United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

May 30, 2025

Case No. FL-2023-00013

Andrew Block
America First Legal Foundation
611 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE, #231
Washington, DC 20003

Dear Mr. Block:

As we noted in our letter dated April 30, 2025, we are processing your request for material under the Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA"), 5 U.S.C. § 552. The Department of State ("Department") has identified an additional 43 responsive record subject to the FOIA. Upon review, we have determined 6 records may be released in full, 36 records may be released in part, and 1 record must be withheld in its entirety.

An enclosure explains the FOIA exemptions and other grounds for withholding material. Where we have made redactions, the applicable FOIA exemptions are marked on each record. The record withheld in full is exempt from release pursuant to FOIA Exemption 5 U.S.C. § 552 (b)(5). The document identification number for the record withheld in full is: A-00000748838. Where applicable, the Department has considered the foreseeable harm standard when reviewing these records and applying FOIA exemptions. All non-exempt material that is reasonably segregable from the exempt material has been released and is enclosed.

We will keep you informed as your case progresses. If you have any questions, your attorney may contact Kevin Bell, U.S. Department of Justice Trial Attorney, at kevin.k.bell@usdoj.gov and (202) 305-8613. Please refer to the case number, FL-2023-00013, and the civil action number, 22-cv-03386, in all correspondence about this case.

Sincerely,

Avery Bullard

Avery Bullard
Supervisory Government Information Specialist
Litigation and Appeals Office

Enclosures: As stated.

The Freedom of Information Act (5 USC 552)

FOIA Exemptions

(b)(1) Information specifically authorized by an executive order to be kept secret in the interest of national defense or foreign policy. Executive Order 13526 includes the following classification categories:

1.4(a) Military plans, systems, or operations
1.4(b) Foreign government information
1.4(c) Intelligence activities, sources or methods, or cryptology
1.4(d) Foreign relations or foreign activities of the US, including confidential sources
1.4(e) Scientific, technological, or economic matters relating to national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
1.4(f) U.S. Government programs for safeguarding nuclear materials or facilities
1.4(g) Vulnerabilities or capabilities of systems, installations, infrastructures, projects, plans, or protection services relating to US national security, including defense against transnational terrorism
1.4(h) Weapons of mass destruction

(b)(2) Related solely to the internal personnel rules and practices of an agency

(b)(3) Specifically exempted from disclosure by statute (other than 5 USC 552), for example:

ARMSEXP	Arms Export Control Act, 50a USC 2411(c)
CIA PERS/ORG	Central Intelligence Agency Act of 1949, 50 USC 403(g)
EXPORT CONTROL	Export Administration Act of 1979, 50 USC App. Sec. 2411(c)
FS ACT	Foreign Service Act of 1980, 22 USC 4004
INA	Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 USC 1202(f), Sec. 222(f)
IRAN	Iran Claims Settlement Act, Public Law 99-99, Sec. 505

(b)(4) Trade secrets and confidential commercial or financial information

(b)(5) Interagency or intra-agency communications forming part of the deliberative process, attorney-client privilege, or attorney work product

(b)(6) Personal privacy information

(b)(7) Law enforcement information whose disclosure would:
(A) interfere with enforcement proceedings
(B) deprive a person of a fair trial
(C) constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy
(D) disclose confidential sources
(E) disclose investigation techniques
(F) endanger life or physical safety of an individual

(b)(8) Prepared by or for a government agency regulating or supervising financial institutions

(b)(9) Geological and geophysical information and data, including maps, concerning wells

Other Grounds for Withholding

NR Material not responsive to a FOIA request excised with the agreement of the requester

Work of a Counter-Disinformation Officer in the Global Engagement Center

ANALYSIS BASKET

To do immediately (but not on the check-in list): sign up for daily media digests from each embassy you cover. You will scan these each day to track disinformation narratives (and you will include significant stories in the Ops Report). Phrases such as "fascist Ukraine" will tip you off to a story that is part of a Russian-engineered disinformation campaign. Citations of *News Front* (or *South Front*, etc.) articles are also signs.

Finding Analytical Projects:

- Think about what might be needed (example: look ahead at elections and other key events.

- Elections meddling is a huge issue so an election in your country is a good potential project topic
- QAnon on Facebook and Twitter is also an evergreen topic
- Or: "current disinfo narratives and how they are evolving" in a priority country
- With the situation in Ukraine heating up, follow narratives regarding Ukraine in WE, France, Germany, and Italy would feed into a paper on why a populace does not support protecting Ukraine)
- Monitor potential proxy websites to pick up on narratives (*News Front* publishes in French and German)
- Ideas may arise in meetings with partners
- Archival search techniques: Wayback Machine and archive.is (the latter crawls Facebook but Wayback Machine captures a lot from URLs)

PROJECT BASKET:

- Talk with (b)(6) about process
- Discuss potential options with PAO/PDDO
- Complete grants training
- In my portfolio, Baltics are the only potential places where I can do projects (i.e. Belarus, Ukraine)

Communications Service Providers (CSP) Working Group list

- me
- (b)(6)
- SCCI
- ERA - digital policy of the EU
- DRL/MLGA (freedom online coalition POCs)

- Partnership to Counter Disinformation in the Americas (PCDA)
- Countering Russian Influence Funding (CRIF) - ACE money

- Do we want our G7 RRM people to travel to London? Virtual meeting for them in the next few weeks?

- bring in DHS to IPCSD Communications Service Providers Working Group and consider other agencies to bring in as well
- Arrange for Belarus opposition present at IPCSD
- Analyst exchanges (bringing comms and analysts together in a meaningful way)
- revive newsletter
- communicate more consistently with Posts about IPCSD and outside of IPCSD (i.e. a structural matter of connecting posts with GEC activities and analysis, i.e. promoting use of GECIQ)

Problems:
- Programming: processes established for successful program management of funding opportunities
- Reporting and analysis is good
- Too much time spent on defining the problem and not enough time fighting it or figuring out what to do about it
- Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) is not working

inform their understanding of the information space

RSP - Resiliency Support Project

vaccine report (b)(6) project
TCI campaign (South Africa)
SCA - Kyrgyzstan (halfway done)
program stuff with (b)(6) (Berlin - Belarusian journalism program; Georgia - repressed writers from Soviet period; DebunkEU - Vilnius/Belarus border; Budapest -- $500 k CARDIF [April])
read the pillars and the vaccine reports
Spreadsheet of active and past projects on our SharePoint

Success that we've been involved in in Latvia
Evidence-based proof for why we are active in Latvia
Baltics is a focus and primarily on tracking and getting ahead of the issues on the border concerning refugees

- Working with the team drafting the GEC's updated Functional Bureau Strategy (FBS) as a Russia Team POCs for Objective 1.2: Expand U.S. Federal Government coordination with allied and partner nations to counter foreign propaganda and disinformation. Attended working-level meetings on each of the organization's strategic objectives, reporting back to Team leadership, and pushing for Team equities we want to prioritize. (An earlier FBS draft downplayed exposure work -- a strategic Russia Team objective -- which we pushed back on effectively and changed the course of that document -- so definitely need to watch out for traps like that.)

Breakdown of Roles
Overall logistics: GEC Russia primary, StratComm consulting

Working groups:

- GEC IQ: GEC IQ team primary, with GEC Russia consulting, StratComm visibility
- Programming working group: EUR/ACE primary, GEC Russia consulting, StratComm visibility
- Campaigns: StratComm primary, GEC Russia visibility
- CSP Working Group: DHS primary (hopefully!), GEC Russia coordinating, GEC Silicon Valley rep consulting, StratComm/EUR visibility for policy reasons
- Knowledge Exchange: not much to do on this one, TBD

IPCSD:
Info-sharing, particularly on the response to Russian disinformation, joint PD campaigns,

- **"Communications Service Providers" (CSP) WG**: has the goal of joint representation to tech companies on disinformation issues (along the lines of the possible with our different legal frameworks). DHS/CISA increasingly involved.
- **New - Programming WG**: to increase coordination on counter-disinfo programming in Europe (implicit focus on Russia). EUR/ACE is lead.
- **GEC IQ exchanges**: do we share U.S.-domestic disinfo analysis with the IPCSD GEC IQ group? (eg. from DHS?)
- **Communications WG:** organizes joint public diplomacy campaigns to counter disinformation. Because of IPCSD's membership and focus, localized campaigns in Europe make most sense for IPCSD. EUR/PPD/StratComm is lead.
- **Proposed – Elections WG**: possibly to collect best practices surrounding elections and think about upcoming elections. Partners may view this group as having involvement of domestic agencies. Should we bring in CISA? Are there other elections-related efforts in G7 RRM or CFI? This may be something to deconflict beforehand to avoid redundancy.

G7 RRM:
Info-sharing, truly threat agnostic

- **Definitions WG**: working on definitions with the eventual goal of joint disinfo attribution?
- **Analytics WG**: working on a joint understanding of disinfo outlets with the possible goal of joint attribution?
- ***Capability gap??***: public communications on disinfo issues: joint attribution of disinformation operations, or joint social media campaigns on broad global topics that inherently counter disinformation narratives?? G7 RRM is the only of the three partnerships that are public – this is helpful for possible public communications

CFI:
Info-sharing, broader focus on influence issues (vs. just disinformation), leans toward a focus on the PRC, more USG domestic involvement(?), largest membership of the three

- **FVEY steering committee**: [?]
- **Democracy WG**: led by Sweden. Are there elections-related efforts in this? [see IPCSD elections question above]
- **Strategic Communications WG**: led by UK. No public-facing activity (?). Could this group share potential public materials from the G7 RRM more widely in its membership?
- **Other WGs**?

EEAS Rapid Alert System and GEC IQ:

- Lack of awareness on my part here: do these two systems work together in some way? Are they compatible? Complementary? (Redundant?)

What Russia is doing.

The Goals and Tactics of Russia's Disinformation

- The overall goals are to manipulate and weaken adversaries.
- The main tactics for weakening adversaries are to discredit, divide, disarm, and demoralize them.
- Russian authorities value disinformation for its long-run, cumulative effects.

How is Russia doing it.

(top five narratives)

Prior to the February invasion of Ukraine, Russian state-sponsored media outlets such as RT and Sputnik widely used social media and their television network to spread disinformation. Since many of their outlets have closed for various reasons, the social media accounts of Russian Embassies and Consulates around the world have largely taken over that role.

Who in Russia is Responsible

Where in the World is Russia Active?

Concerning Ukraine:

- Tactics and methods have changed over time from before Russia's further of Ukraine, and since it began, adapting to the new realities and reactions of European countries which quickly took measures to lock Russia out of its information space via bans of various sorts of Russian state-sponsored media agencies.
- Recently we have noticed that the Russian Federation has pivoted its attention from Europe to sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, two areas of the world that have not taken the same measures that Europe did. A few examples:

Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov's May 25 Africa Day speech to assembled African ambassadors in Moscow combined false claims about Ukraine under the pretense of anti-colonial solidarity.

- Lavrov's remarks also likely foreshadow Russia's messaging strategy on Ukraine-related subjects to African audiences.
- Lavrov attempted to portray Russia as a victim of an "all-out hybrid war" where Ukraine is "used as a bargaining chip" by a "small group of U.S.-led Western countries," or a "club of the chosen," working together to achieve a unipolar world order that seeks to subjugate everyone else, including Russia and Africa.
- Lavrov also urged the ambassadors to demand the removal of "illegal, anti-Russian" sanctions in order to strengthen **food security**.
- He promised Russia would, despite Western-manufactured challenges, continue fulfilling its obligations to Africa.
- OneWorld, a website with ties to Russia's military intelligence, echoed Lavrov's claims from his address to African envoys, accusing President Zelenskyy of supporting a U.S. - led "global food cartel" that will wield control over global food supply as a "new hybrid weapon" against the Global South.

SVR - Latin America Does Not Support U.S. On Ukraine:

- Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) issued a May 23 statement that implies the United States has been "pushing" Latin American nations too hard to speak out against Russia over Ukraine, which has led to a "backlash" from Mexico, Argentina, and Bolivia. Reporting on the SVR statement, RIA Novosti said the alleged backlash might lead to the cancellation of June's "Summit of the Americas" in Los Angeles. RT separately published an op-ed on the issue, also alleging the United States is facing summit boycotts from its "Latin neighbors."

Russia Opens Museum Exhibits on NATO "Cruelty," Historical Revisionism

- As Russia increasingly characterizes its war against Ukraine as a conflict against the West and NATO, it has enlisted its cultural institutions to increase propaganda and disinformation targeting both.
- Exhibitions on the "cruelty" of NATO and the West are opening at museums across Russia, including one entitled "NATO: A chronicle of cruelty," which just concluded at Moscow's Museum of Contemporary Russian History.
- Visitors are greeted by the sounds of bombs and approaching planes as they encounter "informative" posters detailing NATO's alleged warmongering and atrocities committed by Allies.
- The exhibit also features objects from the war in Ukraine and comparisons between Nazi Germany and modern Ukraine, further highlighting Russia's false justifications for the war.

Rossotrudnichestvo recently announced it was moving some of its Europe-based employees to Asia and Africa, a possible indication of where the agency will focus its Ukraine-related disinformation efforts.

Preparing Russians For A Prolonged Conflict:

- The Kremlin has begun to offer explanations to the Russian public for the slow progress of its "special military operation."
- Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu falsely claimed May 24 any slowdown was intentional and the result of Russia's determination to "avoid harming civilians."
- Secretary of Russia's Security Council Nikolai Patrushev said Russia was not "chasing deadlines," implying Russia's so-called "denazification" of Ukraine could take time.
- Officials' acknowledgement of delays in Ukraine may reflect a Kremlin directive to prepare Russians for an extended conflict.

