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IX CASE STUDY: FINLAND AS A TARGET OF RUSSIAN INFORMATION INFLUENCE

Martti J. Kari and Riku Hellgren

“A lie that is told often enough becomes true” – Lenin

This article discusses Russian views on the conflict with the West in the information environment, information influence as a tool of Russian foreign policy and Russia's information influence on Finland. Understanding these views is important in order to be able to identify and to respond to Russia's information influence. The article examines the information operation of the Soviet Union; especially the KGB's A service modus operandi, because Russian security organs continue to apply A service methods in information operations. To identify and to respond to Russian information influence is vitally important for Finland, because as an EU member state Finland is in a permanent, long-lasting and low-intensity information war with Russia aimed at breaking up the EU and maintaining Russian influence over Cold War time Eastern Bloc and neutral states. In addition, Finland, as a non-NATO member with 1,300 kilometres of common border with two of Russia's extremely important areas, is a target of information operations aimed at keeping Finland out of NATO and hindering the development of Finland's national defence. Russia has a nearly hundred-year-old tradition of fighting information warfare, producing messages tailored to the target audience, and using the appropriate instrument to deliver these messages. This challenges EU and its member states, including Finland, because long-lasting, low-intensity warfare is difficult to respond to and, for example, in Finland there is a lack of knowledge, structures, processes and legislation to defend against information warfare or information influence.

Introduction

Our operating environment has changed considerably over the last hundred years. In the wars that preceded World War I, battles were fought on land and at sea. In World War I, aircraft introduced a third dimension to warfare. The space race of the United States and the Soviet Union made space the fourth dimension of the operating environment, and the digitalization that began in the 1980s made cyberspace the

fifth dimension. Some researchers combine information with cyberspace, forming a combined cyber and information space. However, information has probably always been used as a tool of warfare. In the world wars, the use of information as part of the operation was already of great importance, but the digitalization and the cyberspace operations significantly increased the importance of information as a tool of influence and its rate of propagation and propagation.

The great powers take advantage of the air, space and information environment and strive for information supremacy (Parliament, 2014). What is interesting and challenging about the information space and information supremacy is that the information dimension is not a military environment and information supremacy cannot be acquired (merely) with weapons. Another challenge is that influencing in the information space can occur during times of deep peace – if there is such a thing.

Information influence – the Russian perspective

According to the Russian definition, the information space is an operating environment related to the creation, modification, transmission, use and storage of information. It affects the information infrastructure as well as information at the individual and societal level (MORE, 2011; CSTO, 2019). Russia does not distinguish between the information infrastructure used to process information and the information processed in it, but together they form an information space (SBRE, 2013). Information warfare is a struggle between two or more states in an information space (MORE, 2011). Information warfare is characterized by the fact that it is waged without interruption every day, not just during war or armed struggle (Prokofiev, 2003). Information warfare can be offensive or defensive (Sergeev, 2015).

This information warfare may be information technological or information psychological in nature. The objects of information technological warfare are information technology systems. Its aim is the destruction of information systems, processes and resources (Kamyshev, 2009). In the West, this information technological warfare is called cyberwarfare.

Information psychological warfare is a conflict among human communities aimed at achieving political, economic, military or other goals at a strategic level. The idea is to influence the civilian population, leadership and/or armed forces of an adversary by disseminating information, information material and combating adversarial information (Manoil, 2005). The aims of information psychological warfare are the overthrow of political, economic and social systems, mass psychological processing to destabilize society and the state, and forcing the target state to make decisions favourable to its opponent (Kamyshev, 2009).

Information psychological warfare is conducted by information psychological

operations. The purpose of information psychological operations is to make an impact on the cognitive dimension of the target individual and society to change his/her perceptions or activities by producing, modifying or restricting the availability of information. The final purpose is to make an impact on the knowledge and wisdom of the target. Knowledge is the fact or condition of knowing something with familiarity gained through experience or association. New knowledge is created, when old knowledge is confirmed or overturned by new information. Wisdom means the ability to use knowledge to see situations in context and make decisions based on this understanding.

According to the doctrine of information security of the Russian Federation (UP-646, 2016), the most important objects to be protected from information psychological influence are the information support needed by democratic institutions and the cooperation of the state leadership and civil society, as well as the so-called national story, a narrative consisting of history, culture and a nation's spirituality.

