

**REGARDING THE INFORMATION-PSYCHOLOGICAL COMPONENT
OF AGGRESSION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AGAINST
UKRAINE**

(according to the results of events during 1-2 March 2014)

Annotation

Analytical note is given over to the key elements of special information and psychological operations, conducted by the Russian Federation during the escalation of the situation in the Crimea, March 1-2, 2014. Attention is focused on the practice of using classic media, Internet media and social networks in the deployment of the special operations. The note also presents previous review of the effectiveness of Ukraine's countermeasure steps.

**REGARDING THE INFORMATION-PSYCHOLOGICAL COMPONENT
OF AGGRESSION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AGAINST
UKRAINE**

(according to the results of events during 1-2 March 2014)

Efforts of the Russian Federation to conduct the introduction of the armed forces on territory of the AR of Crimea was accompanied by actions that had all the signs of organized and deliberate by objectives, activities and consequences information-psychological special operation directed primarily at the Russian audience, on the other side at the Ukrainian and western audiences.

The key purposes of the special operation were the following:

1. Demoralization of the population of Ukraine.
2. Demoralization of the armed forces and power departments, as well as prompting them for state treason and to defect to the opposite side.
3. Formation of Russian and Ukrainian citizens' perverted «media vision» of events that occur, rather than their true causes and consequences.
4. Creating illusion of mass support the Russian Federation actions by population of the southeastern regions of Ukraine.
5. Psychological support Ukrainian adherents of radical convergence of eastern and southern regions of Ukraine with Russia.

The mentioned tasks were implemented through almost a full range of communication channels, which primarily include:

1. Traditional Media.
2. Electronic media (TV).
3. Internet media.
4. Social Networks.

Herewith all methods of information-psychological warfare - from the dissemination of tendentious information and half-truths to the blatant falsehood («fake») were used.

In addition, more traditional measures which had to strengthen the impact of these channels on the population (both Russian and Ukrainian) were used, in particular – impeding the activity of the media on the Crimean peninsula¹, **attempts to terminate functioning of the Internet**². Also web resources blocking mechanisms were used, that actively refuted (could refute) false reports. Particular to fulfill the requirements of Roskomnadzor the Right Sector's page in VKontakte social network was blocked (allegedly for posting by Doku Umarov the address to initiate terrorist activity against Russia³) as well as «Euromaidan's» page. **It is significant that Russia almost did not use scaled hacker attacks**⁴ (including - DdoS-attacks), although during conflicts with Estonia (2007) and Georgia (2008) they were more than actively used. Rather, such passivity can be explained by the fact that a large-scale cyber confrontation between opposition and pro-presidential forces in November and December 2013 made both sides to take significant steps to strengthen their cybersecurity.

According to its basic messages, style and internal logic the operation of disinformation and information-psychological pressure that started by Russia around «the will» of the population in the Crimea and south-eastern regions of Ukraine looks as a component (perhaps the next stage) of a broader Russian special information campaign initiated at least in November 2013, because of the «Euromaidan» events. Starting from the late February the vast majority of Russian conventional media were involved in the information-psychological warfare against Ukraine, trying to support the conduct of military operations. The editions as «Izvestia», «Rossiyskaya Gazeta», «Moskovsky Komsomolets», «Kommersant», «Vzglyad» and information agency «RIA Novosti», «ITAR-

¹ <http://delo.ua/ukraine/zhurnalistov-ne-puskajut-v-krym-ugrozhajut-kalashom-kutepov-s-hr-228768/>

² Ще 28-го лютого в Криму невідомими були заблоковані (захоплені) вузли зв'язку компанії Укртелеком, в результаті чого було пошкоджено магістральні оптико-волоконні кабелі. Проблема була вирішена лише на наступний день // <http://podrobnosti.ua/society/2014/03/01/961822.html>

³ Лідер «Правого сектору» Д.Ярош заявив, що сторінка була зламана і відповідної заяви він не робив.