Driving A Wedge Between Ukraine And Poland

Adding to the Kremlin disinformation targeting Ukraine's relationship with Poland, Russian MFA spokesperson Maria Zakharova falsely claimed May 23 that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's proposal to grant Polish citizens in Ukraine the same rights Ukrainian refugees have received in Poland was tantamount to "legalizing the de facto [Polish] seizure of…[his] country."

Russia's "Z" Campaign on Twitter Benefits From Coordinated Activity

According to GEC analysis, on Twitter, the "Z" campaign, which aims to rally support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine, appears to benefit from coordinated and likely inauthentic amplification.

- Three distinct pro-Russia clusters promote the "Z" campaign: a Russian-language cluster aimed at Russian and Ukrainian audiences; an English-language cluster aimed at an Indian audience; and another English-language cluster aimed at an African audience.
- The India- and Africa-focused clusters appeared highly coordinated, given their recent creation dates and frequent messaging on Russia. The overall reach of this pro-Russia amplification, however, is likely limited, with tweets receiving fewer than 5-10 likes and rarely any comments or retweets.
- Conversely, a pro-Ukraine cluster of accounts also acts in a coordinated manner to amplify messaging denouncing Russia's invasion. Likely targeting Russian and Ukrainian audiences, this cluster largely highlights the Russian army's war losses.

Russia's Health Ministry Disinfo about Ukraine at the UN in Geneva

A pamphlet purportedly from Russia's Health Ministry is circulating on WhatsApp messaging groups among African delegations to the United Nations in Geneva. Among its disinformation claims, the pamphlet blames Ukraine for causing the humanitarian crisis in the so-called DPR/LPR and accuses the Ukrainian Armed Forces of mistreating Russian prisoners of war, perpetrating war crimes, and placing weapons systems in healthcare facilities. The pamphlet appears to be an attempt to deflect the blame for humanitarian crisis and war crimes onto the victim – Ukraine, while portraying Russia as a magnanimous humanitarian actor. The pamphlet's design even mimics a World Health Organization campaign to combat health misinformation, a likely attempt to coopt international legitimacy.

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
To: (b)(6) M@state.gov>
Subject: WAR Input 20 OCT
Date: Tue, 20 Oct 2020 15:44:36 +0000

Coordinate:

~~(SBU)~~ **I2C2 Facilitates Meeting Between the GEC and OSE's China Teams:** On 16 October, I2C2 facilitated a meeting with the GEC and the Open Source Center's (OSE) China Team to best collaborate on future programs and analysis. OSE shared its current and future programmatic focuses and its ability to identify narratives in Chinese media and answered questions pertaining to their foreign media coverage supporting GEC programs. I2C2 will work with OSE's Identifying Foreign Influence Team to schedule follow-on meeting between the two organizations.

Communicate:

~~(SBU)~~ **I2C2 Facilitates GEC Support to Interagency and Academic Election War Rooms:** On 16 October, In support of GEC election security efforts, I2C2 facilitated several meetings with both the interagency and academic community to offer support to their respective election war rooms. In the coming week a plan will be solidified for GEC assistance in monitoring disinformation and misinformation in the lead up to and the days following the election.

~~(SBU)~~ **GEC I2C2 Meets with CYBERCOM J35 to Discuss Collaboration**: On 13 October, GEC's LNO to CYBERCOM met with J35's (b)(6) and (b)(6) at Fort Meade to discuss collaboration between the GEC and CYBERCOM, how this has been done in the past, and how we can do this more and better in the future.

~~(SBU)~~ **The Dutch Shared Internal News Media Article with I2C2 on the Bidens' Implications in Ukraine and Impact on US Elections**: On 15 October, Guus van Zwoll, Senior Policy Officer, Task Force International Cyber Policies, shared with I2C2 International Partner Engagement Planner an article on the Bidens' implication in Ukraine, and the authenticity of their involvement. The share is unique as it was flagged by our Dutch partner as a potential Hack and Leak, and covered by *Trouw*, a prominent Dutch daily newspaper. I2C2 forwarded the story to GEC elections team, and pertinent threat teams.

~~(SBU)~~ **I2C2 Shared Resilience Support Project Reports with the US Embassy, The Hague:** On 16 October, as a follow-up to a virtual meeting with (b)(6) Office of Political and Economic Affairs, U.S. Embassy, The Hague, and the Cyber/Digital Policy Officer and lead on disinformation/related topics, and per (b)(6) request, I2C2 International Partner Engagement Planner forwarded the DHS/CISA Strategic Communications Plan, as well as the

reporting from the RSP Slovakia Project. Meanwhile, I2C2 Elections Planner is working to get a one-pager outlining the details of RSPM for the US Embassy, The Hague. (b)(6) appreciates this effort, as he believes it will be useful, and helpful in his forthcoming meeting with the Dutch on information-sharing, CPD, and US and Dutch elections in March.

Looking ahead:

On 20 Oct 20,(b)(6) meeting with TET (JD Maddox) and USAF Blue Horizons team at HST to discuss overlap and potential collaboration (Blue Horizons is a USAF think-tank/prototype team tasked with rapidly leveraging commercial/government capabilities to address a current mission critical challenge). The focus of this team (led by (b)(6) is looking at how can the USAF leverage capabilities in Air, Space, Cyber to uniquely deter, disrupt, or deny state-sponsored disinformation campaigns threatening US national security.

On 22 Oct, I2C2 will conduct a call with OSE's Identifying Foreign Influence Team to best coordinate sustainable interaction between our organizations, specifically increasing the threat team's involvement with OSE's analytic tools and methodology. I2C2 will go through a proposed meeting schedule to include times and dates to best coordinate working and senior level engagement between our two organizations. OSE's regional programmers and analysis have expressed their appreciation for the GEC's products and their desire to work with the GEC.

V/r,
(b)(6)

Sender: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Recipient: (b)(6) @state.gov>

Special Envoy's Daily Brief
Jan. 7, 2021

Trending Propaganda and Disinformation News

China Wages Cognitive Warfare To Topple Taiwan Government: Report

MSN

China is waging "cognitive warfare" against Taiwan and aims to topple its government by targeting the public with escalating misinformation campaigns this year, according to a national security think tank in Taipei. In its year-end report analyzing Beijing's political and military policies in 2020, the government-funded Institute for National Defense and Security Research said Chinese efforts to influence the Taiwanese public's voting behavior has so far backfired, but it expected more of the same strategy this year.

Readership: 71,798,074

China is having a field day with U.S. Capitol chaos

The Washington Post

As democratic governments around the world reacted with horror to President Trump supporters' storming of the Capitol, China's official propagandists could barely contain their schadenfreude. If you don't allow the storming of your own legislature, they asked, how could you support it in Hong Kong? It was an illustration of how Trump's subversion of American democracy has provided cover for authoritarian governments like China's. Beijing has found the chaos incited by Trump a convenient defense for its authoritarian policies and iron-fisted suppression of dissent.

Readership: 33,563,185

COVID-19 Conspiracies: How Can We Deal With Misinformation?

Forbes

The rush to roll-out COVID-19 vaccines in the United States, United Kingdom and other countries has contributed to a new viral spread—that of false health information and malicious disinformation campaigns about the vaccines. Misinformation regarding health matters is an age-old problem, but one that social media has exacerbated—with dangerous consequences. Any increase in traction for anti-vaccination activists inevitably leads to a decline in vaccination rates and an increase in preventable illnesses, as noted by the recent resurgence in measles outbreaks in the United States. A recent nationally representative U.S. study found that the self-reported intent of getting a COVID vaccine declined from 74% in early April to 56% in early December 2020.

Readership: 26,855,122

COVID-19 vaccines lies and hoaxes: How to inoculate yourself,

family and friends against deadly misinformation

USA Today

Top scientists have created an online guide to arm people with scientific facts and practical tips to fight lies, hoaxes and conspiracy theories that are threatening public trust in the COVID-19 vaccines. More than two dozen leading experts in vaccine psychology, education and virology say they volunteered contributions to The COVID-19 Vaccine Communication Handbook to take on misinformation and propaganda spread by anti-vaccination activists that could lower vaccination rates and cause needless deaths. Even as coronavirus cases surge and hospitals overflow with critically ill patients, opposition to the vaccines is resonating, not just with fringe communities but with swaths of mainstream America.

Readership: 25,993,705

QAnon and the storm of the U.S. Capitol: The offline effect of online conspiracy theories

The Conversation

What is the cost of propaganda, misinformation and conspiracy theories? Democracy and public safety, to name just two things. The United States has received a stark lesson on how online propaganda and misinformation have an offline impact. For weeks, Donald Trump has falsely claimed the November presidential election was rigged and that's why he wasn't re-elected. The president's words have mirrored and fed conspriacy theories spred by followers of the QAnon movement. While conspiracy theorists are often dismissed as "crazy people on social media," QAnon adherents were among the individuals at the front line of the storming of Capitol Hill.

Readership: 6,964,811

Social media allowed a shocked nation to watch a coup attempt in real time

TechCrunch

Today's historic and terrifying coup attempt by pro-Trump extremists in Washington, D.C. played out live the same way it was fomented — on social media. Once again Twitter, streaming sites and other user-generated media were the only place to learn what was happening in the nation's capital — and the best place to be misled by misinformation and propaganda. In the morning, official streams and posts portended what people expected of the day: a drawn-out elector certification process in Congress while a Trump-led rally turned to general protests.

Readership: 5,081,380

Trending Adversary Narratives

Creating conditions for a very frozen conflict? US Navy to step up patrols in frigid Arctic waters off Russia's northern borders

RT

As Arctic ice retreats further each year, it helps to open up another front in the perennial standoff between Russia and the US, with both nations racing to dominate the space and control the emerging maritime trade route. In a call with reporters on Tuesday, US Secretary of the Navy Kenneth Braithwaite announced that American sailors would increasingly set course for the frigid waters of the far North. "You will see the Navy operating again in a more permanent manner above the Arctic Circle," he said, adding that the US will "operate more assertively" to challenge Russia's claims in the region.

Readership: 13,008,224

Do you realize now what you have done? US gets the kind of 'democracy' it championed overseas Op-ed

RT

A crowd of protesters stormed Congress protesting a presidential election they claimed had been fraudulent. When this happened in Serbia in 2000, the US called it democracy. When it happened in Washington, DC – not so much. Scenes from the US Capitol on Wednesday, as protesters backing President Donald Trump disrupted the joint session of Congress meeting to certify the election of Democrat Joe Biden, looked very much like Belgrade in October 2000. The sight was later repeated in Ukraine – twice, in 2004 and 2014 – Georgia, Moldova, Belarus, and several Central Asian former Soviet republics. On every occasion, the US backed the "people power," because American NGOs and embassies were supporting what became known as "color revolutions."

Readership: 13,008,224

Iran to Welcome Biden Administration's Return to Path of Law: President

iran Goverment

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani says Tehran will welcome it if the incoming administration of US President-elect Joe Biden would choose to return to the rule of law and comply with its commitments under the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran. "We will welcome it if the other side obeys the law. A person who acts in a cruel way in the alley, breaks the windows with stone, but suddenly comes to his mind and says he doesn't want to break windows anymore; shouldn't we welcome it? We'd welcome such a move," Rouhani said in a Wednesday address to a cabinet session.

Readership: 1,296

GEC Mentions

Nothing Significant to Report

Trending Academic Research

The Pendulum: How Russia Sways Its Way to More Influence in Libya

War on the Rocks

[...] To maximize its control over locals and minimize its dependence on them, Moscow has built leverage over the years using a sophisticated mixture of tools, ranging from disinformation to diplomacy to banking interference to clandestine military intervention. Lethal equipment deliveries to the L…

Sources and Methods

The bullets above are compiled from four Boolean searches from TrendKite. The precise searches can be modified to fit business needs.

Today's search revealed 4788 artifacts based on the queries above, from which we parsed out what we found to be the most meaningful stories for the GEC's leadership

and mission by readership. Search criteria are based on USG leadership profiles.

~~SBU/FOUO~~ Last updated: 9/2/21

Project or Campaign Title	GEC Funding Type	Implementer (Name/ Post)	Total Funding		Countries or Region	Brief Project Description
GEC-DoD Co-Funded Cooperative Agreements						
GLOBSEC - Exposing Russian Disinfo	**DoD co-funded**	**GLOBSEC**	**$ 3,002,046.84**	**9/28/18 - 12/31/21**	Poland; Slovakia	(DoD co-funding $1,002.665.48.) GLOBSEC is mapping the media environment and disinformation landscape of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. The program hopes to build resiliency in the governments of these countries against Russian disinformation and propaganda.
	Sub-award	Center for Democratic Transition	*$ 52,000.00*		Montenegro	GLOBSEC research partner providing narrative analysis in local language.
	Sub-award	Political Capital KFT	*$ 104,000.00*		Hungary	GLOBSEC research partner providing narrative analysis in local language.
	Sub-award	International and Security Affairs Centre – ISAC Foundation	*$ 69,200.00*		Serbia	GLOBSEC research partner providing narrative analysis in local language.
	Sub-award	GlobalFocus	*$ 83,200.00*		Romania	GLOBSEC research partner providing narrative analysis in local language.
	Sub-award	Prague Security Studies Institute	*$ 104,000.00*		Czech Republic	GLOBSEC research partner providing narrative analysis in local language.
	Sub-award	Center for the Study of Democracy	*$ 83,200.00*		Bulgaria	GLOBSEC research partner providing narrative analysis in local language.
	Sub-award	Association for Promotion of Euro-Atlantic Ideas and Values; Euro-Atlantic Council of Macedonia	*$ 52,000.00*		North Macedonia	GLOBSEC research partner providing narrative analysis in local language.
Information Access Fund **DT Institute DTI** **(formeraly Democracy Council of California (DCC) -**	**DoD co-funded**	**Democracy Council of California (DCC)**	**$ 10,881,622.00**	**9/28/18-5/31/22**	DCC: Russian Federation; DCC-Information Access Fund: Specified in NOFOs	(DoD co-funding $7,190,624.00.) Democracy Council acts as a sub-award mechanism to provide small grants to implementers from a diverse range of countries and a wide range of projects to build United States allies and partner's capabilities to independently recognize, understand, expose, and counter Russian disinformation. As part of this award, DCC will also issue a sub-award to Zinc Network to train key local social media influencers to co-produce content to reach critical audiences with material that communicates strategic, democratic messages and develop those influencers into a distinct network.
	Sub-award	TV8 Moldova	*$71,000*	*09/21-05/22*	Moldova	extend the project to facilitate news and analysis by TV8 TV channel (Media Alternativa NGO) in the period estimated to follow likely snap parliamentary elections. This effort will counter the avalanche of misinformation, manipulation, and propaganda in the media space by providing impartial and accurate news and analysis on current events. More precisely, this project will center around the production of What was that? (Что это было?) weekly program and regular dissemination of short videos across TV8's digital channels and social media.