In this article, Russia's information influence (information operations) on Finland refers to an offensive information psychological influence implemented, led or sponsored by the Russian state, which aims to achieve political, economic, military or other goals at the strategic level by influencing the country's civilian population, leadership and/or defence forces. It includes information modified or prepared for this purpose, information material or activities. The targets are democratic institutions, the cooperation of the state and civil society, and the national narrative of society, which consists of history, culture, and spiritual values. In this article information technological influence consists of cyberattacks.

The Soviet Union and information influence

The information operations of Soviet Russia and the Soviet Union should be studied because the *modus operandi* of Russian intelligence and security services have remained unchanged or changed only a little. The operational structure and culture of the intelligence and security services, including information operations, have also remained partly unchanged since the establishment of the Cheka. The Cheka was a Soviet-Russian security service established in December 1917. In February 1922, the Cheka was incorporated into the Russian People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (Ministry of Internal Affairs, NKVD) as the State Political Administration (GPU). In 1923, the GPU became the United Political Administration (OGPU) (Verbenko, 2017).

The Bolsheviks used information influencing from the beginning of their activities. The term *disinformation*, defined as false information with the intention to deceive public opinion, first appeared in the Russian language in the 1920s. The GPU was responsible for this information influence. In January 1923, the Politburo decided

to set up a disinformation office within the GPU, the *Desinformbjuro* (DB). The office's tasks included the following (Zirnov, 2003):

- Assess the quality of information collected by foreign intelligence services on Russia.
- Determine what information interests foreign intelligence services.
- Estimate the level of knowledge of the enemy about Soviet Russia.
- Compilation and technical preparation of false information and documents with the aim to give the enemy a misconception about the internal situation of Russia, the organization and status of the Red Army and NKVD, etc.
- Supply of this false material to the enemy through the GPU and the *Razvedupravlenie*
- Produce and publish false information in newspapers and magazines.

DB's first information operation targeted Poland. In 1923, false news was published in *Pravda* and *Izvestia* about a possible Polish attack on Germany. However, the news did not have the desired effect and the Central Committee decided to use the foreign press to disseminate false news in the future. The OGPU's first successful information operation took place in 1923, when the DB succeeded in blackmailing Grand Duke Kirill, who sought the status of the Tsar of Russia, so that both Russian monarchists and Kirill's Bavarian financiers withdrew their support.

The OGPU's most successful operations in the 1920s were Operation Trust and Operation Syndicate 2. In these false flag operations, the OGPU succeeded in creating the image that an underground monarchist organization operated in Russia. They gathered information about monarchist organizations operating in the West, and ultimately nearly destroyed anti-Soviet organizations and individuals among Russian emigrés. As part of the operations, the GPU experimented with a new method to influence world public opinion. With the help of GPU operatives, the famous monarchist Vasili Shulgin visited Russia under a false identity. Shulgin was shown the best parts of Soviet Russia, and after returning to the West, he wrote a book praising Soviet Russia that the Bolsheviks would win (Primakov, 2014).

Stalin's purges affected OPGUs, and information operations were partially paralyzed. With the outbreak of World War II or, in Russian terms, the Great Patriotic War, activities aimed at deceiving the enemy took on a considerable share of the tasks of state security organs. The misleading of the enemy was partly entrusted to the counter-intelligence bodies. During the Korean War, the Soviets, with the help of the "International Commission of Inquiry", succeeded in generating findings that the United States used a bacterial biological weapon in the war to spread diseases to North Korea through rodents and insects. MGB operation predecessors, the KGB's predecessor,

then donated scientists to prevent them from taking a position that the research findings were not based on facts, and journalists to publish “research findings”.

The operational successor to the *Dezinformbjuro* was the Active Measures Service, a service of the first directorate of the KGB. Active measures were open or secret intelligence along with special operations and measures aimed at accomplishing the following (Shavaev, 2017; Mitrokhin, 2002):

- Influence the internal political life of the target countries, foreign policy, solutions to international
- problems for the benefit of the Soviet Union, other socialist countries and communism;
- Weaken and destabilize the political, military, economic and ideological position of the capitalist world and nullify the enemy’s intentions;
- Create favourable conditions for the implementation of the Soviet Union’s foreign policy
- Mislead the opponent.

