc=1&_rdr. Available [online]: June 26, 2016.

²⁵ <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/rosyjski-wywiad-oplaczal-niemieckiego-posla-i-polskich-nacjonalistow-6373470089799297a>

²⁶ <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/german-populists-forge-deeper-ties-with-russia-a-1089-562.html>

²⁷ <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/gesellschaft/medien/auftritt-im-propagandasender-russia-today-wie-der-mdr-der-afd-und-moskau-zugleich-half/21101090.html>

²⁸ P.A. Simpson – Mobilizing meanings: Translocal identities of the far right web. *German Politics and Society*, (2016)

²⁹ <https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2014-11/rt-deutsch-russland-propaganda-luegen/seite-2>

³⁰ See: <http://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/swiat/1-721430.1.rosja-ingerowala-w-niemieckie-wybory-sa-niepokojace-sygnaly.read>; <https://forsal.pl/artykuly/10-05463.jak-putin-steruje-europa-dezinformacja-zbierania-niwo.html>

TV station *Channel One* reported that a 13-year-old girl from a Russian-immigrant family was being raped by asylum-seekers for over a 30-hour period. According to German police, the girl was not raped and not abducted. These “fake news” incidents fueled anti-migrant protests in Germany.³¹ *The Washington Post* reported that Russian support for AfD was provided by anonymous accounts on the Internet that promoted anti-immigrant messages from AfD³².

³¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-eu-35413134>

³² <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/washington-post-o-sukcesie-afd-rosjanie-mieli-mobilizowac-wyborcow-6170288025638529a>

It is also worth mentioning the vision of Russia that President Putin is selling to the right wing in the West. According to John R. Schindler, a former NSA analyst, Putin can be called “an Orthodox Jihadist”. Russian propaganda presents Putin as the last crusader, a true defender of “Western values”, freedom of speech, masculinity, family, nation states, Christianity, opposition to political correctness, Islam, decadence, and moral decline of the West³³.

THE LEFT IN MOSCOW’S SERVICE

Although the Russian propaganda apparatus presented Maidan as a gang of anti-Polish nationalists, Jews, and LGBT+, it did not prevent them from directing a slightly different messaging to the left-wing movements. In this way, the Ukrainians fighting the government, and later the new government with Poroshenko at the helm, became fascists and – again – Nazis³⁴. Yanukovich (and later the separatists) supported by Russia were portrayed as anti-fascists³⁵, even though on the separatist side fought the declared fascists and Nazis³⁶.

As mentioned earlier, not only the right-wing parties are the targets of Russian intelligence activities. One of the left-wing parties that have connections with the Russian state is Syriza. This Greek party won power in 2015 with its socialist and



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anti-austerity program³⁷. After winning the election, Syriza formed a coalition with Independent Greeks, a right-wing party that opposes the austerity required by the European Union (EU)³⁸. The victory of Syriza could have been a positive change for Russia because of its anti-saving policies, which could have jeopardized the stability of the Eurozone and the interests of the Northern EU countries, which were creditors of Greece.

According to an e-mail leak in December 2014, Syriza was in contact with the Kremlin’s neo-fascist ideologist Alexander Dugin and with Konstantin Malofeev, the Russian oligarch who is suspected of sponsoring separatists in Donbass³⁹ and has been accused by the Bulgarian government for his efforts to turn Bulgaria towards Russia⁴⁰. Dugin and Malofeev aimed to create a circle of politicians and intellectuals friendly

³³ <https://reason.com/2017/07/07/russias-global-anti-libertaria/>

³⁴ <https://www.km.ru/world/2014/01/24/protivostoyanie-na-ukraine-2013-14/730706-evromaidan-krizis-demokratii-i-prizraki-f>

³⁵ <https://natemat.pl/119319.polak-z-wielkiej-brytanii-dolaczyl-do-separatystow-w-donbasie-jestem-antyfaszysta>

³⁶ See: <https://jagiellonia.org/winston-churchill-przyszli-faszysci-beda-nazywac-siebie-antyfaszystami-fotogalerija/>; <https://natemat.pl/114667.bartosz-bekier-walczy-o-doniecka-republike-ludowa-jak-polski-student-dolaczyl-do-prorosyjskich-separatystow>

³⁷ <http://greece.greekreporter.com/2015/01/12/syriza-leader-tsipras-promises-restoration-of-returnee-expatriates-pensions/>