Project or Campaign Title	GEC Funding Type	Implementer (Name/ Post)	Total Funding		Countries or Region	Brief Project Description
	Sub-award	European Values Center	*$300,000*	*09/21-05/22*	Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia	The already established network of EVC's investigative bloggers will continue to unmask and broadcast via social media instances of Kremlin-sponsored disinformation and other messaging efforts to manipulate public opinion maliciously. EVC will increase the number of Kremlin Watchers and counter-disinformation content and establish a volunteer network of social media influencers who will re-post and engage in relevant social media discourse. EVC will further develop messaging products aimed at transatlantic foreign policy and security experts, parliament members, and leading journalists. These products will raise awareness about how adversarial Russian actors effectively undermine national security interests in these three countries as well as throughout Europe.
	Sub-award	Euroradio	*$275,000*	*09/21-05/22*	Belarus (and regional)	Euroradio is planning to engage with young adults (25-34) and soon-to-be retirees (55-64), many of whom find themselves in a difficult economic situation, are heavy consumers of Russian TV channels, and active Russian Orthodox Church believers. To do this, Euradio will focus on producing fact-based news and information, including the production of Absurdity Ranking (a draft title), a 10-15 min weekly video podcast that will debunk three news disseminated via fake or pro-Kremlin outlets, and; Doctor, help me! A 10-15min weekly video podcast will review medical information, healthcare tips and debunk Russian medical disinformation messages directed at the Belarusian audience. Also, Euroradio will expand the network of media outlets countering Russian malign messaging and strengthen its own and partners' strategies for the use of Telegram and other social media sites.
	Sub-award	Vok Ukraine	*$103,761*	*09/21-05/22*	Ukraine, Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Malta, Portugal, and Spain	Vox Ukraine will create a searchable database where disinformation is catalogued and then recorded, refuted, or explained. This will provide easy-to-use, high-quality information that will increase the capacity of civil society and media organizations in Western Europe to aid in the identification of and response to Russian disinformation and manipulative narratives. The database will also explain the purpose of the fake and true stories. The portal will be developed on the basis of an existing Vox Ukraine tool called the Anthology of Lies – a database of fact-checked statements by Ukrainian politicians. In collaboration with Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Malta, Portugal, and Spain, based on the European Union model, this database will support the counteraction of the narrative pushed by Russia that Ukraine is a failed state by showing that there are consistent and impactful steps being made within the country towards building sound institutions.

Project or Campaign Title	GEC Funding Type	Implementer (Name/ Post)	Total Funding		Countries or Region	Brief Project Description
	Sub-award	Metamorphosis	*$168,974*	*09/21-05/22*	North Macedonia	The goal of Metamorphosis is to expose Russian disinformation, propaganda, and influence in North Macedonia by creating an anti-disinformation hub and subsequent trainings and resources that will be available to a network of media outlets and journalists. There will also be a public-facing education campaign to target those who believe that foreign influences are nonexistent or irrelevant. The outlets will develop a series of journalistic products, including daily news that presents verified facts or debunks current disinformation and investigative stories that provide in-depth analysis of select aspects of Russian influence. Specifically, these investigative stories will look at narratives that intend to undermine the integration of Macedonia into NATO and the EU, including mainstream and fringe media, social networks, political proxies, economy, sports, religion, education, public health system.
	Sub-award	Glas Sumadije	*$122,466*	*09/21-05/22*	Serbia	Glas Sumadije's goal is to reduce Russia's negative media influence on socio-political developments in Serbia by offering credible resources and trainings to journalists in the region. This will be done by outreach followed by strengthening Glas Sumadije's media outlet and web portal that will feature information free of Russia influence available for public consumption. Media monitoring and assessment of local media, roundtable discussions, literacy workshops will be part of this project to enhance journalistic capability and build capacity for uncovering and countering Russian disinformation and propaganda. A training will also be organized for new hire journalists as part of their onboarding to strengthen journalistic and ethical standards when reporting.
	Sub-award	Zasto Ne	*$190,261*	*09/21-05/22*	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia	Zasto ne is launching the first region-wide initiative spanning from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Montenegro, Serbia, and North Macedonia. This project of online workshops and fact-checking resources aims to empower citizens to analyze media content with the ability to identify Russian disinformation and propaganda and raise media literacy. In turn, the goal is to motivate regional governments to take proactive measures to counteract disinformation and the adoption of strategies and legislation to be more effective. In addition to publicizing debunked cases of disinformation and propaganda that also publicly names the perpetrators. Zasto ne will also create a regional report on the state of foreign-influenced disinformation, including COVID-19 disinformation that will be shared via a promotional campaign for the research and its findings.
GEC-funded Grants & Cooperative Agreements						

Project or Campaign Title	GEC Funding Type	Implementer (Name/ Post)	Total Funding		Countries or Region	Brief Project Description
IAF Support to Belsat TV	**Cooperative agreement**	Democracy Council of California (for Belsat TV)	$ 800,000.00	**3/25/20-1/31/22**	Russian-speaking former Soviet republics	Belsat will be responsible to produce a yearlong program by: 1) adding additional television content to Belsat's on-going Russian-language Vot Tak television program, 2) creating a separate Russian-language Vot Tak website--publishing more Russian-language original content, written in the Russian language rather than showing Russian-language translations from Belsat's Belarusian-language website, and 3) expanding the presence of the Russian-language Vot Tak program in social media.
Exposing Russian Health Disinformation	**Cooperative agreement**	The Critical Mass	$ 250,000.00	**9/29/20-9/30/21**	Ukraine, Georgia, Kazakhstan	TCM will research the impact of Russian health disinformation on public health officials and the ability to respond to health crises by conducting case studies in these three states. Results will be disseminated via webinar and articles.
Exporting Best Practices	**Cooperative agreement**	Atlantic Council	$ 1,000,000.00	**2/17/21-2/28/23**	WHA;sub-Saharan Africa (pilot country selection TBD)	This project will minimize the strategic gap in the information environment that Russian adversarial actors take advantage of to use disinformation and propaganda to manipulate countries in WHA and AF by connecting government communicators and CSOs in key pilot countries with disinformation subject matter experts in experiences countries including but not limited to the UK's RESIST, Lithuanian Elves, and Debunk.eu as well as TechSoup's expansive CSO and activist network, aided by DRFLabs expertise.

Project or Campaign Title	GEC Funding Type	Implementer (Name/ Post)	Total Funding		Countries or Region	Brief Project Description
Mapping Disinformation in Africa	**Cooperative agreement**	Code for Africa	**$ 650,000.00**	**2/12/21-2/28/23**	Sub-Saharan Africa: Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa. Tier two: Burundi, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, DRC, Ghana, Mali, Niger, South Sudan, Sudan, and Tanzania. Tier three: Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Zimbabwe .	The Consortium supported by Code for Africa will map the disinformation and information environment of sub-saharn africa and provide this analysis and relevant data to key policy makers, decision-makers, and civil society to begin to build capacity to counter Russian disinformation in Africa.
GLOBSEC Stratcom 2.0	**Cooperative Agreement**	GLOBSEC	**$749,233**	**08/31/21-06/30/23**	Slovakia	WOG/WOS approach to CSD with Slovakian Government
		Total Ongoing GEC Program Funding	**$ 17,332,901.84**			

Project or Campaign Title	GEC Funding Type	Implementer (Name/ Post)	Total Funding
GLOBSEC	DoD co-funded	GLOBSEC	$ 3,002,046.84
Information Access Fund	DoD co-funded	DTI	$ 10,881,622.00
	Sub-award	TV8 Moldova	*$71,000*
	Sub-award	European Values Center	*$300,000*
	Sub-award	Euroradio	*$275,000*
	Sub-award	Vok Ukraine	*$103,761*
	Sub-award	Metamorphosis	*$168,974*
	Sub-award	Glas Sumadije	*$122,466*
	Sub-award	Zasto Ne	*$190,261*
GEC-funded Grants & Cooperative Agreements			
IAF Support to Belsat TV	Cooperative agreement	DTI	$ 800,000.00
Exporting Best Practices	Cooperative agreement	Atlantic Council	$ 1,000,000.00
Mapping Disinformation in Africa	Cooperative agreement	Code for Africa	$ 650,000.00
GLOBSEC Stratcom 2.0	Cooperative Agreement	GLOBSEC	$749,233
		Total Ongoing GEC Program Funding	$ 17,082,901.84

Project or Campaign Title	GEC Funding Type	Implementer (Name/	Total Funding		Countries or Region	Brief Project Description
Helsinki Hybrid Center of Excellence	**Cooperative agreement**	European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats	**$ 500,000.00**		(In Finland): Non-specific (CoE members)	To train CoE's member states to counter electoral interference and disinformation. EUR will continue to assess CoE funding needs in the future to determine the appropriate level of ongoing U.S. support.
Contracts						
Audience Research: The Arctic	**INR contract**	Epinion	**$ 135,000.00**		Denmark, Norway (Greenland and the Faroe Islands)	($431,000 total cost shared with GEC China Team.) The U.S. government has an interest in understanding how communities perceive Russian activity and growing Chinese investment in the region. This research will generate the necessary baseline of data required to construct an effective messaging campaign intended to combat Russia's malign influence operatons and China's Belt and Road propaganda.
Audience Research: Nord Stream II in Denmark	**INR contract**	Epinion	**$ 81,000.00**		Denmark	GEC has an interest in understanding how European publics perceive energy security, energy diversity, natural gas/fossil fuel consumption, and how the public perceives the construction of the new Russian gas pipeline called Nord Stream II. A combination of focus groups and surveys will examine how people understand energy security and its relationship to energy diversity, how people discuss reducing carbon emissions and green energy, and investigate the association of Russian gas and their hidden political costs (like those imposed in Ukraine). The project will investigate the association of Russian gas and hidden political costs in Denmark – and public awareness of these costs.
Audience Research: Nord Stream II in Germany	**INR contract**	Forsa	**$ 80,000.00**		Germany	A combination of focus groups and a national survey used to examine how people understand energy security issues and the relationship to energy diversity. The project will investigate the association of Russian gas and hidden political costs in Germany – and public awareness of these costs. Project used to provide ENR, Emb Berlin, EUR, and GEC message testing and content recommendations to counter Russian propaganda about NS II.
Audience Research: Berlin Wall	**INR contract**	Forsa	**$ 149,500.00**		Germany	In conjunction with the 30th anniversary of the fall of communism in Europe, this research provides GEC the needed target audience analysis to understand what Russia might say, who they might target, and why certain themes may (or may not) resonate with German audiences. This analysis will be used by GEC to support EUR bureau in two ways: one, to promote positive USG messaging around the anniversary event, and two, to prepare a response in the event that Russia launches a disinformation campaign around the anniversary event.

Tactical Communications Initiative (TCI), Part 1	**GEC contract**	Northrop Grumman	**$ 2,077,400.00**		Non-specific	The Russia team is standing up a new approach called the Tactical Communications Initiative (TCI) which is focused on owning the information space to force the Russians to respond to our narratives. TCI will be run through world-class advertising and marketing firms which have on the ground expertise in communicating with hard to reach audiences. TCI will give GEC the ability to support efforts to win back information space in Europe and potentially other regions where Russia enjoys advantages based on proximity, lack of counter programming, or commonality of language.
Audience Research: Orthodox Communities	**INR contract (pending award)**	(Execution on hold pending budget authorization)	**$ 365,000.00**		Non-specific (countries in which Orthodox Christianity predominates)	A key tool in the Kremlin's toolkit has long been assumed to be the Orthodox Church; this transnational research project intends to substantiate what propaganda Russia disseminates through its relationship to the Church, and determine how that information is received by publics in States with large Orthodox communities. The research will interrogate how Orthodox communities perceive American efforts to counter the Kremlin's malign influence. By understanding perceptions of both Russia and of the United States, the project will enable the USG to communicate more effectively in these communities and counter Russia's disinformation among previously hard-to-reach audiences.
Fund Cites to Posts						
Fighting Misinformation through Fact-Checking Technology	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Ankara	**$ 50,000.00**		Turkey	Journalism training workshops: This project will use Google Ventures' Design Sprint method over four separate workshops to teach and train participants from 12 Turkish organizations on tools for fact-checking and stopping disinformation.
Engaging Orthodox Communities to Counter Disinfo	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Athens	**$ 100,000.00**		Greece	The Embassy will work with Romfea.gr, the most popular Orthodox news web portal in Greece, to produce more reliable and objective content, as well as to call out Russian efforts to use the Church for political ends and to focus on longstanding cultural affinity that regional Orthodoxy has had with the Patriarchate in Istanbul vice the Moscow patriarch. Romfea.gr will also provide content in English to reach a wider audience of influencers in the Orthodox world.
Countering Kremlin Disinfo throughout the Caucasus Space through Strengthening Journalistic Professionalism	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Baku	**$ 200,000.00**		Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia	Translation of English-language online journalism graduate certificate program into Russian, and teaching of that course. Audience: 30-200 regional journalists who do not have the English skills to do the existing course (which is taught in Georgia). Could potentially include any Russian-speaking journalist who wants to access the courses online. Amplification via social media channels and program alumni/graduates.
Misinfo Conference	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Brussels	**$ 80,000.00**		(In Belgium): Non-specific (Western Europe)	Sponsorship of two-day regional Misinfo conference to further awareness and collaboration with European partners and assist participants to produce action plans to counter disinformation. Misinfocon is a global movement focused on building solutions to online trust, verification, fact checking, and reader experience, launched at MIT in 2017 and brings together social scientists, technology firms, news organizations, and experts in cybersecurity, advocacy, media literacy and other fields.