The KGB’s active measures included supporting pro-Soviet forces, exerting political influence through influential agents, and disseminating disinformation. Pro-Soviet forces included the Communist and other leftist parties as well as peace movements in various Western countries. Influential agents were individuals who concealed their connections to Soviet intelligence and who played an active role in their country’s politics at the governmental or party level as well as in business, trade unions, or the press. Disinformation was disseminated to mislead public opinion or policymakers and/or to discredit individuals, organizations, and politics in enemy countries and their allies (Pomerantsev & Weiss, 2014).

The A service was responsible for the entire disinformation production chain. It analysed the situation in the target country, selected the information to influence targets and means to be used, and prepared an operation plan based on the analysis. The A service selected the operators to be used in the information operation, and recruited them and formed an influencer-agent network. After the start of the operation, the A service monitored the safety and the effectiveness of the operation and, if necessary, changed the operation to better correspond to the target conditions. The operations were financed via the A service (Darczewska & Żochowski, 2017).

The tactic of the A service, for example, was to place the fake news first in a small third-world newspaper, after which it would be published in pro-Soviet and Soviet-funded Western European and American media. After that, the false news began to, in the words of a former A service operations officer, “spread by itself like an avalanche” (Zirnov, 2003).

The A service was an elite unit within the KGB. The service recruited sociologists, historians, psychologists, political scientists and journalists with experience of working abroad and capable of analytical thinking. The aim was to understand the characteristics of the strategic culture and national thinking of the target country and its people and, based on this understanding, to create disinformation based partly in the truth in order to achieve the political goals of the Soviet Union. It was important to be able to connect views that supported Communist ideology to information that explains the worldview and world events (Dniprov, 2016).

Difficult tasks for the A service were situations in which active measures had to be used to protect unpopular decisions or measures made by the Soviet leadership. For example, the invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979, the shooting down of a passenger plane over Sakhalin, the persecution of dissidents and depriving citizenship to Alexander Solzhenitsyn demanded great efforts from the A service. It was particularly difficult and important to establish the first part of the disinformation, which could then be relied on and referred to in the future. The A service spent significant money on Western journalists to get this first-stage disinformation published in the Western press (Dniprov, 2016).

The A service found channels in the Western press for its information operation. According to Lieutenant General Shebarshin, the last head of the Soviet Union's foreign intelligence, "a journalist was found in a newspaper who agreed to publish the necessary text in exchange for financial compensation". The Washington Post was the only newspaper whose journalists the KGB failed to bribe, according to a former active operations officer (Zirnov, 2003).

In the last years of the Soviet Union, the A service sought to justify its existence by supporting Mikhail Gorbachev. The service paid for the publication of articles praising Gorbachev and Perestroika in the Western press and sought to create "Gorbymania".

Russian information operations

Strategic culture is a set of persistent and consistent historical patterns of how state leadership thinks about the threat and use of force, including information influence, to achieve political goals. These patterns originate from historical experiences and are influenced by the historical, geographical, and political philosophical, cultural, and cognitive experiences and characteristics of the state (Johnston, 1995). Russian information influence can be considered a use of force that belongs to long-lasting, low-intensity warfare against the West. For this reason, it can be explained using the theory of strategic culture.

One of the basic assumptions of Russian strategic culture is that the international arena is a dangerous, chaotic and volatile battlefield (Sinovets, 2016). The National

Security Strategy of the Russian Federation (UP-683, 2015) states that the use of force in international politics is increasing. This has led to Russia's confrontational approach to the international community. The Kremlin is also legitimizing the Putin regime by transferring internal tensions within Russian society to external enemies (Darczewska & Żochowski, 2017).

According to President Putin, the Soviet Union was a besieged fortress constantly under threat of attack by the West (Aron, 2008). NATO enlargement and war in eastern Ukraine have bolstered this narrative and brought back the Soviet-era perception of permanent war between Russia and the USA. The Clausewitzian belief in the use of force has been one of the fundamental elements of Russian strategic culture. The Soviet Union waged an ideological-psychological war against its alleged enemies, a trend which continues in today's Russia. The tools and methods of modern "active measures" differ little from those used during the Cold War (Darczewska & Żochowski, 2017).

The Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia, General Valery Gerasimov (2013), gave a speech in 2013, in which he stated that the rules of war have changed. The Clausewitzian belief in the use of force to achieve political aims can still be seen, but the role of non-military means to achieve political and strategic goals has grown. In many cases, non-military means have exceeded the power of weapons in their effectiveness. The lines between war and peace have been blurred. The concept of the permanent war zone has also been introduced in the Military Doctrine 2014. Asymmetrical actions, such as the use of internal opposition to create a permanently operating front through the entire territory of the enemy state, as well as information operations are also part of the changed rules.