⁴ Водночас є повідомлення про намагання порушити роботи низки Інтернет-ЗМІ

TASS», «Rosbalt», «AIS» not only reprinted unverified news, but also were detected in the creation of completely false information (eg, about the defection of the ship of the Navy of Ukraine «Getman Sahaidachny» on the Russia's side)⁵, who had returned after the anti-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden⁶.

Another example was the attempt of TV channels in particular satellite «Russia-24» and «NTV Mir» to confirm by the appropriate video the news about numerous refugees from Ukraine to Russia⁷ (this was particularly consequential taking into account the circulated earlier information about 140 000 of Ukrainians applied for political asylum to Russia⁸). For this purpose a video from Ukraine-Poland border was used⁹, but the emergence of a photographic material¹⁰ from the real Ukraine-Russia border disavowed the news. Also referring to the «RIA Novosti»¹¹ the news about a low turnout of recruits in the «first day of the general mobilization» in Ukraine was reprinted, though general mobilization was not announced, and true photo- and video materials prove the contrary.

Justifying aggressive actions in the Crimea, Russian television used (March 1) the video¹² which depicted supposedly «Ukrainian fighters» standing at the background of lying motionless bodies of Russian soldiers, against of buses named «Lviv Taigan». The check revealed that the bus with «banderas» owned by the Crimean enterprise «Park Lviv» Taigan», «Ukrainian fighters» used weapon of the Russian Army, and the «victims» had no traces of blood.

In addition, in the final program «Today» at NTVMir on March 2, 2014 it was emphasized that the referendum on the status of the Crimea, to be held on March 30, 2014 supposedly is completely in the spirit of modern European realities, giving an example of upcoming similar events in Scotland (18 September 2014) and Catalonia (9 November 2014)¹³.

⁵ <http://izvestia.ru/news/566817>

⁶ <http://izvestia.ru/news/566817>

⁷ <http://www.interfax-russia.ru/South/main.asp?id=477460>

⁸ <http://ria.ru/world/20140301/997697055.html>

⁹ <http://poglyad.te.ua/podii/yak-lohanuvsya-telekanal-ort/>

¹⁰ [http://inpress.ua/uploads/assets/images/Inna/%D0%B32\(3\).jpg](http://inpress.ua/uploads/assets/images/Inna/%D0%B32(3).jpg)

¹¹ <http://ria.ru/world/20140302/997790546.html>

¹² <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2014/03/2/7017125/>

¹³ <http://www.ntv.ru/peredacha/itogovaya/m22900/o227537/>

It is significant that Russia managed to engage partially the Western media to highlight their own position. Thus CNN channel showed a story that justified actions of the Russian President, citing the historian Stephen Cohen, who believes that there is no blame of Putin in the Ukrainian crisis. In the CNN interview he declared that in this situation, the Russian president had no choice. Moreover, in the same situation the USA president would have acted exactly in the same way if not tougher¹⁴.

Active bilateral interaction was demonstrated by the pro-government Russian online media and relevant social networks' activists. A number of Russian sites engaged in permanent information-psychological confrontation concerning Ukraine actively covered current events, disseminated unverified and false information, committed active analytical commenting of the events. **These news was fully formed by publications' editorials, or relied to the information of «friendly activists» in social networks.** In particular, the social network Facebook presents groups (communities) of people who consciously disseminate panic and false information, aimed at the formation of the image of «invincible Russian army». It is worth noting that their messages in their news feeds were reprinted by online media, sometimes – even by traditional media. Of course, in order to maintain its reputation the media had to refute these facts over time.

Important component of the information campaign against Ukraine was the dissemination of information about the rapid movement of Russian troops to the regions of Ukraine (in particular to Zaporizhzhya¹⁵, Dnipropetrovsk¹⁶, Kherson¹⁷ regions), which later were not confirmed. Obviously, this was done with the aim of sowing panic and disorganization of defense efforts of the Ukrainian state (including stimulation of dispersion of troops), to create the impression of scale invasion etc.