#Misinformation #Propaganda #Fake News - A Danish Perspective	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Copenhagen	**$ 50,000.00**		Denmark	Interactive and cross-disciplinary one-day workshop on disinformation and fake news, including leading politicians, state officials, journalists, scientists, head teachers, and students (university and high school).
European Digital Diplomacy Exchange (EDDE)	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Ljubljana	**$ 500,000.00**		Slovenia	PAS Ljubljana and EUR/PD continue to build the strategic digital communications capacities of key allies and training and encouraged them to use these skills more proactively and collaboratively in the battle against disinformation.
"Feed Me the Truth": Media Literacy to Combat Disinfo Among Young Adults	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Madrid	**$ 500,000.00**		Spain	PAS Madrid will use American Spaces network to organize a series of events for Spanish youth to increase their ability to detect disinformation. Program will use Newseum kits provided by IIP's Office of American Spaces. Amplification via social media.
Mobile Disinfo Lab	**Fund cite to post**	Consulate Munich	**$ 32,800.00**		Germany	A series of educational events on media literacy and the use of digital tools in debunking disinformation and fake news. Participants learn about the importance of media literacy for all citizens in contemporary society and the role of critical thinking, and analysis. The value of digital tools supporting cross-national dialogue to understand and debunk propaganda and fake news is emphasized in the context of the sessions.
IMMUNE – Improving Media Literacy by Understanding Mechanisms and Strategies of News Feeds	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Prague	**$ 23,000.00**		Czech Republic	Awareness-raising program about disinformation and the mechanisms disinformation campaigns use to target users online. Program partnered with Transparency International Czech Republic (TICZ).
Empowering Senior Citizens by Teaching Media Literacy Skills and Bridging the Generation Gap	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Prague	**$ 57,100.00**		Czech Republic	Empowering a critical voting block (seniors) through workshops, educational tours to newsrooms, and online resources on disinformation and fake news (Note: This is an extension request of a pilot funded last year under the Unfunded Priorities Competition.)
21st Century Democracy: Countering Disinformation	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Reykjavik	**$ 12,000.00**		Iceland	Three-part speaker program ($4k each) on media literacy and awareness; the role of social media and the technology industry; geopolitical elements of disinformation. Focused on ages 30 and under.
Countering Disinfo through Media Literacy	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Riga	**$ 500,000.00**		Latvia	Develop a bot that identifies and debunks fake news on Twitter. (Co-funded by the British Embassy in Riga.)
Disinfomation Recognition Reporting Tours to Moldova and Estonia for Italian Media	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Rome	**$ 28,000.00**		(In Moldova and Estonia): Italy	Italian Journalists travel to Tallinn and Chisinau for a reporting tour to build Italian media's capacity to recognize and counter Russian disinformation.
Fighting Fake News Network	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Skopje	**$ 249,253.00**		North Macedonia	A counter-disinformation program focused on rebuilding Macedonian citizens' trust in democratic values by combatting disinformation and fake news through comprehensive research and media monitoring in Macedonia, and creating fact-based narratives spread across different vital communication channels.
Media Literacy TechCamp	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Sofia	**$ 50,000.00**		Bulgaria	Media literacy program and TechCamp built capacity in young Bulgarians throughout the country to understand the threat of disinformation and engage in local media environment.

English for Journalists	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Sofia	**$ 49,064.00**		Bulgaria	Build a regional model of language training for journalists likely to be susceptible to Russian disinformation. (Partial funding request to build on a program funded via 2017's R Innovation Fund.)
USEU Press Tour	**Fund cite to post**	USEU Brussels	**$ 55,000.00**		Western Europe	Western European journalists to travel to the Czech Republic and the Baltics to gain first-hand awareness of Russian disinformation campaigns.
Analytical Support for Danish Elections	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Copenhagen	**$ 55,000.00**		Denmark	Funding for local counter-disinfo digital analytics support ahead of the Danish elections.
Stockholm FBI Journalism Training Initiative	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Stockholm	**$ 180,000.00**		Sweden; Norway; Denmark; Finland; Iceland	This project builds off of a previous GEC-funded and FBI-led cyber training held in Poland in late 2018. The initiative trained 20 cybersecurity practitioners in how to best protect their government and electoral systems from the hacking used in adversarial foreign influence operations. The three-day training included briefings on foreign influence operations following by in-depth technical training.
D-Day Commemoration	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Paris	**$ 65,000.00**		France	Support for post's D-Day 75th anniversary commemoration activities.
Cyprus Counter-Disinformation Conference	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Nicosia	**$ 50,000.00**		Cyprus	To fund a counter-disinformation two-day event to build the awareness of, and capacity to resist, state-sponsored disinformation among students and teachers, as well as participating journalists and Cypriot policy makers.
Baltic Way Campaign	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Vilnius	**$ 200,000.00**		Lithuania	To facilitate communication strategy related to the Baltic Way 30th anniversary commemorative events.
	Fund cite to post	Embassy Riga	**$ 83,265.00**		Latvia	Delfi Baltic Way 30, Latvian National Commission for UNESCO, and Baltic Youth Forum.
	Fund cite to post	Embassy Tallinn	**$ 52,500.00**		Estonia	Outdoor campaign, social media campaigns and Baltic Chain event utilizing Vabamu Musuem of Occupations and Freedom.
1989 Campaign	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Bratislava	**$ 125,000.00**		Slovakia	Half of Embassy Bratislava's campaign revolved around the May 2019 World Ice Hockey Championships, which were particularly vulnerable to Russian disinformation. The other half of the campaign focuses on social media influencers and other famous Slovaks creating content to explain how their lives and passions would not be possible if not for post-Soviet values.
	Fund cite to post	Embassy Warsaw	**$ 205,000.00**		Poland	Embassy Warsaw's campaign focuses on broad public outreach campaigns online that revolve around a number of in-person embassy-supported events. Post is working with a marketing/PR firm to run a public awareness campaign to get young and uninformed audiences acquainted with the events of 1989 and the U.S. role in helping Poland emerge from communism towards a more positive future.
	Fund cite to post	Embassy Sofia	**$ 150,000.00**		Bulgaria	Embassy Sofia's campaign will center around the fact that access to quality food, clothing, and housing was difficult to obtain in communist Bulgaria. Luxury goods like chocolate bars could only be found in foreign currency stores, if at all. Easy access to Western goods in 2019, especially luxuries like chocolate, is an important symbol of the growth in Bulgaria since 1989.

	Fund cite to post	Embassy Prague	**$ 200,000.00**		Czech Republic	Embassy Prague will utilize a host of products and platforms to remind people of the importance and benefits of freedom and the wisdom of the Velvet Revolution. Post is partnering with social media influencers to create relevant content, developing print, outdoor, and digital advertisements, and creating documentary shorts about some of the events that will take place to celebrate 1989. These events include the "Free to Rock" movie tour celebrating the role of rock 'n roll in bringing about the 1989 democratic revolutions; a bicycle tour following the former Iron Curtain; Narodni Fest (Freedom Festival); NATO Days in Ostrava, the "Telling Our Stories" Professional Fellows tour and hackathon; Zinc Network "30 under 30" campaign, and more.
	Fund cite to post	Embassy	**$ 350,000.00**		Hungary	Program information on ClassNet at post request.
	Fund cite to post	USEU	**$ 300,000.00**		Eastern Europe; Caucasus; Central Asia	Mission USEU co-sponsorship of the Atlantic Council's DisinfoWeek 2020 conference and workshops in Brussels. GEC contribution will pay for 50 journalists and civil society representatives to travel from Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia to participate in the event, which will have a special emphasis on the continuities of disinformation techniques employed by the former Soviet Union and today's Russian Federation.
Balkans Support Strategies	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Podgorica	**$ 22,600.00**		Montenegro	Project 2019 REACT, promoting NATO and Euro-Atlantic integration among students from northern (and traditionally pro-Russian) region. Week-long camp, study visit, and national essay contest will focus on CSD in Montenegro.
	Fund cite to post	Embassy Skopje	**$ 50,000.00**		North Macedonia	Production of quality media content on CSD over a 12-month period to counter false narratives and improve professionalism among local investigative journalists.
USOSCE International Reporting Tour on Countering Disinformation	**Fund cite to post**	USOSCE	**$ 40,000.00**		(In Austria and Ukraine): Central Asia Regional	International reporting tour to Vienna and Ukraine for journalists from Central Asian OSCE participating states on the topic of OSCE programs to counter disinformation.
Research and Surveys Concerning U.S. Military Presence in Poland	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Warsaw	**$ 30,000.00**		Poland	In order to be proactive and control/maintain the narrative high ground with regard to the U.S. and NATO force presence in Poland and to combat disinformation initiatives from Russia and its operatives, post will work with the GEC A&R Team to contract an analysis of messaging data and sources of negative and misleading reports that may damage on U.S.-Polish relations. Post will seek to obtain real-time information on the veracity of news sources and negative reporting on U.S.-Polish efforts to enhance military cooperation and mitigate threats to NATO's eastern flank.
Co-sponsorship of Press Freedom/Media Literacy Workshop in Gdansk	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Warsaw	**$ 20,000.00**		Poland	Foreign amplification of anti-Semitic, Islamophobic, anti-LGBTQI and xenophobic themes and narratives presents an enormous challenge to Polish society, threatening the stability of democracy and social cohesion. This workshop will address the deleterious effects of domestic hate speech and raise awareness among participating journalists of how foreign adversaries are acting to exploit cleavages in Polish society in order to weaken the country and its ties with allies and partners.

CSD Program Agencia Lupa	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Buenos Aires	**$ 298,000.00**		Argentina	To help enhance lower-middle class Argentines' resilience to state-sponsored disinformation and propaganda, Embassy Buenos Aires will partner with a) Chequeado, a regionally renowned fact-checker, to build a nation-wide network of fact-checkers to counter disinformation with data-driven and fact-based narratives; and b) contract an established communications firm to execute fact-based messaging campaigns on priority issues.
CSD Program Chequeado	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Brasilia	**$ 150,000.00**		Brazil	Embassy Brasilia and its consulates partners with Agencia Lupa, a leading Brazilian fact-checking organization, to build a nation-wide network of fact-checkers to expose and counter state-sponsored disinformation aimed at undercutting U.S.-Brazil relations.

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
CC: GEC I2C2 Internal <GECI2C2Internal@state.gov>
Subject: Re: WAR Input
Date: Mon, 19 Oct 2020 16:40:53 +0000

CLEAR WITH GEC

NSTR, likewise
From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Monday, October 19, 2020 12:22 PM
To: (b)(6) (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: GEC I2C2 Internal <GECI2C2Internal@state.gov>
Subject: Re: WAR Input

C2,

Unfortunately, NSTR.

Still working adminstrative coordination with USAID

V/r

(b)(6)

I2C2 Liaison Officer to USAID
Global Engagement Center
Department of State
OpenNet: (b)(6) @state.gov
Official Trvl: (b)(6) @america.gov
Work Cellphon (b)(6)
Personal Ce (b)(6)

Sent via the Samsung Galaxy Tab E, an AT&T 4G LTE tablet
From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Monday, October 19, 2020 11:16:16 AM
To: Ri (b)(6) @state.gov>; GEC I2C2 Internal <GECI2C2Internal@state.gov>
Subject: WAR Input

Hi (b)(6)

My War input for this week. Thanks!

Regards,
(b)(6)

Communicate:

The Dutch Shared Internal News Media Article with I2C2 on the Bidens' Implications in Ukraine and Impact on US Elections: On 15 September, Guus van Zwoll, Senior Policy Officer, Task Force International Cyber Policies, shared with I2C2 International Partner Engagement Planner an article on the Bidens' implication in Ukraine, and the authenticity of their involvement. The share is unique as it was flagged by our Dutch partner as a potential Hack and Leak, and covered by *Trouw*, a prominent Dutch daily newspaper. I2C2 forwarded the story to GEC elections team, and pertinent threat teams.

~~(SBU)~~ **I2C2 Shared Resilience Support Project Reports with the US Embassy, The Hague:** On 16 October, as a follow-up to a virtual meeting with (b)(6) Office of Political and Economic Affairs, U.S. Embassy, The Hague, and the Cyber/Digital Policy Officer and lead on disinformation/related topics, and per (b)(6) request, I2C2 International Partner Engagement Planner forwarded the DHS/CISA Strategic Communications Plan, as well as the reporting from the RSP Slovakia Project. Meanwhile, I2C2 Elections Planner is working to get a one-pager outlining the details of RSPM for the US Embassy, The Hague. (b)(6) appreciates this effort, as he believes it will be useful, and helpful in his forthcoming meeting with the Dutch on information-sharing, CPD, and US and Dutch elections in March.

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

Sender:	(b)(6) @state.gov>
Recipient:	(b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>; GEC I2C2 Internal <GECI2C2Internal@state.gov>

From:	(b)(6) @state.gov>
To:	(b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject:	Re: WAR Input
Date:	Mon, 19 Oct 2020 15:45:48 +0000

Thanks

Get Outlook for iOS
From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Monday, October 19, 2020 11:16:16 AM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>; GEC I2C2 Internal <GECI2C2Internal@state.gov>
Subject: WAR Input

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~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

Sender:	(b)(6) @state.gov>
Recipient:	(b)(6) @state.gov>

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: Special Envoy's Daily Brief - 7 JAN 2021
Date: Thu, 7 Jan 2021 13:55:44 +0000

Totally.