The aims of the Russian information influence directed at the West are the maintenance and possible expansion of the so-called *Russkiy mir* (i.e. the Russian world and its sphere of influence), weakening the eastern flank of NATO, limiting the influence of the United States in Europe, the break-up of the European Union and building a pro-Russian lobby (EP, 2016; Darczewska & Żochowski, 2017). Russia is seeking to call into question democratic values, divide Europe, mobilize domestic support and create the image of states that have lost their capacity to act in the EU's eastern neighbourhood. The Russian administration finances parties and other organizations within the European Union, thus seeking to undermine political cohesion. Russia seeks to destabilize other countries by supporting political extremists and through large-scale disinformation and media campaigns. Russia supports anti-EU forces within the EU, particularly far-right parties and populist forces and movements that deny the fundamental values of liberal democracies. One of Russia's main strategies is to spread and feed an alternative narrative, often based on a distorted interpretation of historical events, that seeks to justify Russia's external actions and geopolitical interests (EP, 2016).

Maintaining a sphere of influence includes keeping control over Belarus, regaining control over Ukraine and destabilizing the Baltic States by undermining their national narratives, disintegrating the EU and limiting EU policy in Eastern Europe. Weakening the eastern flank of NATO includes stoking disputes between NATO member states and setting the partners against each other to make it difficult to create alliances. Limiting the influence of the USA in Europe includes stoking anti-American sentiment among the authorities and societies of Europe and to create a strategic division between the EU and the USA. Russia tries to break up the EU by setting its members against each other and undermining the value of its institutions, inciting fear and insecurity among EU citizens and sowing doubt in transatlantic partnerships in the minds of the EU's citizens and its neighbours.

In their information operations, the Russians take advantage of fundamental Western values such as freedom of speech and an open society. Within the same information operation, it is typical to tell different target groups a different narrative. Russia is simultaneously offering several versions of reality with the aim of strategic deception. Different propaganda is directed to the West and to its own citizens. Russian-language propaganda seeks to strengthen popular support for the Kremlin and to provide an alternative truth to Russian-speaking population in the West. For example, in justifying the conquest of Crimea, the Kremlin used the narrative that Crimea is historically part of Russia and that the rights and the lives of the Russian minority had been threatened in Crimea after the rise of "fascists" in Kiev. The foreign narrative focused on reiterating that the annexation of Crimea to Russia was based on a referendum, which was legal under international law.

Russia invests significant financial resources in its disinformation and propaganda tools. They are used either directly by the state or by companies and organizations controlled by the Russian government. These include think tanks and special foundations (e.g. Russkiy Mir Foundation), special authorities (Rossotrudnichestvo), multilingual television channels (e.g. RT), virtual news agencies and multimedia services (e.g. Sputnik), social and religious groups and the Internet and social media (EP, 2016). Tools for influencing information in Russia include pro-Russian websites and portals, the Russian Orthodox Church, groups and political parties that are friendly towards Russia or critical of closer integration within the EU, and extreme nationalist parties. Pro-Russian forces include peace movements, communist parties and other extreme groups in various Western countries. Just as during Soviet times, Russia is also using influential agents, individuals who conceal their connections to Russian intelligence and who have an active role in their country's politics at the governmental or party level, in business, trade unions, or the press (Pomerantsev & Weiss, 2014).

Russia also uses the long-term construction of social, political and intellectual groups, which are friendly to Russia and support the implementation of Russian

political objectives, such as politicians, local authorities, business circles, educational cooperation, artistic groups, sports teams and their fans' associations. Other groups include radical, populist, anti-American, Eurosceptic and separatist political parties and movements for information influence. The Russian Orthodox Church, gun advocacy groups, motorcycle clubs, or anti-Immigration research Outlets also offer appealing avenues for the Kremlin to gain a physical and virtual foothold in the West (Watts, 2018). Russia also has the ability to create a migration crisis and organize demonstrations to support Russian foreign policy. In some countries, Russia blames the local authorities for the destruction of Russian symbols and for stoking Russophobia.