¹⁴ <http://russian.rt.com/inotv/2014-03-03/CNN-Amerikanskie-SMI-iskazhayut-obraz>

¹⁵ <http://ru.tsn.ua/politika/v-zaporozhskoy-oblasti-idet-kolonna-rossiyskih-voysk-smi-352254.html>

¹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/oleg.tsarov/posts/435979149867790>, з сторінки О.Царева де він зізнається, що свідомо блокував пересування українських військ

¹⁷ <http://soviet.kidstaff.com.ua/question-356623>

Another important direction of Russia's propaganda actions is numerous statements about Ukrainian military defection to the Russian side or the voluntary surrender of military units/ storehouse of weapons / other military facilities to Russian military. At the same time there is only one confirmed fact - the betrayal of Rear Admiral D.Berezovskiy, who said, that he defected to the side of the self-proclaimed authorities of the Crimea¹⁸. All other cases were denied by the military. At the same time information about alleged numerous cases of acquisition of Russian citizenship by Ukrainian military was actively circulated. However, there is only one true acknowledgement of these facts, that refers to few former members of Special Forces «Berkut» (who received Russian passports).

In order to strengthen a misperceptions of events in Ukraine satellite TV channel «Russia-24» showed the story of confession of a citizen, who was allegedly involved in the riots in Kiev¹⁹. He claimed that trained mercenaries, among others from the U.S., Germany, Poland are fighting on the side of «radicals» and assured about the alleged existence of a «Code of fighters» that requires tough punitive measures (even murder) for insubordination or treason. This information was replicated by other Russian media, including the «Rossiyskaya Gazeta».

Interesting and new constituent of information-psychological confrontation was used by Russia – to create the impression that the world press supports Russia's actions via **republication of comments** to the articles of famous editions at their web sites as points of view of Western media and public opinion²⁰, although technologically nothing prevented to leave these comments by the Russians themselves.

Another example of a «world's» support of Russia's actions – is an arbitrary interpretation of international leaders' statements (John Kerry – ITAR-TASS agency²¹, China's attitude in the interpretation of IA REGNUM²²).

¹⁸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Zt9efnLV4UY

¹⁹ <http://www.rg.ru/2014/03/02/naemniki-site.html>

²⁰ <http://odnarodyna.com.ua/content/mirovoe-obshchestvennoe-mnenie-na-storone-rossii>

²¹ <http://avmalgin.livejournal.com/4378894.html>

²² <http://expres.ua/world/2014/03/03/102833-yaponiya-kytay-tezh-zastupyls-ukrayinu>

Change of events' interpretations of are well seen in the example of the publications of the agency «Interfax». The headline news is the following: «Russian soldiers captured Belbek airport near Sevastopol», in a few minutes – «Russian military control Belbek airport to prevent the arrival of militants», and finally – «Crimean vigilante groups dispersed across the perimeter of Belbek airfield» (also the text highlights – «Russian soldiers have no relation to the events at the Belbek airport»)²³.

The introduction by Russian news agencies relevant tags marked with red letters: «The threat of civil war in Ukraine» – IA REGNUM, «CRISIS IN UKRAINE» – ITAR-TASS.

Significant fact is the use of appropriate banners, such as at the Internet portal KM.RU that posted two such images – a small one in the list of topics and a large one – in the same topic.

An unanimous support of intervention to the Crimea turned out to be a fake: of the total number – 166 senators, 85 senators attended the session, though the number of those who voted – 90 senators²⁴.

In assessing of Ukraine's counter-propaganda efforts one can state their partial effectiveness in the plane of more or less timely disavowal of negative content. However, this response was irregular and mostly situational, because Ukraine does not have an integrated national strategy of foreign policy informing and almost completely doesn't have the necessary facilities and specialists an appropriate level, such as Russia's media Corporation «Russia today» that was created in the late of 2005.