The pickup of the RT article and the Chinese response to the protests is fascinating. I hope people see it.

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, January 7, 2021 8:54 AM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: Special Envoy's Daily Brief - 7 JAN 2021

Not exactly an easy one to write...

(b)(6)
Analytics and Research Team
Global Engagement Center
U.S. Department of State
Accenture Federal Services Affiliate
OpenNet (b)(6) @state.gov | ClassNet: (b)(6) @state.sgov.gov
Personal Cell: (b)(6)

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, January 7, 2021 8:54 AM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: Special Envoy's Daily Brief - 7 JAN 2021

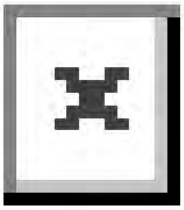
Great edition.

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, January 7, 2021 8:14 AM
To: Gabrielle(Potts), Lea (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Special Envoy's Daily Brief - 7 JAN 2021

Good Morning Special Envoy Gabrielle,

Please find below and attached this morning's edition of your daily news and propaganda capture.

Special Envoy's Daily Brief
Jan. 7, 2021



Trending Propaganda and Disinformation News

China Wages Cognitive Warfare To Topple Taiwan Government: Report

MSN

China is waging "cognitive warfare" against Taiwan and aims to topple its government by targeting the public with escalating misinformation campaigns this year, according to a national security think tank in Taipei. In its year-end report analyzing Beijing's political and military policies in 2020, the government-funded Institute for National Defense and Security Research said Chinese efforts to influence the Taiwanese public's voting behavior has so far backfired, but it expected more of the same strategy this year.

Readership: 71,798,074

China is having a field day with U.S. Capitol chaos

The Washington Post

As democratic governments around the world reacted with horror to President Trump supporters' storming of the Capitol, China's official propagandists could barely contain their schadenfreude. If you don't allow the storming of your own legislature, they asked, how could you support it in Hong Kong? It was an illustration of how Trump's subversion of American democracy has provided cover for authoritarian governments like China's. Beijing has found the chaos

incited by Trump a convenient defense for its authoritarian policies and iron-fisted suppression of dissent.

Readership: 33,563,185

COVID-19 Conspiracies: How Can We Deal With Misinformation?

Forbes

The rush to roll-out COVID-19 vaccines in the United States, United Kingdom and other countries has contributed to a new viral spread—that of false health information and malicious disinformation campaigns about the vaccines. Misinformation regarding health matters is an age-old problem, but one that social media has exacerbated—with dangerous consequences. Any increase in traction for anti-vaccination activists inevitably leads to a decline in vaccination rates and an increase in preventable illnesses, as noted by the recent resurgence in measles outbreaks in the United States. A recent nationally representative U.S. study found that the self-reported intent of getting a COVID vaccine declined from 74% in early April to 56% in early December 2020.

Readership: 26,855,122

COVID-19 vaccines lies and hoaxes: How to inoculate yourself, family and friends against deadly misinformation

USA Today

Top scientists have created an online guide to arm people with scientific facts and practical tips to fight lies, hoaxes and conspiracy theories that are threatening public trust in the COVID-19 vaccines. More than two dozen leading experts in vaccine psychology, education and virology say they volunteered contributions to The COVID-19 Vaccine Communication Handbook to take on misinformation and propaganda spread by anti-vaccination activists that could lower vaccination rates and cause needless deaths. Even as coronavirus cases surge and hospitals overflow with critically ill patients, opposition to the vaccines is resonating, not just with fringe communities but with swaths of mainstream America.

Readership: 25,993,705

QAnon and the storm of the U.S. Capitol: The offline effect of online conspiracy theories

The Conversation

What is the cost of propaganda, misinformation and conspiracy theories? Democracy and public safety, to name just two things. The United States has received a stark lesson on how online propaganda and misinformation have an offline impact. For weeks, Donald Trump has falsely claimed the November presidential election was rigged and that's why he wasn't re-elected. The president's words have mirrored and fed conspriacy theories spred by followers of the QAnon movement. While conspiracy theorists are often dismissed as "crazy people on social media," QAnon adherents were among the individuals at the front line of the storming of Capitol Hill.

Readership: 6,964,811

Social media allowed a shocked nation to watch a coup attempt in real time

TechCrunch

Today's historic and terrifying coup attempt by pro-Trump extremists in Washington, D.C. played out live the same way it was fomented — on social media. Once again Twitter, streaming sites and other user-generated media were the only place to learn what was happening in the nation's capital — and the best place to be misled by misinformation and propaganda. In the morning, official streams and posts portended what people expected of the day: a drawn-out elector certification process in Congress while a Trump-led rally turned to general protests.

Readership: 5,081,380

Trending Adversary Narratives

Creating conditions for a very frozen conflict? US Navy to step up patrols in frigid Arctic waters off Russia's northern borders

RT

As Arctic ice retreats further each year, it helps to open up another front in the perennial standoff between Russia and the US, with both nations racing to dominate the space and control the emerging maritime trade route. In a call with reporters on Tuesday, US Secretary of the Navy Kenneth Braithwaite announced that American sailors would increasingly set course for the frigid waters of the far North. "You will see the Navy operating again in a more permanent manner above the Arctic Circle," he said, adding that the US will "operate more assertively" to challenge Russia's claims in the region.

Readership: 13,008,224

Do you realize now what you have done? US gets the kind of 'democracy' it championed overseas Op-ed

RT

A crowd of protesters stormed Congress protesting a presidential election they claimed had been fraudulent. When this happened in Serbia in 2000, the US called it democracy. When it happened in Washington, DC – not so much. Scenes from the US Capitol on Wednesday, as protesters backing President Donald Trump disrupted the joint session of Congress meeting to certify the election of Democrat Joe Biden, looked very much like Belgrade in October 2000. The sight was later repeated in Ukraine – twice, in 2004 and 2014 – Georgia, Moldova, Belarus, and several Central Asian former Soviet republics. On every occasion, the US backed the "people power," because American NGOs and embassies were supporting what became known as "color revolutions."

Readership: 13,008,224

Iran to Welcome Biden Administration's Return to Path of Law: President

iran Goverment

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani says Tehran will welcome it if the incoming administration of US President-elect Joe Biden would choose to return to the rule of law and comply with its commitments under the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran. "We will welcome it if the other side obeys the law. A person who acts in a cruel way in the alley, breaks the windows with stone, but suddenly comes to his mind

and says he doesn't want to break windows anymore; shouldn't we welcome it? We'd welcome such a move," Rouhani said in a Wednesday address to a cabinet session.

Readership: 1,296

GEC Mentions

Nothing Significant to Report

Trending Academic Research

The Pendulum: How Russia Sways Its Way to More Influence in Libya

War on the Rocks

[...] To maximize its control over locals and minimize its dependence on them, Moscow has built leverage over the years using a sophisticated mixture of tools, ranging from disinformation to diplomacy to banking interference to clandestine military intervention. Lethal equipment deliveries to the L…

Sources and Methods

The bullets above are compiled from four Boolean searches from TrendKite. The precise searches can be modified to fit business needs.

Today's search revealed 4788 artifacts based on the queries above, from which we parsed out what we found to be the most meaningful stories for the GEC's leadership and mission by readership. Search criteria are based on USG leadership profiles.

Very Respectfully,

(b)(6)
Analytics and Research Team
Global Engagement Center
U.S. Department of State
Accenture Federal Services Affiliate
OpenNet: (b)(6) @state.gov | ClassNet: (b)(6) tate.sgov.gov
Personal Cell: (b)(6)

Sender: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Recipient: (b)(6) @state.gov>

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
CC: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: Special Envoy's Daily Brief
Date: Thu, 15 Oct 2020 20:20:22 +0000

igotchu fam

(b)(6)
Analytics and Research Team
Global Engagement Center
U.S. Department of State
Accenture Federal Services Affiliate
OpenNet: (b)(6) @state.gov | ClassNet: (b)(6) @state.sgov.gov
Personal Cell: (b)(6) | State Cell: (b)(6)

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, October 15, 2020 4:18 PM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: Special Envoy's Daily Brief

You da best!
From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, October 15, 2020 3:15 PM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: Special Envoy's Daily Brief

Added them both to gec@state.gov distro.

(b)(6)
Analytics and Research Team
Global Engagement Center
U.S. Department of State
Accenture Federal Services Affiliate
OpenNet: (b)(6) @state.gov | ClassNet: (b)(6) @state.sgov.gov
Personal Cell: (b)(6) | State Cell: (b)(6)

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, October 15, 2020 3:05 PM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: Special Envoy's Daily Brief

Hey (b)(6)

We actually no longer manage that distro - we send it to the GEC-wide distro. But it's worth adding (b)(6) and (b)(6) to that distro so I'll make sure they get on that.

(b)(6)
Analytics and Research Team
Global Engagement Center
U.S. Department of State
Accenture Federal Services Affiliate
OpenNet: (b)(6) @state.gov | ClassNet: (b)(6) @state.sgov.gov
Personal Cell: (b)(6) | State Cell: (b)(6)

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, October 15, 2020 2:51 PM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: Special Envoy's Daily Brief

Hi (b)(6)

Can you please add (b)(6) @state.gov) and (b)(6) @state.gov) to the SEDB distro? They are supporting (b)(6) Digital Transformation Enterprise project.

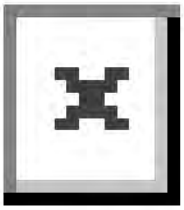
Thank you!
(b)(6)

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, October 15, 2020 7:27 AM
To: Gabrielle(Potts), Lea (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Special Envoy's Daily Brief

Good Morning Special Envoy Gabrielle,

Please find below and attached this morning's edition of your daily news and propaganda capture.

Special Envoy's Daily Brief Oct. 15, 2020



Trending Propaganda and Disinformation News

Facebook and Twitter restrict controversial New York Post story on Joe Biden

The Guardian

Facebook and Twitter took steps on Wednesday to limit the spread of a controversial New York Post article critical of Joe Biden, sparking outrage among conservatives and stoking debate over how social media platforms should tackle misinformation ahead of the US election. In an unprecedented step against a major news publication, Twitter blocked users from posting links to the Post story or photos from the unconfirmed report. Users attempting to share the story were shown a notice saying: "We can't complete this request because this link has been identified by Twitter or our partners as being potentially harmful." Users clicking or retweeting a link already posted to Twitter are shown a warning the "link may be unsafe".

Readership: 27,826,696

YouTube bans misinformation about Covid vaccinations

The Guardian

YouTube has banned misinformation about Covid vaccinations, just days after Facebook took similar action on its own platform. The company says that the fact that such a vaccine might be imminent makes it the right time to take action, and

expand its pre-existing policies against Covid-19 medical misinformation. “A Covid-19 vaccine may be imminent, therefore we’re ensuring we have the right policies in place to be able to remove misinformation related to a Covid-19 vaccine from the platform,” a YouTube spokesperson said. “Any content that includes claims about Covid-19 vaccinations that contradict expert consensus from local health authorities or the World Health Organization (WHO) will be removed from YouTube.”

Readership: 27,826,696

Trending Adversary Narratives

Putin, Erdogan call for activation of political process on Nagorno-Karabakh

tass.com

Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish colleague Recep Tayyip Erdogan have discussed the situation around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict during a phone call on Wednesday, the Kremlin press service informed on the outcomes of the talks between both countries' leaders. "Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan have called for activation of political process, namely based on the progress reached within the OSCE Minsk Group," the Kremlin informed. Both sides have reaffirmed the importance of a humanitarian ceasefire reached on October 10 in Moscow. Vladimir Putin has also expressed serious concern over the participation of Middle Eastern militants in the hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Readership: 258,903

Iran’s funds in Iraq over $5 billion: Top banker

Pars Today

Iran’s central bank governor Abdolnaser Hemmati says he is “hopeful” his visit to Baghdad on Monday and successful talks with Iraqi officials would enable Tehran to use more than $5 billion of its funds in the country. Money from Iran’s exports of gas and electricity has accumulated and been trapped in a bank account in Iraq because of the illegal US sanctions. Hemmati secured a trade agreement

with officials in Baghdad Monday to use payments from energy exports to buy essential goods from Iraq. “The recent trip to Iraq was a success and we hope to be able to use our resources in Iraq, which are more than five billion dollars,” he told reporters after a cabinet meeting in Tehran Wednesday.

Readership: 159,785

Beijing's climate pledge could pave way to net-zero global economy

Chinadaily Global Edition

The announcement at the UN General Assembly by Chinese President Xi Jinping that China would become carbon neutral by 2060 and ensure its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions peak by 2030 marks a historic precedent. As one of the world's largest emitting economies, China will need to drastically cut GHG emissions every year. Announcing its new climate target, China has raised the bar for national climate commitments globally, joining the ranks of a dozen other countries that have made similar commitments, such as Austria, Finland, France, Germany and Japan, but also Fiji, New Zealand, Ireland, Singapore and South Africa.

Readership: 78,731

GEC Mentions

Portman Highlights Efforts to Combat Global Disinformation and Propaganda Threats & Cyberattacks in Bush Center Democracy Talks Series

Rob Portman

In a George W. Bush Center Democracy Talks series interview, Senator Portman discussed his work to combat disinformation and cyberattacks both in the United States and abroad by highlighting the bipartisan Countering Foreign Propaganda and Disinformation Act, which he authored with Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT) and that was signed into law in December 2016. The law improves the ability of the United States to counter foreign propaganda and disinformation by establishing

an interagency center, the Global Engagement Center (GEC), housed at the State Department to coordinate and synchronize counter-propaganda efforts throughout the U.S. government in support of friends and allies overseas.