Examples of Russian Information Operations in Finland

The definition of information influence stated by the Finnish Prime Minister's Office (PMO) is close to the Russian definition of information-psychological warfare. According to the PMO definition, information influence is a strategic activity that seeks to systematically influence public opinion, people's behaviour and decision-makers, and thus to affect the ability of society to function. Means of information influence include disseminating false or misleading information and using accurate information for other purposes. The aim is to get the target to make decisions that are harmful to itself and to act against its own interests. The ultimate goal of information influence in Finland is to destroy Finland's national narrative.

The strategic goals of Russia's information influence on Finland are to ensure that Finland remains, in at least some form, within its sphere of influence. Russia also seeks to prevent Finland's accession to NATO, hinder the country's defence development, foster the break-up of the EU, weaken citizens' confidence in the country's leadership and the European Union, destroy its national narrative and increase Finns' positive attitudes towards Russia.

Preventing Finland's accession to NATO

Russia is also looking to secure Northwest Russia militarily, including the Murmansk and St Petersburg areas, by preventing Finland's accession to NATO, and by impeding development of Finnish military capabilities and alliances. Russia executes direct information operations in the statements of Russian political and military leadership. Different Finnish organizations, movements and politicians then often echo these statements.

Time after time, high-level political and military leaders are reminding Finland about the disadvantages of NATO membership. Former Chief of General Staff Army General Nikolai Makarov said in his speech in Finland in June 2012 that, according to Russian experts, Finland's practical participation in NATO's so-called NORDEFCO

cooperation and in joint military exercises with the organization prove that Finland is gradually joining NATO. Under certain circumstances, this may even pose a threat to Russia security (YLE, 2012).

In 2014, Finland signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with NATO on host nation support for the execution of NATO operations, exercises and similar military activity. This MOU was criticized by both Russia and some Finnish politicians. For example, the Left Alliance stated in its goals for the 2020–2023 period that the party will demand a review of the host nation support agreement by Parliament, with the aim of revoking it (Left Alliance, 2021).

Russian authorities, when speaking about Finland's international position, often use the word "neutral". During the Cold War, Finns used the word when Finland tried to signal that Finland was not part of the Eastern Bloc led by the Soviet Union. Since joining the EU, Finland has stated that, as an EU member, it cannot be neutral in the conflict between the European Union and a third party (MoD, 1997). By continuing to call Finland neutral, the aim has been to give the impression that Finland, at least in some form, is still in Russia's sphere of influence and to highlight that even though Finland is part of the EU it still differs from the nations who belong to both it and NATO. While visiting Finland in 2016, President Putin (2016) stated the following in a press conference:

Speaking of which, we are doing so on the basis of Finland's neutral position. Imagine for yourself that Finland would join NATO. That would mean that Finnish troops would become independent, would cease to be sovereign in this in the full sense of the word, they would become part of NATO's military infrastructure that would suddenly appear on the borders of the Russian Federation. ... As a member of NATO, Finland would have to fight Russia. Think for yourself if it is for you necessary and decide for yourself.

In 2017, the Russian ambassador to Finland, Pavel Kuznetsov, repeated president Putin's message in an interview (Haapala, 2017):

Every country has the sovereign right to define its own national security and defence policy. However, I think everyone understands that bringing NATO's military infrastructure closer to our borders is forcing us to take appropriate retaliatory action. Maybe someone needs it, but at least not the peoples of Finland and Russia.

It is interesting to notice that some Finnish politicians continue to use the word "neutral" when describing Finland's foreign and security policy. For example, in 2019,

Member of Parliament Johannes Yrttiaho (Left Alliance) stated the following (Ristamäki, 2019):

Since the Second World War, Finland's foreign and security policy has been based on balancing. Being neutral and militarily non-aligned.

Hindering Finland's defence development

In addition to preventing Finland's NATO membership, Russia is using information influence to complicate and hinder the deepening and strengthening of defence cooperation between Finland and Sweden. In May 2018, Russian defence minister Sergei Shoigu criticized the increased cooperation between Finland and Sweden. According to him, the declaration of intent to facilitate military cooperation between Finland, Sweden and the USA allows countries to participate fully in NATO military exercises and to use military alliance forces and arms control systems. Reciprocally, NATO has been granted unhindered access to the airspace and territorial waters of these countries (Yle, 2018).