³⁸ http://www.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/_w_articles-wsite1_1_26/01/2015_546550

³⁹ <https://www.rferl.org/a/greek-syriza-deep-ties-russian-eurasianist-dugin/26818523.html>

⁴⁰ <https://www.expatica.com/ru/russia-banker-gets-10-year-ban-from-bulgaria-spy-affair/>

to Russia. The Russians and Syriza were to “work closely together on strategy, PR, etc.”⁴¹. For instance, important Syrian documents about their political positions were to be forwarded to Dugin for his opinion. Syrian representatives were on the list of potential partners of their network of intellectuals that Dugin presented to the oligarch in February 2014⁴².

Further news also include Nicolas Laos, Syriza’s Greek adviser and businessman with business connections in Russia, or Panos Kammenos, the head of the Independent Greeks party, who later became the Minister of Defense, and whose Institute for Geopolitical Studies began working with the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, formerly part of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service⁴³. Kammenos was also opposed to the agreement with Macedonia to change the country’s name to North Macedonia, so that Greece would not block North Macedonia’s NATO candidacy⁴⁴. Dugin also has connections with the Foreign Minister in the then Syriza government, Nikos Kotzias, a former member of the Communist Party. Dugin was invited by Kotzias to give a lecture at International Politics and the Eurasianist Vision, where he said that Greece should not join the Eurasian Union, but should play a role in “reconstructing Europe’s architecture” and create an “eastern pole of European identification” in the European Union with other countries, including Serbia⁴⁵ (an EU candidate country). Kotzias, in

his rhetoric, rejected the EU’s tough line of sanctions against Russia and demanded an active role for Greece in negotiations with Moscow⁴⁶.

Then Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, the Minister of Energy and Panagiotis Lafazanis, the leader of the far left in Syriza, were also against further sanctions against Russia in the coalition government of Syriza and Independent Greeks. Tsipras accused Kyiv of being a haven for the Nazis, and said that “it is a regress for us to have fascists and neo-Nazis in European governments and that the European Union accepts this”⁴⁷.

As mentioned at the beginning, Russia is trying to reach everyone who wants, or is able, to disturb the *status quo* in the West. From this perspective, other interesting groups are the so-called “hackers”, “libertarians”, and “radical liberals”.

OPPONENTS OF THE STATUS QUO: HACKTIVISTS

Julian Assange, an Australian citizen, decided to launch the “WikiLeaks Party”, which was to give him a place in the Australian Senate⁴⁸. From the beginning, WikiLeaks has tried to give the impression of a completely neutral project, aimed only at fighting for the transparency of all countries. Although, according to TechCrunch, the first time when they published something that actually concerned Russia was in 2017⁴⁹, it was nothing that could cause an earthquake⁵⁰.

⁴¹ http://www.ekathimerini.com/4dcqj/_w_articles_wsite1_1_26/01/2015_546550

⁴² <https://www.rferl.org/a/greek-syriza-deep-ties-russian-eurasianist-dugin/26818523.html>

⁴³ <https://www.rferl.org/a/greek-syriza-deep-ties-russian-eurasianist-dugin/26818523.html>

⁴⁴ <http://www.ekathimerini.com/233729/article/ekathimerini/news/greek-pm-accepts-kotzias-resignation-takes-over-as-foreign-minister>

⁴⁵ <https://www.rferl.org/a/greek-syriza-deep-ties-russian-eurasianist-dugin/26818523.html>

⁴⁶ <https://tvn24.pl/swiat/grecja-nie-moze-zerwac-swoich-histerycznych-wiezow-z-rosja-ra511208>

⁴⁷ <https://www.ft.com/content/a87747de-a713-11e4-b6bd-00144feab7de>

⁴⁸ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2012/12/12/assange-Wikileaks-party-australia>

⁴⁹ <https://jagiellonia.org/totalna-inwigilacja-uzyt-kownikow-internetu-przez-rosyjskie-sluzby-wikileaks-po-raz-pierwszy-wypuszcza-materiały-na-rosje/>