Readership: 26,062

Trending Academic Research

Facebook Users May Spread Russian Propaganda Less Often If They Know Its Source

RAND Research Topic: Science and Technology

Russian propaganda is hitting its mark on social media, generating strong partisan reactions that help intensify political divisions. But Facebook users are less apt to press the like button on content when they learn that it is part of a foreign propaganda campaign.

Sources and Methods

The bullets above are compiled from four Boolean searches from TrendKite. The precise searches can be modified to fit business needs.

Today's search revealed 2675 artifacts based on the queries above, from which we parsed out what we found to be the most meaningful stories for the GEC's leadership and mission by readership. Search criteria are based on USG leadership profiles.

Very Respectfully,

(b)(6)
Analytics and Research Team
Global Engagement Center
U.S. Department of State
Accenture Federal Services Affiliate

OpenNet: (b)(6) @state.gov | ClassNet: (b)(6) @state.sgov.gov
Personal Cell: (b)(6) | State Cell: (b)(6)

Sender: (b)(6) @state.gov>

Recipient: (b)(6) @state.gov>;
(b)(6) @state.gov>;
(b)(6) @state.gov>

From:	(b)(6) @state.gov>
To:	(b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
CC:	(b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject:	Re: Recent disinformation in New Eastern Outlook
Date:	Wed, 13 Jan 2021 23:32:59 +0000

The above photo was taken at the Pentagon after the September 11 attack and contains a clearly identifiable piece of landing gear wreckage from the aircraft that impacted the building. A closer view of the item, shown below, reveals additional detail in the shape of this landing gear component.

http://www.aerospaceweb.org/question/conspiracy/q0290.shtml

Aerospaceweb.org | Ask Us - Pentagon & Boeing 757 Wheel Investigation

Ask a question about aircraft design and technology, space travel, aerodynamics, aviation history, astronomy, or other subjects related to aerospace engineering.

www.aerospaceweb.org

(b)(6)

From (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, January 13, 2021 6:21 PM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: Recent disinformation in New Eastern Outlook

A military engineer surveys damage to the inner portion of the Pentagon.

Aircraft debris created this exit hole in the outer wall of the building's C Ring. A wheel from the plane's landing gear is visible to the right of the worker.

Ironically, French conspiracy theorist Thierry Meyssan used this photograph on the cover of his book Pentagate, which claimed that no plane hit the Pentagon.

https://photos.state.gov/galleries/usinfo-photo/39/Sept_11_Pentagon/13.html

from a photo gallery on the September 11 attack on the Pentagon, which I wrote in the 2000s.

Best,

(b)(6)

USINFO Photo Gallery - USEmbassy.gov

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 < PREVIOUS : NEXT > A military engineer surveys damage to the inner portion of the Pentagon. Aircraft debris created this exit ...

photos.state.gov

From: (b)(6)
Sent: Wednesday, January 13, 2021 5:43 PM
To (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: RE: Recent disinformation in New Eastern Outlook

Oriental Review carries many articles by Thierry Meyssan, including one on January 7, 2021. Meyysan first gained widespread attention after the 9/11 attacks, which he blamed on the USG. His book *L'Effroyoble Imposture* (*The Frightening Deception*) claims that the destruction at the Pentagon on September 11 was not caused by the impact of hijacked American Airlines Flight 77, but rather a truck bomb. He alleges that the U.S. government covered up this fact from the world as part of a larger scheme by the U.S military-industrial complex to covertly orchestrate the September 11th massacres in order to justify the campaign in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the Middle East. His book was a best-seller in France and elsewhere. Ironically, a follow on book he wrote about the attack on the Pentagon shows a large aircraft part on its cover. I have a copy.

(b)(6)

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, January 13, 2021 4:46 PM
To (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: Recent disinformation in New Eastern Outlook

Thanks guys -- as I thought might happen, Daniel just called looking for exactly this and I had it ready to go right away thanks to you. Sounds like this is finally happening tomorrow or Friday.

Best,
(b)(6)

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, January 13, 2021 3:57 PM

To: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: Recent disinformation in New Eastern Outlook

Examples of recent disinformation from News Front

12/30/20 - The article claims that Ukraine is refusing to accept the Russian Sputnik V vaccine on the orders of its Western "curators." According to the article, Ukraine's decision to use a Chinese vaccine that has not proven its effectiveness condemns the Ukrainian people to physical disability or death. - https://news-front.info/2020/12/30/soglasie-na-lyuboj-surrogat-ukraina-reshilas-na-kitajskuyu-vakczinu-kotoraya-ne-dokazala-svoyu-effektivnost/

01/03/21 - The article promotes the Great Reset conspiracy theory, claiming that some elites are planning to introduce "health passports" and to exclude those who refuse to vaccinate from vital services like receiving credits. The article alleges that Bill Gates will control the future of medicine.- https://es.news-front.info/2021/01/03/humanos-del-gran-reinicio-como-seria-el-futuro-en-2021-si-las-elites-controladoras-se-salen-con-la-suya/

01/13/21 - The article reports that Biden chose Samatha Power to head USAID, the agency known for financing state coups in Ukraine and other countries. https://news-front.info/2021/01/13/bajden-reshil-kto-budet-kurirovat-revolyuczii-v-interesah-ssha/

(b)(6)
Senior Analyst
Global Engagement Center, Russia Directorate
U.S. Department of State
Contractor: Keniva-Trusant Group
Phone: (b)(6)

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, January 13, 2021 3:41 PM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Recent disinformation in New Eastern Outlook

The January 10, 2001 article in New Eastern Outlook (NEO), "Growing Protests Over Threat of US Bio Weapons" is a litany of long-refuted disinformation about alleged U.S. biological weapons, none of which exist. In 1969, President Nixon issued an executive order unilaterally and unconditionally ending America's bioweapons program, and all U.S. stockpiles were destroyed by 1972. The United States and 182 other countries are parties to the Biological Weapons Convention, which bans biological weapons.

The NEO article makes numerous false claims about supposed US biological weapons, while dismissing the Russian use of the biological agent Novichok against Skripal and Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny as false and "Russophobic."

For example, it repeats the false claim that "in 1981, the US used the Dengue virus against Cuba, as a result of which over 344,000 Cubans contracted the disease." This disinformation was refuted in the 1985 Department Special Report no. 133, "Case Study of Cuban Hypocrisy: The 1981 Dengue Epidemic in Cuba" which stated:

Former Cuban health official Dr. Ruben Ramirez has reported that Castro, speaking in confidence to a national seminar for the leaders of the mosquito eradication program on July 16, 1981, admitted that responsibility for the epidemic lay with him and with Cuba's communist party, which had not heeded the advice of public health officials to make available resources needed to control the disease.

...

Thirty minutes after privately admitting responsibility for the epidemic Castro made "suspicion" of U.S. responsibility for the dengue epidemic the centerpiece of his annual 26th of July address. Castro stated, "We ... strongly suspect that the plagues that have been punishing our country, especially the hemorrhagic dengue, could have been introduced into Cuba, into our country, by the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]."

Best,

(b)(6)

Sender: (b)(6) @state.gov>

Recipient: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>

From:	(b)(6) @state.gov>
To:	(b)(6) @state.gov>; GEC-Russia Team <GEC-RussiaTeam@state.gov>
Subject:	Re: Kremlin Watch Briefing: The SNP calling for a reform to clean up UK's politics
Date:	Fri, 20 Nov 2020 20:35:09 +0000

Yes, I send them to (b)(6) and Veronika. They have agreed to mention them in the Kremlin Watch Briefings, which is great because they have a very broad distro list. (b)(6)

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Friday, November 20, 2020 3:23 PM
To: GEC-Russia Team <GEC-RussiaTeam@state.gov>
Subject: Fw: Kremlin Watch Briefing: The SNP calling for a reform to clean up UK's politics

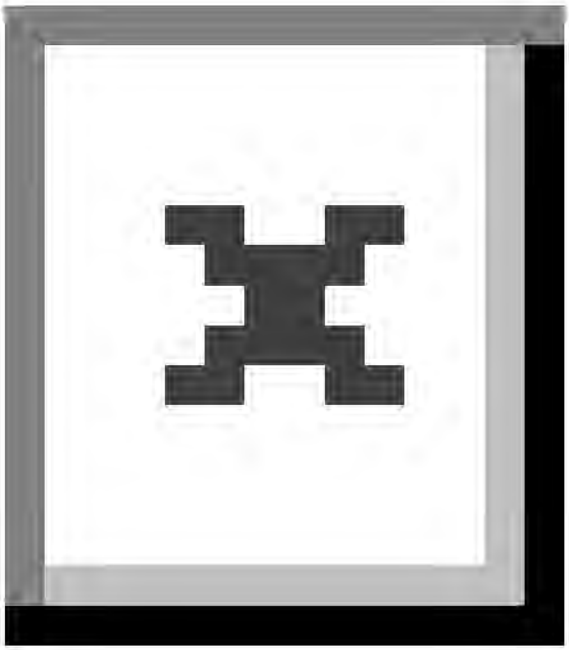
The GEC gets a mention under the U.S. Developments section. And a really Good Old Soviet Joke. (b)(6)

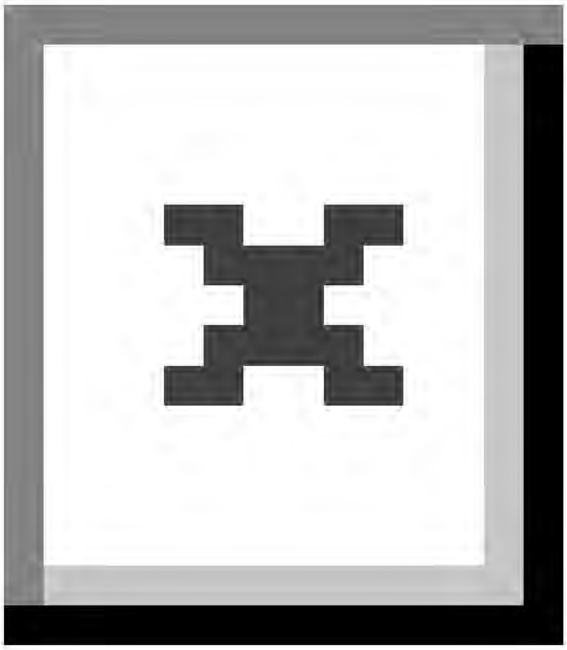
(b)(6)
USEUCOM J39 Liaison, Russia Team
(Booz Allen Hamilton Contractor)
Global Engagement Center
U.S. Department of State
State SA-5 Desk: (b)(6) Cell: (b)(6)
OpenNet: (b)(6) @state.gov | ClassNet: (b)(6) @state.sgov.gov

From: European Values Center for Security Policy (b)(6) europeanvalues.cz@mlsend2.com> on behalf of European Values Center for Security Policy (b)(6) @europeanvalues.cz>
Sent: Friday, November 20, 2020 7:03 AM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Kremlin Watch Briefing: The SNP calling for a reform to clean up UK's politics

Last week's events concerning the pro-Kremlin disinformation campaign

Can't see images?
https://preview.mlsend2.com/a5l8l2





Topics of the Week

The Scottish National Party is calling for a reform to clean up UK's politics.

Russia and North Korea hacked COVID-19 vaccines.

Kremlin's Current Narrative: Russia as the balancer of Europe.

Good Old Soviet Joke

A frightened man came to the KGB: "My talking parrot disappeared."

"This is not our case. Go to the criminal police."

"Excuse me. Of course, I know that I have to go to them. I am here just to tell you officially that I disagree with that parrot."

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Policy & Research News

Russia and North Korea hacked COVID-19 vaccines

Microsoft security experts reported that Russian and North Korean hackers attempted cyberattacks against the companies developing coronavirus vaccine.

Launched attack targeted pharmaceutical companies and vaccine developers in the U.S., Canada, India, France and South Korea, however, the Microsoft managed to prevent and block the most of cyber disruption. The malign activities were attributed to the three groups Strontium, a unit of Russia's military intelligence agency ('Cozy Bear') and two other groups, the Lazarus Group and Cerim backed up by North Korea.

Earlier in July, UK's National Cyber Security Centre together with the U.S. and Canada reported that Russia tried to steal data from academic and pharmaceutical institutions around the world which are involved in the vaccine and treatment development. The

same month the U.S. blamed China-sponsored hackers for targeting labs engaged with the Covid-19 vaccine development.

Assertive states keep exploiting the cyberspace to steal classified data or disrupt to fulfil their foreign policy goals. The EU and NATO should take a more outwardly nuanced approach to strengthen cyber resilience, and prevent future state-sponsored cyber-attacks, as well as 'guilty states' should be held accountable for cybercrimes.

The Scottish National Party calling for a reform to clean up UK's politics

The SNP is about to submit a major document highlighting the shortcomings of the UK Government's Integrated Review (IR) of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy. Defence spokesman Stewart McDonald MP highlighted that omnipresent non-military threat, such as cyber-attacks or disinformation is the current defensive gaps. Therefore, the SNP stated that it is necessary to launch a democratic reform to clean up the UK politics inside as a part of securing defence strategy priorities.

The UK government should cover current gaps, as it is evident that they are not immune to the novel sophisticated menaces, as it is found by the "Russia Report". The recently released "Russia Report' prepared by the Intelligence and Security Committee, warned on Kremlin's meddling. The Nationalists called Tories for conducting the proper investigation over Kremlin's intrusive activities. The report cast a light that the UK government downplayed the threat of Kremlin and therefore failed to respond to Russian interference in the UK's democracy.