First of all it should be noted that the media activity of the key public persons was not sufficient. The speeches of the top officials were mainly not substantial and did not create an impression of the adequate activity among citizens, but rather fussiness. Moreover, the repeated statements of the state leadership about their appeal to the international community created the impression of the helplessness to

<http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1773518.html>

²³ <http://www.aboutru.com/2014/02/interfax/>

²⁴ <http://uainfo.org/yandex/286061-senatory-soveta-federacii-rossii-ne-vse-golosovali-za-vvod-voysk-v-krym.html>

aggression (in accordance with the users' comments in the on-line media and the social networks).

The speeches of the government leaders partially conform to the confrontational crisis discourse and did not submit particular and relevant information about the actions and intentions of the government.

The most effective mechanism to restrain aggressive campaign (as well as on information and real level) was the use of the public journalism and the most extensive coverage of what is happening on-line. The on-line broadcast from the place of events through using of tools such as «Stream-TV» allowed to disavow the most provocative statements and prevented provocations on the part of armed men in some cases, in the circumstances where the Russia tried to create «staging» background advantageous for there.

It is significant that the new format of the «Stream-TV» became a real problem for the Russian military, who do not know how to respond to these «public journalists»²⁵. So the appeal «Maximal coverage!» is really appropriate to the situation as well as the attempt of Ukrainian media to verify more thoroughly any information even that comes out from «respectable» news agencies. The initiative of Ukrainian journalists of the procedure to coverage the currency events and calls for their Russian colleagues not to inflame their materials about Ukraine-Russian conflict²⁶ were absolutely relevant and important – the appeals of some journalists to take certain analog of «Hippocratic Oath» for the media it also may include²⁷.

However, some of Ukrainian media also reproduced misinformation messages from Russian media that were officially disproved by the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine²⁸ such as the information about the capture or the block of military and

²⁵ One of the “Stream-TV” channels posted activist’s material where he drove to unknown armed men and asked him why they are here. Judging by the fact that his reaction was only hide the faces behind masks, their leadership did not provide such capabilities and did not give him any instructions how to behave in such circumstances.

²⁶ http://www.newsru.com/world/03mar2014/tv_smi.html

²⁷ <http://www.telekritika.ua/kontekst/2014-03-02/91016>

²⁸ <http://www.mil.gov.ua/>

strategic facilities in the Crimea²⁹.

The extremely important national initiative «StopFake» (<http://stopfake.org/>) and the USA initiative «To inform is to influence», which are actively disprove «fake» from Russian are worth mentioning now³⁰.

Moreover such information must be widely refuted through public media, especially on television through the state national company «First National» and State broadcasted company «Ukrainian television and radio world service» (UTR).

The significant public activity occurs on the background of the authorities' lack of media response. First of all the official websites of the key state institutions are almost completely inactive. The information support of current events partially carried out through the sites of the Cabinet Ministers of Ukraine and the Supreme Council of Ukraine, while the site of the President of Ukraine promulgates only the signed Law of Ukraine.

The decisions of significant number of national television channels not to change broadcasting network during troubled days (1-2 March 2014) are disputable. The only thing that made all of the TV channels was placing of the slogan «United Ukraine» in two languages (Russian and Ukrainian) in a corner of the screen, but it could be placed even in the Crimean Tatar language. On the one hand, such television «passivity» in the coverage of current events probably was due to reluctant to spread a panic among the population, but the result of this «passivity» was the lack of information among the population (as a result the majority of people learned about the dramatic events of the 1st of March only on the next Sunday). Such media work is not fit for rules of the crisis media-communication management, because it leads to the spread of rumors, gossip and as a result to the total nervousness of population.