⁵⁰ <https://www.wired.com/story/wikileaks-spy-files-russia/>



RUSSIA IS TRYING TO REACH EVERYONE WHO WANTS, OR IS ABLE, TO DISTURB THE *STATUS QUO* IN THE WEST

However, when browsing through the official fan page of Assange's party, one can find posts that fit into the pro-Russian narrative. Up to now, one can read there that "Ukraine is at war with their own people"⁵¹, "Israel Special Forces are training American cops despite history of rights abuses"⁵², or that "American helicopters are transporting Daesh fighters in eastern Syria"⁵³. From their profile, one can also learn that the MH17 flight was interrupted by a rocket launched from territory controlled by Ukraine and not by Russian puppet *quasi* states⁵⁴. There are also videos where a man accuses John McCain of treason⁵⁵ or clips from RT, a propaganda television sponsored by the Russian

government that operates outside Russia⁵⁶. We can also see a photo of unknown origin that shows an infant with a deformed body who, according to the provided description, is a child from Fallujah in Iraq – thus its appearance is blamed on the United States⁵⁷. These are just a few consecutive posts. However, it is difficult to prove that it was supposed to work in favor of Russian propaganda, only on the basis of entries in social media. But there is more.

Julian Assange was in hiding at the Ecuadorian embassy in London for several years, from where – according to the report of the Spanish consulting company, UC Global, created on behalf of the Ecuadorian government – he was supposed to be in contact with Russian secret services. According to the report, Assange personally supervised the leakage of e-mails from Hillary Clinton (who, at the time, was Donald Trump's opponent in the U.S. presidential race) and had previously been in contact with Nikolai Bogachychin, the head of RT's London branch⁵⁸ and the people who donated the stolen materials⁵⁹.

According to Robert Mueller, an American official investigating Russia's interference in the U.S. presidential election, Assange met altogether with twelve Russian intelligence officers⁶⁰. The information about Assange's planned escape from the United Kingdom

⁵¹ <https://www.facebook.com/WLParty/posts/1339-305472833678>

⁵² <https://www.facebook.com/WLParty/posts/1342-116572552568>

⁵³ <https://www.facebook.com/WLParty/posts/1325-287180902174>

⁵⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/WLParty/posts/1333-357976761761>

⁵⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/WLParty/posts/1333-340750096817>

⁵⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/WLParty/posts/1334-177200013172>

⁵⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/WLParty/posts/1324-552910975601>

⁵⁸ <https://www.newsweek.pl/swiat/zalozyciel-wiki-leaks-wspolpracowal-z-rosja-mial-wplynac-na-wyniki-wyborow-w-usa/g6zkvwy>

⁵⁹ <https://www.infosecurity24.pl/wikileaks-czescia-rozgrywki-rosyjskiego-wywiadu>

⁶⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/13/us/politics/mueller-indictment-russian-intelligence-hacking.html>

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to Russia⁶¹, which the Russians were supposed to help him with, was suspicious, but allegedly the plan was viewed by Russians as too risky⁶². Assange also ran his program on Russian propaganda television RT⁶³. The founder of WikiLeaks has been supported in the past by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, among others, according to whom Assange deserves the Nobel Peace Prize. Wikileaks also criticized the documents published by Panama Papers, according to which, among other things, Russian businessmen had ties to companies in tax

⁶¹ <https://tvn24.pl/swiat/media-julian-assange-chcial-uciec-do-rosji-ra869166-2582579>

⁶² <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,23952854,rosjanie-chcieli-pomoc-assange-owi-w-ucieczce-z-wielkiej-brytanii.html>

⁶³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/01/world/europe/wikileaks-julian-assange-russia.html>

havens. This criticism was later used by Vladimir Putin to deny the truth of the Panama Papers' report about Russian corruption and oligarchs and to calm the Russian society⁶⁴.

FRIENDS OF FREEDOM AND RUSSIA

The next groups are libertarians and radical liberals. The most noteworthy are the libertarians from the Ron Paul Institute and those associated with the American Mises Institute. The most important representatives of both communities include Ron Paul, the founder of the Ron Paul Institute and a former member of the US Congress⁶⁵; Lew Rockwell, the founder of the Mises Institute and the website lewrockwell.com⁶⁶, and Justin Raimondo, the co-founder of antiwar.com⁶⁷.