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US Developments

Liberal Chinese Americans Are Fighting Right-Wing WeChat Disinformation

Liberal Chinese Americans are fighting back against pro-Trump disinformation on the popular messaging app WeChat. Right-wing conspiracy content has been shared across hundreds of thousands of chat groups on the app amid both the 2020 and 2016 elections. Unlike in 2016, however, countervailing liberal forces have taken to the app fight against the conspiracy theories that claim that the election was a fraud and that Hunter Biden is a paedophile. Among the chief sources of disinformation is a media network associated with the billionaire Guo Wengui and former Trump strategist Steve Bannon.

US Department of State Global Engagement Center on Russia's International Disinformation Network

Since 2010, Russia has worked to construct a global disinformation website network to spread anti-Western conspiracy materials often under the guise of research or news. According to the GEC, Russian authorities "have signed dozens of content sharing agreements between Russian-state-controlled media outlets such as RT and Sputnik and media outlets in other countries, including China, India, Iran, Indonesia, and many others" since 2014. Many of these sites host anti-American and anti-Western materials authored by the Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, or GRU.

Kremlin's Current Narrative

Peace in Nagorno-Karabakh – President Vladimir Putin plays a key role and Russia should be recognized as the balancer of Europe

On November 10 Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia have signed a cease-fire agreement at least for now putting to an end the conflict over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. While doubts remain regarding the finality of peace, Russian media salute the

Russian peacemakers deployed in the region and the role of Vladimir Putin in concluding the negotiations.

The Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov pointed out that Vladimir Putin played a key role in the peace settlement, with "days of intensive, sometimes round the clockwork" with both conflicting parties. On top of that, the peace in the region, as well as safety and future of its inhabitants, are now guaranteed solely by Russian peacekeepers.

In an interview with RT, Mr Peskov also highlighted that Moscow promoted the formulas for conflict management in Nagorno-Karabakh for many years even before its recent peak. Therefore, the role of Russia in the settlement of the conflict was practically natural. He added, however, that the consensual claims of three presidents – Putin, Trump and Macron, played a major role in stimulating the peace talks. Nevertheless, nothing could be done until the parties to the conflict had requested the direct intervention of Vladimir Putin.

On the other hand, there is some degree of surprise over the fact that now the United States and France are requesting more information about the agreement of the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia since from the beginning of negotiations, close communication was upheld with the Minsk Group of OSCE. It must be thus "lack of awareness or a misunderstanding" from the side of Western leaders.

The overall "victory" for the Russian influence in the region has produced a broader view of the role of Moscow as "the Balancer of Europe." According to the article by RT, it has been many years that Moscow is suggesting various solutions to the problem of terrorism in Europe (no references given by the source), and it would settle the conflict in Belarus much better than Europe (again, not specified how). "The language of sanctions" that Europe has been speaking up to this point is, sadly, neglecting the balancing powers of Russia that could help make the world a "beautiful place."

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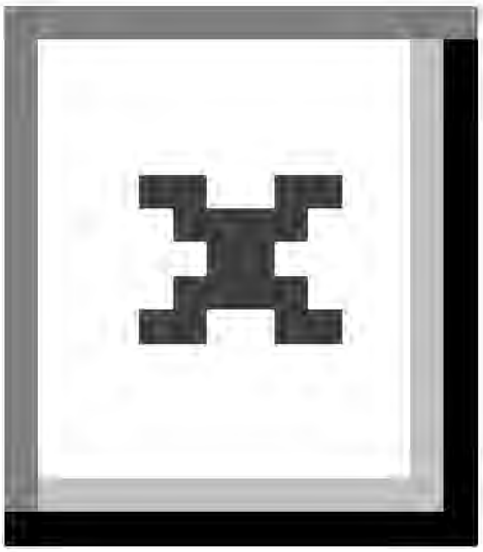
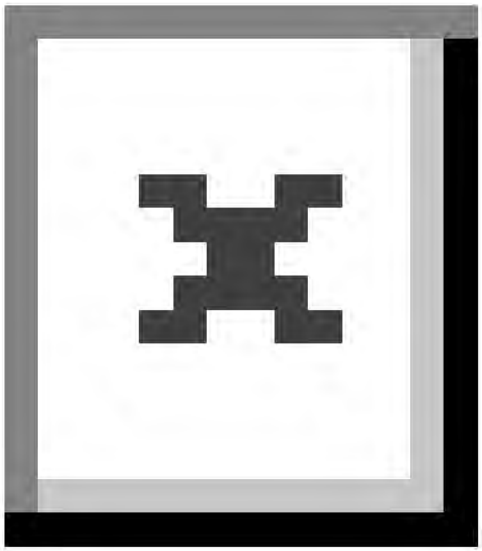
Support us





Subscribe!

Kremlin Watch is a strategic program of the European Values Center for Security Policy, which aims to expose and confront instruments of Russian influence and disinformation operations focused against the liberal-democratic system.

For comments. suggestions or media inquiries, please contact the Head of the Kremlin Watch Program Veronika Víchová at (b)(6) @evropskehodnoty.cz

Sender: (b)(6) @state.gov>

Recipient: (b)(6) @state.gov>;
GEC-Russia Team <GEC-RussiaTeam@state.gov>

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
To: Isabella Garcia-Camargo (b)(6) @stanford.edu>
Subject: Re: GEC/Election Integrity Partnership
Date: Mon, 2 Nov 2020 03:53:24 +0000

Hi Isabella,

Yes, that'd be great. My Slack email address is (b)(6) @gmail.com

Please let me know if there's any additional info you need in order to add me to the channel - happy to provide.

Best,

(b)(6)
From: Isabella Garcia-Camargo (b)(6) @stanford.edu>
Sent: Sunday, November 1, 2020 9:31 PM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: GEC/Election Integrity Partnership

Hi (b)(6)

Following up as we got some labels on one of the tickets you had sent in. I am wondering if you'd like to join our slack channel, perhaps we can communicate quicker there.

Best,

Isabella Garcia-Camargo

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Date: Tuesday, October 27, 2020 at 4:05 PM
To: Isabella Garcia-Camargo (b)(6) @stanford.edu>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: GEC/Election Integrity Partnership

Totally understand re: the data agreements. I am planning to start focusing on this nearly full time on Thursday, and will continue to do so until November 4 unless things become especially chaotic and I'm authorized to continue by my leadership. As I said, feel free to add me to anything originating with or amplified by foreign actors that you are tracking and could use a hand on.

From: Isabella Garcia-Camargo (b)(6) @stanford.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, October 27, 2020 6:40 PM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: GEC/Election Integrity Partnership

The tickets are internal due to our data agreements with Twitter. However, I think that if we are collaborating on enough tickets or if anything you send us relates to current analysis, we will for sure add you to these. If you have a clear sense of when you might want to be added that would be great.

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Date: Tuesday, October 27, 2020 at 3:30 PM
To: Isabella Garcia-Camargo (b)(6) @stanford.edu>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: GEC/Election Integrity Partnership

Thanks so much. I received the invite this time around and have set up an account. In the future, I will submit tickets to the system vice emailing you, at least for the first few times as you mentioned. Am I able to see other tickets outside of the GEC that are submitted for situational awareness, or are those tickets siloed off?

Thanks again!

From: Isabella Garcia-Camargo (b)(6) @stanford.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, October 27, 2020 6:00 PM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: GEC/Election Integrity Partnership

Hello (b)(6)

Thank you for following up here – our Jira platform says an invite was sent to (b)(6) @state.gov – sometimes this arrives into a Junk inbox, so please do check there as well (we've had some issues with .gov email addresses in the past).

Let me know and I'd be happy to hop on a call this afternoon to figure this out. I just resent an invite!

Best,

Isabella Garcia-Camargo

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Date: Tuesday, October 27, 2020 at 2:46 PM
To: Isabella Garcia-Camargo (b)(6) @stanford.edu>
Cc: '(b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: GEC/Election Integrity Partnership

Bella,

I hope you had a nice weekend. Just wanted to check in regarding my gaining access to EIP's Jira so I can begin submitting tickets soon. As I mentioned before, I received the instruction packet but have yet to receive an email from the jira@2020partnership.atlassian.net address.

As an example of what I might flag as suspicious content while looking at overseas outlets, SouthFront, one of the Kremlin-aligned proxy sites featured in the GEC's 'Pillars' Report, posted an article today with the headline "'You'll Bury Everyone Involved': Bobulinski Recorded Biden Operatives Begging Him to Stay Quiet, Set to Release Tues." As you can see, this article did not originate on SouthFront, but on another website well-known to the counter-disinformation community. Additionally, a number of audio recordings with controversial themes has recently started spreading on Twitter. RT and Sputnik are covering these related stories. As the RT article points out, many of these recordings and videos originate from GNews / GTV.org (**warning: very NSFW**) and are now being removed from some social media platforms.

Please let me know if you have any questions - happy to assist wherever possible.

Best Regards,

(b)(6)

Counter Disinformation Analyst | Russia Team
Global Engagement Center
U.S. Department of State
Contractor: All Native Group
Cell: (b)(6)

From: (b)(6)@state.gov>
Sent: Friday, October 23, 2020 3:24 PM
To: Isabella Garcia-Camargo (b)(6)@stanford.edu>
Subject: Re: GEC/Election Integrity Partnership

Hi Bella,

Thanks so much for the quick response. I reviewed the onboarding material and am looking forward to getting some hands-on experience with the Jira - thanks for being willing to bring me onto the system! When you add me to the whitelist, if you could use (b)(6)@state.gov for my address, that would be great. If that doesn't work and you need a non-.gov address (or if the State systems block the jira@2020partnership.atlassian.net address on my end), please try (b)(6)@gmail.com.

I'm excited to collaborate and will be sure to reach out with any questions. Have a great weekend!

Cheers,

(b)(6)

From: Isabella Garcia-Camargo (b)(6) @stanford.edu>
Sent: Friday, October 23, 2020 2:46 AM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: GEC/Election Integrity Partnership

Hello (b)(6)

Yes – this sounds great. I think that this would be really helpful. I can certainly add you to our Jira under the organization GEC – this would allow you to flag things to the EIP team. From there, we could collaborate further over Slack/Zooms/Email etc. but that will be a lot more clear after we see one or two incidents and how they play out.

Here is some onboarding material which we send to our civil society partners, but it has general information about how to onboard to the system. You can submit a ticket over email or in our portal, both methods outlined in the document. Please let me know if you have any questions here – also happy to chat tomorrow at any point to discuss further what collaboration might look like!

Best,

Isabella Garcia-Camargo

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Date: Thursday, October 22, 2020 at 9:36 AM
To: Isabella Garcia-Camargo (b)(6) @stanford.edu>
Subject: RE: GEC/Election Integrity Partnership

Bella,

Thanks again for taking time to chat with us last Friday. I wanted to follow up directly with you on some of what (b)(6) mentioned in her email on Monday so that I can be as useful as possible to EIP's efforts. Would you and your team still find my observations and 'flags' on foreign originated and amplified disinformation narratives around the election helpful? If so, are you the right person for me to pass these findings to as I see them, or is there a person or system that is more appropriate? Additionally, (b)(6) had mentioned the potential for me to observe or be integrated into your Jira system/'virtual war room.' Is that still something you would all be comfortable with me doing?

As I said, I am happy to assist in whatever way you and your team find most helpful. Please let me know your thoughts on the above when you have a chance. I am also reachable by phone at the number in my email signature if that's easier. Looking forward to collaborating more in the future.

Best regards,

(b)(6)

Counter Disinformation Analyst | Russia Team
Global Engagement Center
U.S. Department of State
Contractor: All Native Group
Cell: (b)(6)

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Monday, October 19, 2020 4:46 PM
To: Kate Starbird (b)(6) @uw.edu>; Jevin West (b)(6) @uw.edu>; Isabella Garcia-Camargo (b)(6) @stanford.edu>; 'info@eipartnership.net' <info@eipartnership.net>; Cc: Elena Cryst (b)(6) @stanford.edu>; Alex Stamos (b)(6) @stanford.edu>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>; Renee DiResta (b)(6) @stanford.edu>; Shelby Grossman (b)(6) @stanford.edu>
Subject: Re: RE: GEC/Election Integrity Partnership

Hello Stanford and UW Partners,
thank you sincerely for your time on Friday and interest in the GEC's work. It was immensely helpful to learn about your impressive efforts and we hope that we can also be of assistance. A few follow-up items below:

Bella, what is the best way for (b)(to contact you with relevant information? Is there a format/form/etc. that he should use? Another question, what is the possibility of him being able to observe how your "war room"/platform works for learning purposes?

Alex, I'd like to introduce you to a Lithuania based professor, who works with our trusted think-tank partner Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA). I met her last year in person and found to be a truly impressive individual in the counter-disinformation community of practice: she has been organizing citizen volunteers to counter disinformation and has been coordinating a large NGO umbrella organization. What is the best way for me to introduce you two? I'd be happy to coordinate a meet and greet between her and you and to join the conversation, or if you'd prefer to reach out to her directly, I can do just an email introduction.

All,

I am attaching the *Top 10 USG Counter-Disinformation Academic and Think-Tank Research Topics*, which I mentioned during out call in case you or any of your graduate students are interested in a collaboration around any of those topics this academic year. They were created with input from seven US Government partner agencies and by surveying ~300 USG counter-disinfo practitioners.

And, finally, as promised, attached is the **GEC's Annual Program Statement (APS)**, which serves as a standing catch-all for grant applications. It is a single-stage competitive process and proposals are evaluated and scored by a merit review panel on a quarterly basis. The APS serves as a method to accept innovative proposals that may not fall under an existing NOFO. Attached is a copy of the APS and you can find the full solicitation here or by searching funding opportunity number SFOP0006728 on Grants.gov. For your situational awareness, the APS is not directly tied to the Top 10 Research Topics, and you are also still encouraged to keep your eyes out for NOFOs. Please reach out to **gec-programs@state.gov** if you have any APS or NOFO related questions; the team running those is truly phenomenal.