Increasing Finns' positive attitudes towards Russia

One aim of Russian information influence is to increase Finns' positive attitudes towards Russia. One of the tools for this is the Finnish–Russian association (RUFİ), which was established in April 2017. According to RUFİ, its purpose is to improve the relations between Finland and Russia by cooperating with Finnish and Russian parties, organizing, among other things, cultural and artistic cooperation, political influence, counselling, and interpretation and translation assistance. According to its website, RUFİ will help improve and patch up existing negative relations with Russia through cultural and informative influence. The aim is to create a sympathetic line, a warm, comrade-like approach to Russia. The association acts as an antibody to incitement, exaggeration and panic, so this is a kind of correction. RUFİ will fight against Russophobia, and will try to change Finns' perceptions of Russia to be more positive (Karkkola, 2017). The background and financing of RUFİ is unclear.

In May 2017, 2018 and 2019, RUFİ has organized a so-called March of the Immortal Regiment in Helsinki, which is originally a Russian commemoration of the Soviet Union's victory in World War II. In the invitation, RUFİ states that

The Helsinki Immortal Regiment will work for world peace, and for Nazism, fascism and war between Russians and Finns to never break out again! The Helsinki Immortal Regiment belongs to the World Immortal Regiment and is subordinate to the Organizing Committee of the International Immortal Regiment. (RUFİ 2019)

Daria Skippari-Smirnov, one of the organizers of the march, stated in 2017, that the march is not political and the organizers do not have a partner in Russia. The Russian embassy in Helsinki is aware of the march, but there are no direct connections to Russia. According to Skippari-Smirnov (Korkee, 2017):

The march is not a demonstration, but I would characterize it as a celebration event. We want to change Finns' perceptions of Russia... Johan Bäckman is not a member of the association, but has shown his support.

According to Watts (2018), Russia is using information influence also through sport teams and their fan associations. It is possible that the Kremlin is using the Finnish hockey team Jokerit as a tool of information influence. The participation of the Jokerit hockey team in the KHL (the Russian hockey league) and their fan association can be considered as seeking Russian political objectives. Jokerit has played in the KHL since 2014. From 2014 to 2017, Jokerit showed a loss of more than €40 million. In 2018, the loss was more than €12 million. Russian owners have paid for the losses (Lempinen, 2017). According to a Finnish analyst, the interest of financing of Jokerit must be a non-financial return. It is difficult to see a business connection in this case (Oivio, 2019). According to Professor Tuomas Forsberg, the KHL can have a positive impact on the image of Russia. Thanks to the KHL, Russia will become more familiar in Finland as well. For example, people learn to map the cities of hockey clubs. According to Forsberg (Sillanpää, 2018):

The biggest impact is on young people whose image of modern Russia is bleak. The KHL balances those tones. Young people see that normal and interesting things are happening in Russia.

Destroying the Finnish national narrative

According to the Finnish Prime Minister's Office (PMO, 2019), the ultimate goal of information influence is to destroy Finland's national narrative, and it has been in the Kremlin's interests to remind both Finns and Russians of Finnish wartime wrongdoings and cooperation with Germany during World War II. This message, when combined with the accusations of Russophobia presented by the Russian media, is likely directed to Russians living in Finland²⁵⁰ as well.

The Winter War, which was a humiliation for the Soviet Union, because Finland managed to avoid Soviet occupation by fighting against the Red Army, is an essential

²⁵⁰ According to Statistics Finland, on 31 December 2017, about 60,000 Russian citizens lived in Finland (of which about 30,000 are also Finnish citizens), which is more than 1% of the country's total population.

part of the Finnish national narrative. In October 2019, a month before Finland was preparing to commemorate the 80-year anniversary of the beginning of the Winter War, Russia launched an information operation. The Russian media published news on Finnish concentration camps in Eastern Karelia, which was occupied by Finns from 1941 to 1944. According to the news, Finnish occupation authorities gathered the Russian population to these camps for “ethnic cleansing”. Information on the camps was based on documents released by the FSB (RIA Novosti, 2019).

Another example of an information operation aimed against the Finnish national narrative and to remind Russians of Finnish wartime wrongdoing is the so-called Sandormah case. In 1996, Research and Information Centre Memorial in St Petersburg found documents proving that NKVD had executed thousands of gulag prisoners in the 1930s in Karelia. Karelian historian Yuri Dmitriev managed to find the place called Sandormah and to identify about 8,000 victims of “the Great Terror” executed in Sandormah (Yarovaya, 2017). In 2016, Russian newspapers and TV started to spread a new narrative about Sandormah. According to the Russian media, Sandormah was a place where Finns, who were occupying that part of Karelia during World War II, executed thousands of Soviet prisoners of war (Sokirko, 2016). It is interesting to note that Anatoly Razumov, a Russian historian who specialises in the purges, compares the Russian narrative of Sandormah with the Russian narrative on Katyn (AFP, 2018). In Katyn, a forest near the Russian city of Smolensk, the NKVD executed around 25,000 Polish soldiers in the spring of 1940 on Stalin’s orders.