Ron Paul is known for his many controversial statements criticizing US foreign policy and justifying Russia's actions. He publicly stated that a *coup d'état* took place in Ukraine in 2014, and that the sanctions imposed on Russia are "criminal" and constitutes an act of war⁶⁸. He also justified the so-called "Crimean referendum", claiming that he saw no reason why it should not be fair and that everyone should have the right to secession⁶⁹. He also accused the US government of funding a change of government in

⁶⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2016/apr/07/putin-dismisses-panama-papers-as-an-attempt-to-destabilise-russia>

⁶⁵ <http://ronpaulinstitute.org/about-us/>

⁶⁶ <https://www.lewrockwell.com/about/>

⁶⁷ https://original.antiwar.com/antiwar_staff/2019/07/05/justin-raimondo-rip-1951-2019-2/

⁶⁸ See: <https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/03/06/ron-paul-crimea-has-right-to-join-russia-obamas-sanctions-criminal>; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/15/ron-paul-crimea-russia-sanctions-act-of-war>

⁶⁹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20140814075502/http://blog.panamapost.com/alexander-mccobin/2014/03/24/ron-paul-gets-it-wrong-when-he-speaks-about-secession-and-crimea/>

Ukraine, with the National Endowment for Democracy, an American fund that distributes grants to organizations in authoritarian and emerging democracies⁷⁰. In one of his speeches, he suggested that the MH17 plane that was shot down was a “false flag” by Ukraine⁷¹ and that it is the United States⁷² that was to blame. Ron Paul has appeared many times in RT, just like his colleagues from the Institute⁷³.

As Anton Shekhovtsov, a Ukrainian researcher on the European extreme right and its links to Russia, reported on his blog⁷⁴, at least three of Ron Paul Institute’s associates were associated with the now-defunct British Helsinki Human Right Group (unrelated to the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights) – known for its claim that elections in authoritarian Belarus meet democratic standards. They are Daniel McAdams, Executive Director of the Institute and associated with antiwar.com, as well as RT, Mark Almond (former President of the BHHRG; speaking in RT and associated with another Russian propaganda channel, the Voice of Russia) and John Laughland, a British opponent of the European Union (formerly associated with the Institute of Democracy and Cooperation in Paris, where Natalya

Narochnitskaya, a Russian national-conservative, was the head). Daniel McAdams is responsible, among other things, for an article according to which the Ukrainian government is carrying out ethnic cleansing or arguing with the Ukrainians living on the battlefield, ridiculing them for thinking that, “separatists kill their own people”. He also ridiculed information about Russian military drones on Mariupol, a Ukrainian seaside town that was the target of a pro-Russian offensive⁷⁵. Paul’s institute takes the same position on the issue of Maidan and the war in Ukraine⁷⁶. As Anton Shekhovtsov, a Ukrainian researcher on the European extreme right and its links to Russia, reported on his blog⁷⁷, at least three of Ron Paul Institute’s associates were associated with the now-defunct British Helsinki Human Right Group (unrelated to the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights) – known for its claim that elections in authoritarian Belarus meet democratic standards. They are Daniel McAdams, Executive Director of the Institute and associated with antiwar.com, as well as RT, Mark Almond (former President of the BHHRG; speaking in RT and associated with another Russian propaganda channel, the Voice of Russia) and John Laughland, a British opponent of the European Union (formerly associated with the Institute of Democracy and Cooperation in Paris, where Natalya Narochmitskaya, a Russian

⁷⁰ In fact, there was information that the US government spent more than five billion dollars on Euromaidan. However, in reality, the amounts covered the period since 1992 and concerned expenditure on, among others, support for the fight against drug smuggling, support for the rule of law, humanitarian aid, and economic aid. Find out more: <https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2014/mar/19/facebook-posts/united-states-spent-5-billion-ukraine-anti-government/>; <https://www.thedailybeast.com/ron-paul-is-supporting-russias-illegal-occupation-of-crimea>

⁷¹ <http://ronpaulinstitute.org/archives/featured-articles/2014/july/24/ron-paul-whats-so-bad-about-a-split-up-ukraine.aspx?>

⁷² <https://www.businessinsider.com/ron-paul-defends-russia-after-malaysian-plane-crash-2014-7?IR=T>

⁷³ <https://www.rt.com/trends/ron-paul-us-politics/>

⁷⁴ <https://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.com/2014/02/pro-russian-network-behind-anti.html?>

⁷⁵ See: <http://ronpaulinstitute.org/archives/peace-and-prosperity/2014/march/11/geoffrey-pyatt-the-outlaw-as-sheriff.aspx>; <http://www.ronpaulinstitute.org/archives/neocon-watch/2014/march/26/did-students-for-liberty-leader-really-attack-ron-paul/>; <https://ukraine-atwar.blogspot.com/2014/08/rpi-executive-director-daniel-mcadams.html>