²⁹ <http://expres.ua/digest/2014/03/01/102757-rosiyska-armiya-okupuvala-ponad-70-viyskovykh-strategichnyh-obyektiv-krymu>

³⁰ In particular “StopFake” denied reports about a gunfight in Simferopol and «To inform is to influence» denied reports about arrivals three hundred employees of the U.S. military company Xe Services LLC. to Ukraine recently. At the same time such national projects should receive greater government support (including - analytic and monitoring) or duplicated on the similar public resources (with a maximum spread of the resources addresses on the web) at all.

The suggestion to interrupt broadcast of Russian television news formats in Ukraine is also debatable. It is most likely that similar step would decrease the negative demoralizing effect of the Russia's information and psychological operations against the population of Ukraine, at the same time it might stimulate citizens to look for this news content from another causes.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ukraine has to promote intensely its version of events in the world using all available media resources (including international broadcasting services – State broadcasting company «Ukrainian Television and RadioWorld Service» (UTR), international satellite TV Channel «First Ukraine», national news agency «UKRINFORM»). Although main attention of the world media community at the moment is focused on the Crimean issue, it's still necessary to take some extra steps to invite more international journalists to Kyiv and Crimea. This will strongly complicate conducting of Russia's aggression actions.

2. In the present context, when adequate response to provocations and unconfirmed reports become a key task, it is appropriate to center work of all government monitoring services (including press agencies and speakers) around searching and refutation of such information and the provision of correct messages to maximum number of people (including part – through the provision of verified information to sites like «StopFake» and other similar associations).

3. It is also necessary to brisk up the work of press services of all government bodies for the implementation of information counter-measures.

4. It is necessary to inform widely about the true state of ensuring of rights of Russian-speaking citizens in Ukraine and of Ukrainian citizens in the Russian Federation. In particular in Ukraine, as of 2013:

- 19700 schools operate, including Ukrainian language schools – 16356, Russian language schools – 1256 (that is more than 6 % of the total quantity), several languages schools – 1283. In particular, most Russian

language schools operate in Crimea (343), Donetsk (200) and Lugansk (151) regions.

- a variety of periodicals and continued publications has been issued: 2945 (excluding newspapers), among which the Russian-language ones – 508 (17 %) and newspapers – 2343, including Russian-language ones – 845 (36 %).

5. It is essential to establish cooperation between the CNN company and the Ukrainian broadcaster «First National» through the signing of several cooperation agreements (such as was signed between Inter and CNN) for the mutual exchange of information. In order to increase public awareness (especially in the south-eastern regions) it is worthy to create a special film in three languages (Ukrainian, Russian, Tatar) about the true state of affairs in the Crimea and the relationship between minorities, that should be broadcasted via the national and private TV-channels and also on the Internet. For the promotion of this movie it might be useful to involve leading PR-companies of the country.

6. It is necessary to create a special governmental agency responsible for the information/communication policy (including monitoring 24/7, which covers both open and confidential sources). High-profile government officials such as the cabinet members, the Deputies of Verkhovna Rada, the President must be constantly provided with current results of this monitoring. As far as monitoring would be only one of the objectives of the body, it is advisable to create it under submission of the Prime Minister or the First Deputy Prime Minister.

7. It is high time for the creation of Ukrainian portal «InoZMI» that can be implemented as a public-private partnership. Adequate and timely translation of the international media in Russian and Ukrainian languages could allow effective fraud and error prevention. At the time of formation of the portal it would be useful to complete the agreements with the media organizations, news agencies, online media providers (Hlavred, Ukrains'ka Pravda, Spil'nobachennya etc.) that already have the appropriate category, and will duplicate the content on the common integrated portal.

8. Besides the distribution of translated materials to the general public, the portal can be used as an indicator of the needs and directions of response of public authorities. (For instance, according to the analysis of «inoZMI» publications about events in Ukraine over the last days, it revealed the fact of silencing the existence of Budapest Memorandum, and hence the need to ensure appropriate guarantees for Ukraine.³¹)

Department of Information Society and Information Strategies

³¹ <http://comments.ua/politics/455341-zapadnie-smi-nazivayut-sobitiya-krimu.html>