Soviet and now Russian information operations are using the similarity of the names of Katyn near Smolensk in Russia and a small Belarusian village called Khatyn (Хатынь). In the Belarusian village, Germans executed 156 Belarusians in March 1943. The Soviet Union as well as Russia have used this event as a tool in their information operations. The name of the Belarusian village, Khatyn, is close to the name Katyn, especially in English. Russian ministry of foreign affairs and embassies publish press releases and tweets at the end of March telling about the massacre of Khatyn. The reason why the Soviet Union, which lost more than 27 million people during World War II, is reminding the world every year about the Belarusian Khatyn massacre is that they are trying to confuse people and cover up the Katyn massacre in Smolensk.

Conclusions

Finland does not have, in the eyes of the Kremlin, a special position created by history or good neighbourly relations, despite what some circles in Finland want to believe. Talking about Finland’s special status can be considered a Russian information influence operation, the aim of which is to maintain the faith of Finns in a benevolent

neighbour and that staying out of NATO is vitally important for Finland's security. Ordinary citizens are targeted in ways which are not always possible to recognize as tools of information influence. Information influence operators, who understand the characteristics of Finland's strategic culture and national thinking, can try to keep Finland in the Russian sphere of influence by sustaining and amplifying the narrative of Finland's neutrality. This narrative of neutrality, which brings peace and safety, continues to create the impression that military non-alliance is the only solution in this changed situation as well. The fact is that Finland is not neutral but a part of a Western community of values. This means that Finland is also a participant of the information war with Russia, whether Finns like it or not.

As a member of the EU, Finland is a target of the Russian information operations to disrupt the European Union. These operations contain arguments that sanctions against Russia are ineffective, the USA is abandoning Europe and the EU is breaking up into national states. As a non-NATO member in the vicinity of Russia's vitally important areas St Petersburg and the Kola peninsula, Finland is also a target of tailored information operations which aim at weakening the eastern flank of NATO, maintain Russia's sphere of influence, and building a pro-Russian lobby.

The challenge is the structure of Russian information warfare, which consists of information technology (cyber) and information psychological components. For over a hundred years, starting with Cheka's disinformation bureau, Russia has had a tradition of producing information tailored to a country's strategic culture and national thinking and delivering targeted messages. For the delivery of this information, Russian special services has used and continues to use selected means and methods to target all levels of society, from high-level politicians to ordinary citizens, in a way that it is difficult to see how all the different pieces of information delivery are connected.

Finland does not have the structures and processes to respond to this combined information warfare. The response to information technology influence e.g. to cyberattacks is fragmented between different ministries and organizations. This fragmentation creates a situation where the conditions for success are virtually non-existent. In 2014, Finland established the National Cyber Security Centre. In 2019, Finnish civilian and defence intelligence agencies received access to networks to collect intelligence information, but not to protect critical information infrastructure.

In February 2020, the Government created the post of a national cyber security director (CSD). The role of the CSD is to coordinate the development, planning and preparedness of cybersecurity. Under the leadership of the CSD, an overall picture and development programme for cybersecurity will be prepared in accordance with the country's 2019 cybersecurity strategy. The problem is that the CSD's task is not operational, for example, the director does not coordinate the response to cyberattacks in practice. Another problem is that the CSD is placed in the Ministry of Transport

and Communications (MTC), not in the Prime Minister's Office. This means that CSD has no real authority over other ministries than MTC. Finland needs a well-mandated and structured national organization to fight information technical influence. The two most recent examples of failure are the hackings of Finnish Parliament and Psychotherapy Centre Vastaamo in autumn 2020.

Finland lacks coordinated processes or an organization to lead the fight against information influence. The Prime Minister's Office has attempted to do so, but the results have not been a great success. Finland needs a national information security director and an organization to counter information influence. This is important because Finland, as a member of the EU and a neighbour of vitally important areas of Russia, is in a permanent war in the field of information influence with Russia.

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