⁷⁶ See: <http://ronpaulinstitute.org/archives/featured-articles/2014/january/23/ukrainian-opposition-and-the-west-%E2%80%98playing-with-fire-siding-with-extreme-nationalists.aspx>; <http://ronpaulinstitute.org/archives/featured-articles/2014/january/22/-radicals-in-riots-euromaidan-failed-to-separate-from-neo-nazis.aspx>

⁷⁷ <https://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.com/2014/02/pro-russian-network-behind-anti.html?>

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Similar articles appeared on a page related to Lew Rockwell, where even articles directly from RT appeared⁷⁹.

CHINA, (SELF-)CENSORSHIP IN POP CULTURE, AND OTHER INFORMATION-WARFARE STORIES

The Chinese model of information war with the West differs from the Russian model. It does not focus so much on aggressive promotion of politicians sympathizing with China, but instead puts emphasis on building a positive image of China in the West, imposing its narrative on Western companies or gradually buying out companies in the West. The Chinese model of information war with the West differs from the Russian model.

⁷⁸ See: <http://ronpaulinstitute.org/archives/peace-and-prosperity/2014/march/11/geoffrey-pyatt-the-outlaw-as-sheriff.aspx>; <http://www.ronpaulinstitute.org/archives/neocon-watch/2014/march/26/did-students-for-liberty-leader-really-attack-ron-paul/>; <https://ukraine-atwar.blogspot.com/2014/08/rpi-executive-director-daniel-mcadams.html>

⁷⁹ See: <https://www.lewrockwell.com/2015/03/michael-s-rozoff/what-russian-aggression-in-ukraine/>; https://www.lewrockwell.com/2018/01/no_author/ukraine-libya-syria-and-now-iran-we-have-seen-this-song-and-dance-before/; <https://www.lewrockwell.com/2015/07/russia-today/was-there-a-2nd-aircraft-in-the-mh-17-disaster/>; <https://www.lewrockwell.com/2015/04/ron-paul/us-sends-troops-to-ukraine/>; https://www.lewrockwell.com/2019/11/no_author/ukraine-for-dummies/



THE SELF-CENSORSHIP GOES BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

By forcing Western filmmakers to censor their works before they are released on Chinese screens, the aim is to ensure that Western versions would be already devoid of elements that depict China in a negative light in the future. The censorship includes minor changes – from the name of the antagonist in “Iron Man 3” from “Mandarin” to “Man Daren” to avoid Chinese connotation, or by inserting Chinese life-saving surgeons Tony Stark, by silencing the words “Russia” and “Russian” in “Iron Man 2” due to the common socialist past of China and Russia. Even “Django” did not escape being censored and was banned from the cinema – according to Zhu Dake, a Chinese film critic, probably because of the fact that “[Django] is an outside force inciting people to rise up against slavery, which may be reminiscent of Chinese social reality.”

Interestingly enough, Marvel self-censored itself in the film “Doctor Strange”, where in the comics of the 1960s the Doctor was a Tibetan monk, which was changed to a white woman – according to one of the filmmakers, it was caused, among other things, by the fear of Chinese censorship, which would link it to the political situation in Tibet. Captain America has also fallen victim to censorship – he does not use an

American iPhone, but a Chinese Vivo. This is likely because China is a huge market for cinematography, sometimes surpassing the American one⁸⁰. Of course, on the other end of the spectrum, there are also films made in China, such as “Wolf Warriors”, where heroic Chinese commandos fight the drug traffickers supported by the American Navy Seals⁸¹.

The decision of the American video game developer, Blizzard Entertainment, who organized a tournament in his game “Hearthstone”, also received a loud echo. One of the players, a Hong Kong resident known as “Blitzchung”, was interviewed during the tournament and wore a mask similar to that used by the protesting Hong Kong residents and said: “Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times”, which is the slogan of the protesters. A moment later the streaming was interrupted. Blitzchung was kicked out of the tournament on the second day, his winnings were taken away, and he was banned from the big tournaments for a year. The two streaming hosts were also fired by Blizzard⁸². However, the self-censorship goes beyond the boundaries of the entertainment industry and has even reached the American Ivy League universities – Harvard and Princeton professors will use special vocabulary to protect their students from the new National Security Law, as they say⁸³.

⁸⁰ See: <https://www.cnet.com/features/marvel-is-censoring-films-for-china-and-you-probably-didnt-even-notice/>; <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/hollywood-is-increasingly-normalizing-censorship-china-report-finds-1305935>

⁸¹ <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,25917992,zachod-oskara-chiny-o-pandemie-pekin-odpowiada-animacja.html>

⁸² <https://www.theverge.com/2019/10/8/20904308/hearthstone-player-blitzchung-hong-kong-protesters-ban-blizzard>

⁸³ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2020/08/21/ivy-league-schools-self-censor-for-china/#23e86ae814a5>



CHINESE DISINFORMATION EFFORTS WERE VERY VISIBLE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ONGOING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Another element of China’s model of waging an information war with the West is mass purchases of businesses and real estate in other countries. They have several goals: taking over patents and know-how, increasing their influence on the country, and taking over strategic points. A good opportunity for shopping was the crisis in the Eurozone, when many countries were looking for additional money, such as Greece⁸⁴.

Another good moment for China came along with the coronavirus, which led to the current recession in many economies⁸⁵. For example, COSCO, a Chinese transport company with shares in many European ports, such as Rotterdam⁸⁶, purchases, among others, Western innovative

⁸⁴ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/economics/11511653/Isolated-Greece-pivots-east-to-Russia-China-and-Iran-But-will-it-work.html>

⁸⁵ <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/02/04/investing/china-markets-coronavirus/index.html>

⁸⁶ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2020/04/18/watch-out-for-china-buying-spreed-nato-warns/#4e72ed0a1758>

companies⁸⁷ – for example in the north of Europe⁸⁸, – or top brands, including film companies⁸⁹. This is to allow China to impose a positive vision of the Chinese regime on the unconscious public by directly influencing films, advertising campaigns, and brand communication. Investment and cheap investment loans in Africa, a continent which for years has been Europe's sphere of influence, are also part of this battle, but with growing investment in African countries, their political leaders are making a turn towards China⁹⁰.

Part of the Chinese economic war against the West are also companies producing electronics, symbolized by Huawei and its 5G systems, which are banned by some countries, whereas the United States impose further sanctions on the company itself⁹¹. The Chinese Communist Party also uses the popular TikTok application, whose moderators are to follow the Party's censorship line, such as in Taiwan, Tibet, or the protests

in Hong Kong⁹². For example, the account of Feroz Aziz from the US was censored when she published a video on the persecution of the Muslim minority in China⁹³. Although there is a separate version of TikTok for the Chinese market, according to the agreement between the government and the application's owners, there are accounts of Chinese governmental institutions on the global TikTok. The presence of the Chinese state on TikTok can be used to promote its own narrative, e.g. in the scope of the previously mentioned Muslim minority.⁹⁴

Furthermore, China sponsors educational centers known as the "Confucius Institute" in the West, but they have been closed down in the US, Canada, Sweden, and Australia for a few years now because of being a tool for projecting China's soft power⁹⁵. They are also accused of restricting academic freedom, suppressing criticism outside China, and spreading Chinese propaganda⁹⁶.

Another element of Chinese soft power is... the panda. Pandas are used both as political gifts or elements of deals between states⁹⁷, but also as China's mascots for the outside world. It is not without reason that state

⁸⁷ See: <https://hbr.org/2011/04/the-globe-how-china-reset-its-global-acquisition-agenda>; <https://www.businessinsider.com/china-is-buying-a-lot-of-foreign-companies-2016-2?IR=T>; <https://justthenews.com/world/asia/made-china-owned-china-20-deals-show-how-china-gobbling-us-assets>

⁸⁸ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/15/china-is-bargain-hunting-and-western-security-is-at-risk/>.

⁸⁹ See: <https://www.industryweek.com/the-economy/article/22024894/should-we-allow-the-chinese-to-buy-any-us-company-they-want>; <https://variety.com/2020/biz/asia/china-tencent-music-buying-stakes-in-universal-warner-1234644387/>

⁹⁰ See: <https://www.bruegel.org/2019/07/chinas-investment-in-africa-what-the-data-really-says-and-the-implications-for-europe/>; <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/05/the-next-empire/308018/>; <https://qz.com/africa/1825914/chinas-investment-in-africa-more-influential-than-uk-france/>; <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/what-does-chinas-investment-africa-mean-europe>

⁹¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2020/04/18/watch-out-for-china-buying-spree-nato-warns/#4e72ed0a1758>

⁹² <https://www.wionews.com/world/tiktok-an-entertainment-platform-or-chinese-propaganda-company-299518>

⁹³ <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/nov/27/tiktok-makeup-tutorial-conceals-call-to-action-on-chinas-treatment-of-uighurs>

⁹⁴ See: <https://www.scmp.com/abacus/culture/article/3029515/china-tiktok-another-tool-government-spread-its-message>; <https://www.businessinsider.com/tiktok-parent-company-bytedance-spreads-chinese-propaganda-report-2019-11?IR=T>

⁹⁵ <http://wenku.baidu.com/view/3b7190f79e-314332-39689307.html>

⁹⁶ <https://www.vaticannews.va/pl/swiat/news/2019-09/chiny-instytut-konfucjusza-propaganda.html>

⁹⁷ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-12-22/why-pandas-are-part-of-chinas-diplomatic-strategies/10630298>

media are eager to promote various recordings of pandas. The association of fluffy, sweet, and perhaps slightly clumsy pandas with China makes foreign societies not so easily associate China with aggression⁹⁸.

Chinese disinformation efforts were very visible in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Disinformation began to appear when the first infections were detected at the turn of 2019/2020, when censorship was strictly imposed on doctors from Wuhan⁹⁹. People who break the information blockade are being actively fought, e.g. a well-known Chinese blogger critical of the authorities, disappeared¹⁰⁰. According to the investigation of the Associated Press, the World Health Organization (WHO) was helpless against China's reluctance to cooperate with the WHO, and despite this, the UN agency publicly praised China¹⁰¹. Its deputy director refused to say the word "Taiwan" in a TV interview¹⁰². This probably has to do with China's financial potential for WHO¹⁰³ or China's relationship with the WHO Director General, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus¹⁰⁴. According to the Chinese narrative, the coronavirus appeared in

China after contact with a person who came back from abroad or the United States who are to be blamed for the outbreak¹⁰⁵. The Chinese authorities want to be perceived by the rest of the world as leaders in the fight against the pandemic, so they share their knowledge, publicize small humanitarian aid, and, above all, sell the necessary equipment. China is trying to convince Western societies that its authoritarian model of state is more effective than Western democracies and international organizations like the EU¹⁰⁶. This is illustrated by a Chinese animation of LEGO figures in which China ridicules Western concern for human rights or the US policy towards COVID-19¹⁰⁷. In addition to social media and its own media, China uses purchased advertisements in foreign newspapers that have published articles written by Chinese diplomats¹⁰⁸. Advertisements in Western newspapers were also a tool to build a negative image of the protesters in Hong Kong¹⁰⁹. Moreover, China uses its English-speaking media, such as the *Global Times* or *People's Daily*, or its diplomats' social media accounts, as well as false accounts on Twitter and Facebook. Surveys of public opinion show that in some societies, sympathy for China and Russia has increased, whereas it has decreased toward the EU and NATO¹¹⁰. Chinese

⁹⁸ See: <https://www.ft.com/content/8a04a532-be9211-e7-9836-b25f8adaa111>; <http://www.chinauncensored.tv/panda-propaganda/>

⁹⁹ https://pism.pl/publikacje/Dezinformacja_Chin_i_Rosji_w_trakcie_pandemii_COVID19

¹⁰⁰ <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,25791687,w-chinach-korowirus-slabnie-ale-nasila-sie-propaganda-sukcesu.html>

¹⁰¹ <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,26006015,sledztwo-ap-chiny-ukrywaly-kluczowe-informacje-o-nowym-koronawirusie.html>

¹⁰² <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,25832180,who-tajwan-o-chinach-juz-mowilismy-bulwersujacy-wywiad-wicedyrektora.html>

¹⁰³ <https://www.dw.com/en/what-influence-does-china-have-over-the-who/a-53161220>

¹⁰⁴ See: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-07-22/pompeo-tells-u-k-mps-china-bought-who-chief-tedros>; <https://theprint.in/opinion/who-and-china-tedros-past-worrying-how-india-fell-for-it/400945/>

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.heritage.org/asia/commentary/western-media-falls-chinas-propaganda-trap>

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.bankier.pl/wiadomosc/Koronawirus-ofensywa-propagandowa-Pekinu-7841497.html>

¹⁰⁷ <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,25917992,zachod-oskarza-chiny-o-pandemie-pekin-odpowiada-animacja.html>

¹⁰⁸ <https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/497185-dyplomacja-maseczkowa-chin-poniosla-kleske>

¹⁰⁹ <https://kulturaliberalna.pl/2019/09/04/chinska-propaganda-protesty-hongkongu/>

¹¹⁰ See: https://pism.pl/publikacje/Dezinformacja_Chin_i_Rosji_w_trakcie_pandemii_COVID19; <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/08/china-serbia-aleksander-vucic-xi-jinping-coronavirus/>

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CHINA IS TRYING
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LIKE THE EU

lies and manipulations about the COVID-19 pandemic were also reported at length by the French daily, *Le Figaro*¹¹¹.

When we try to create the Russian information war model we can see that Russians are diversifying their propaganda activities and trying to adapt the message to a specific part of society. Looking at examples of Syriza and AfD, one can see that they offer their narration to both the left and right side, produce both dull and direct propaganda and are more sophisticated – like a good marketer. For the right, Russia is

a defender of Western values and the only real opponent of (radical) Islam. For the left, the Russian state is peaceful, anti-fascist and pro-social spending. The radicalism of the supported political groups suggests that the Russians do not care about the mere takeover of power by controlled politicians, but about the paralysis of Western countries by chaos.

One can see that the Russian government is not fighting hard against the image of Russia as a corrupt and authoritarian state. Rather, it tries to show Western societies that their governments are no better and that Russia is at least more effective, tolerant and caring for the people.

The Chinese model of leading the information war is different from the Russian model. China is building soft-power through its influence on the entertainment industry, the purchase of large companies, cheap loans and huge investments. They try to convince the rest of the world that the Chinese model of state and economy is the best. In contrast to Russia, China does not target the message and does not influence politicians directly on a mass scale. The Chinese government is trying to present China as a more economically efficient state, but also more effective in managing the pandemic. However, this is a false image built on disinformation.

Both regimes refer to human emotions and needs. They try to say: “with us life is easier, maybe without a bit of freedom, but thanks to that it is safer and with a higher standard of living. And the West? The West is responsible for all the crises and unrest in your life, from the Arab Spring to the war in Syria and Ukraine, to COVID19 and economic crises.” Their message is the more attractive to the average person, the less he/she knows about what is happening inside these countries and the bigger chaos is in the West.

¹¹¹ <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75399,25912084,wszystkie-chinskie-klamstwa-o-koronawirusie-le-figaro.html>

NO ONE IS SAFE, INDEED

In fact, liberals do not have many opportunities to counteract informational attacks by authoritarian regimes, because many actions would involve restrictions on freedom of speech, one of the fundamental values of the liberal order. Of course, supporting fact-checking institutions is an important element of defense. We cannot expect every citizen to verify all information, so we need specialized organizations that, according to the theory of comparative advantage, will be more effective.

It is a good practice for social media owners to close fake accounts, label so-called “fake news”, or add information about financing the most popular profiles. The media should be pressured at the grassroots level and urged to change their business model, so that they no longer accept sponsored articles from authoritarian governments. Educational activities aimed at the public shall be carried out in order to increase awareness of, among others, the operation of information bubbles.

However, the most effective and desirable course of action is to build and support a narrative that portrays China and Russia as they are – aggressive, authoritarian regimes that want to overthrow the liberal order in the West and threaten the freedom of us all. It is important to continue to show how the Russian government treats the opposition or ordinary businessmen, what China does with the opposition and minorities and how it uses its businesses to put pressure on them.

The key to the victory against authoritarian regimes must not be censorship and restrictions on freedom of speech by governments, but winning the battle for people’s hearts and minds, by proving that, indeed, liberal democracies are the true defenders of security, freedom prosperity, and social stability.

After all, let us remember that all political groups fall victim to the information war and no one is safe¹¹².

¹¹² See: <https://www.niemanlab.org/2017/05/republicans-seem-more-susceptible-to-fake-news-than-democrats-but-liberals-dont-feel-too-comfy-yet/>; <https://www.colorado.edu/today/2020/06/17/who-shares-most-fake-news-new-study-sheds-light>



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ALEKSY
PRZYBYLSKI

Currently works as a financial analyst. The co-author of comic books about Kapitalis. A blogger at Kulturozofia.pl