We're looking forward to your response.
Warm regards,

(b)(6)

Academic and Think-Tank Liaison
Global Engagement Center
U.S. Department of State
(b)(6) @state.gov
linkedin.com/in/(b)(6)

Top 10 U.S. Government Counter Disinformation & Propaganda Academic & Think-Tank Research Topics

GEC Mission: "To direct, lead, synchronize, integrate, and coordinate efforts of the Federal Government to recognize, understand, expose, and counter foreign state and foreign non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts aimed at undermining or influencing the policies, security, or stability of the United States, its allies, and partner nations."

From: (b)(6)
Sent: Thursday, October 15, 2020 11:26 AM
To: Kate Starbird (b)(6)@uw.edu>; (b)(6)@stanford.edu (b)(6)@stanford.edu>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; Jevin West (b)(6)@uw.edu>; (b)(6)@stanford.edu (b)(6)@stanford.edu>; info@eipartnership.net <info@eipartnership.net>; (b)(6)@stanford.edu (b)(6)@stanford.edu>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6) (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>
Cc: Elena Cryst (b)(6)@stanford.edu>; Alex Stamos (b)(6)@stanford.edu>
Subject: RE: GEC/Election Integrity Partnership
When: Friday, October 16, 2020 3:30 PM-4:30 PM.
Where:

Dear All,
please join us today Friday, Oct. 16th, at 3:30pm EST/12:30 PT to discuss a concrete idea we have for possible support of the EIP effort.

Please let me know if you have any questions ahead of time.

Join Microsoft Teams Meeting
(b)(6) United States, Spokane (Toll)
Conference ID: (b)(6)#

Warm regards,
(b)(6)

From: Kate Starbird (b)(6)@uw.edu>
Sent: Thursday, October 15, 2020 2:46:23 PM
To: Jevin West (b)(6)@uw.edu>
Cc: (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@stanford.edu (b)(6)@stanford.edu>; (b)(6)@stanford.edu (b)(6)@stanford.edu>; (b)(6)@stanford.edu (b)(6)@stanford.edu>; info@eipartnership.net <info@eipartnership.net>
Subject: Re: GEC/Election Integrity Partnership

Hi all,

I have schedule availability:
Today: 2:30-3:30 (Pacific) or 4pm (Pacific)
Friday: 2-3:30 (Pacific)

Kate

On Oct 15, 2020, at 7:28 AM, Jevin West (b)(6) @uw.edu> wrote:

Hi (b)(6)

I could talk at 10:30 am PT if that works. If that doesn't work, I may be able to make 2 pm PT work.

-Jevin

On Oct 15, 2020, at 6:02 AM, (b)(6) @state.gov> wrote:

Phenomenal - thank you, Isabella and Jevin!

(b)(6) **Jevin, and Kate**, what's your availability for Friday between 9:15am PT/12:15 EST and 11am PT/2pm EST, or after 12PM PT/3pm EST or today from 12PM PT/3pm EST onwards?

From: Jevin West (b)(6) @uw.edu>
Sent: Thursday, October 15, 2020 2:39 AM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @stanford.edu (b)(6) @stanford.edu>; (b)(6) @stanford.edu (b)(6) @stanford.edu>; info@eipartnership.net <info@eipartnership.net>; (b)(6) (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @uw.edu>
Subject: Re: GEC/Election Integrity Partnership

Hi (b)(6)

I would be happy to talk about the EIP project, at least from our perspective in the Center for an Informed Public (CIP) at UW. Kate Starbird (cced) is leading our efforts in the CIP. She would be the best person to talk about the details of the some of the most recent rapid responses, but I am also happy to talk about the broader project. It would be great to learn more about the efforts from your side in the various government agencies.

Best,
Jevin

On Oct 14, 2020, at 11:22 AM, (b)(6) @state.gov> wrote:

Hello Shelby, Renee, and Jevin,
We're looking to connect with someone at the EIP the coming days – would you be available or would you know who may be a good POC?

Our colleagues at the Department of Homeland Security/CISA recommended we talk to you about your current efforts to protect the 2020 elections from foreign interference. There may be some synergies there with the work we're doing.
Warm regards,

(b)(6)

Academic and Think-Tank Liaison
Global Engagement Center
U.S. Department of State
(b)(6)@state.gov
<image001.png>

Mission: "To direct, lead, synchronize, integrate, and coordinate efforts of the Federal Government to recognize, understand, expose, and counter foreign state and foreign non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts aimed at undermining or influencing the policies, security, or stability of the United States, its allies, and partner nations."

From: (b)(6)@state.gov>
Sent: Friday, October 2, 2020 9:50 AM
To: (b)(6)@stanford.edu (b)(6)@stanford.edu>; (b)(6)@stanford.edu (b)(6)@stanford.edu>
Cc: (b)(6)@state.gov>; (b)(6)@state.gov> (b)(6) (b)(6)@state.gov> (b)(6)@uw.edu (b)(6)@uw.edu>
Subject: GEC/Election Integrity Partnership

Hello Shelby and Renee,

I hope you're healthy and safe during these ever more turbulent times. Thank you again for speaking with us last month about your research - our analysts were very impressed and we're keeping our eyes open on possible collaborations with you in this realm - please don't hesitate to reach out to me or them with any ideas or questions.

In the mean time, as mentioned, GEC's Senior Advisor for Election Security, (b)(6), who leads the US Interagency Working Group on Election Security, is interested in learning more about the Stanford **Election Integrity Partnership** and to explore ways in which we and/or the interagency could be useful. The GEC works on both US and international elections security related to issues concerning foreign disinformation and propaganda.

Would you or relevant colleagues be available and interested in the coming weeks to connect with us about this project? We'll be able to share with you more about how the working group works and what we may have to offer from the US Government side.

Warm regards,

(b)(6)

Academic and Think-Tank Liaison
Global Engagement Center
U.S. Department of State
(b)(6) @state.gov
linkedin.com/in/(b)(6)

Top 10 U.S. Government Counter Disinformation & Propaganda Academic & Think-Tank Research Topics

GEC Mission: "To direct, lead, synchronize, integrate, and coordinate efforts of the Federal Government to recognize, understand, expose, and counter foreign state and foreign non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts aimed at undermining or influencing the policies, security, or stability of the United States, its allies, and partner nations."

Sender: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Recipient: Isabella Garcia-Camargo (b)(6) @stanford.edu>

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: RE: GEC I2C2 Weekly Action Review: October 13 - 19 October, 2020
Date: Tue, 20 Oct 2020 18:17:20 +0000

(b)(6)

I accepted your edits and made changes where you pointed out discrepancies. Awaiting your final approval for posting.

Respectfully,

(b)(6)
Operations Officer I Interagency and International Coordination Cell (I2C2)
Global Engagement Center (GEC)
HST Office (b)(6)
(b)(6) @state.gov I SIPR: (b)(6) @state.sgov.gov
All Native Group, a Division of Ho-Chunk, Inc.

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

From: (b)(6) 2@state.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, October 20, 2020 1:41 PM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: RE: GEC I2C2 Weekly Action Review: October 13 - 19 October, 2020

(b)(6)

Please see my edits in the attached, thanks!

(b)(6)
Lead I Interagency and International Coordination Cell (I2C2)
Global Engagement Center (GEC)
SA-4C (b)(6)
(b)(6) @state.gov I SIPR: (b)(6) @state.sgov.gov

"Mission: To direct, lead, synchronize, integrate, and coordinate efforts of the Federal Government to recognize, understand, expose, and counter foreign state and foreign non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts aimed at undermining or influencing the policies, security, or stability of the United States, its allies, and partner nations. "

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, October 20, 2020 12:17 PM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: GEC I2C2 Weekly Action Review: October 13 - 19 October, 2020

Stevie,

The WAR for this week is attached for your perusal and approval.

V/R,

(b)(6)
Operations Officer I Interagency and International Coordination Cell (I2C2)
Global Engagement Center (GEC)
HST Office (b)(6) 53
(b)(6) @state.gov I SIPR: (b)(6) @state.sgov.gov
All Native Group, a Division of Ho-Chunk, Inc.

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

Sender: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Recipient: (b)(6) @state.gov>

GEC I2C2 Weekly Action Review: October 13 – 19 October, 2020

(b)(5) DPP

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

(b)(5) DPP

(b)(5) DPP

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
To: GEC Staff Assistants <GECStaffAssistants@state.gov>; Bray, Leah (b)(6) @state.gov>
CC: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: For DC Clearance - BCL for SE/C Meeting with STAS
Date: Mon, 14 Dec 2020 15:26:28 +0000

(b)(5) DPP

Cheers,
(b)(6)

From: GEC Staff Assistants <GECStaffAssistants@state.gov>
Sent: Monday, December 14, 2020 9:41 AM
To: Bray, Leah (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>; GEC Staff Assistants <GECStaffAssistants@state.gov>
Subject: For DC Clearance - BCL for SE/C Meeting with STAS

Good Morning,

Please see the following BCL for your review and clearance.
STAS Platform Discussion BCL.docx
A summary of Chinese self.docx

v/r
(b)(6)
Global Engagement Center, Front Office | U.S. Department of State | 2426, HST | Staff Assistant | All Native Group Contractor |

Sender: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Recipient: GEC Staff Assistants <GECStaffAssistants@state.gov>; Bray, Leah (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>; GEC-R-EXP <GEC-R-EXP@state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: RE: FireEye Report Forthcoming - NAEBC Remains Active
Date: Mon, 26 Oct 2020 13:27:49 +0000

Added!

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Monday, October 26, 2020 9:26 AM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>; GEC-R-EXP <GEC-R-EXP@state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: FireEye Report Forthcoming - NAEBC Remains Active

Thanks (b)(6)

April, could you please add those two sentences?

When and if this report becomes public, L can decide.

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Monday, October 26, 2020 9:13 AM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>; GEC-R-EXP <GEC-R-EXP@state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: FireEye Report Forthcoming - NAEBC Remains Active

(b)(5) DPP

(b)(6)

(b)(6)

Global and Emerging Threats Lead, Analytics and Research

Global Engagement Center

AFS | GEC | DOS

(b)(6) @state.gov

From (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Monday, October 26, 2020 9:02 AM
To (b)(6) @state.gov> (b)(6) @state.gov>; GEC-R-EXP <GEC-R-EXP@state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: FireEye Report Forthcoming - NAEBC Remains Active

(b)(5) DPP

What to you guys think?

From (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, October 22, 2020 4:57 PM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov> (b)(6) @state.gov>; GEC-R-EXP <GEC-R-EXP@state.gov> (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: FireEye Report Forthcoming - NAEBC Remains Active

Actually we can't touch anyone living in the U.S. (LPR/Citizen/otherwise)

(b)(6)

Global and Emerging Threats Lead, Analytics and Research

Global Engagement Center

AFS | GEC | DOS
(b)(6) @state.gov

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, October 22, 2020 4:56 PM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>; GEC-R-EXP <GEC-R-EXP@state.gov (b)(6)
(b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: RE: FireEye Report Forthcoming - NAEBC Remains Active

L doesn't let us touch legal residents either, right?

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, October 22, 2020 4:52 PM
To: GEC-R-EXP <GEC-R-EXP@state.gov>(b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Fw: FireEye Report Forthcoming - NAEBC Remains Active

Just found an interesting nugget for the Libya report. Ilana Mercer, one of the authors who writes for NAEBC, also writes for the Free West Media, the website I describe in my write up as amplifying the FNVP and vice versa.

She could be a USP though. Her bio states "ILANA Mercer is a paleolibertarian writer and theorist based in the US. Her acclaimed, weekly column, begun in Canada..."

http://www.ilanamercer.com/biographical/

https://freewestmedia.com/author/ilana/

https://naebc.com/category/authors/ilanamercer/

From (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, October 22, 2020 4:27 PM
To: GEC-Russia Team <GEC-RussiaTeam@state.gov>(b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc (b)(6) @state.gov>; Amanda Gilbert <(b)(6) @mandiant.com>; Bray, Leah
(b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: FireEye Report Forthcoming - NAEBC Remains Active

Good Afternoon Russia Team -

Attached is a ***DRAFT*** of a FireEye Intelligence report that will be published to our FireEye Intelligence Portal shortly.

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Please let me know if you have any questions and I'll follow up with the official report as soon as it publishes to our FireEye Intelligence Portal.

Thanks,

(b)(6)

(b)(6)

Global Engagement Center

U.S. Department of State

FireEye Inc.

Cell (b)(6)

Sender: (b)(6) @state.gov>

Recipient: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>; GEC-R-EXP <GEC-R-EXP@state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: FireEye Report Forthcoming - NAEBC Remains Active
Date: Thu, 22 Oct 2020 21:26:52 +0000

I'll follow up with (b)(6) to see who in the interagency is/isn't receiving these.

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, October 22, 2020 5:03 PM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: RE: FireEye Report Forthcoming - NAEBC Remains Active

Yes – our messages crossed paths. Was about to suggest that you (b)(6) work with (b)( )I2C2 on a distro list of orgs/agencies who aren't getting FireEye info/reports and we can shoot the items to them.

At this point, I believe anyone with a big role on elections has access, but best to double check – plus there may be components w/in the orgs that don't and should.

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, October 22, 2020 5:01 PM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: FireEye Report Forthcoming - NAEBC Remains Active

Completely agree in that case. I was unaware that some of them are also on the receiving end of FireEye's reports.

Per (b)(6) email that came through as I was typing this, maybe we share with partners who otherwise may not receive FE's reports? CYBERCOM would strike me as an agency that may not be paying for cyber-oriented organizations to produce reports. As you suggested (b)(6) maybe we ask (b)(6) who in the interagency is already receiving these reports and then share with whomever isn't getting them.

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, October 22, 2020 4:57 PM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: RE: FireEye Report Forthcoming - NAEBC Remains Active

Will, I checked with (b)(6) yesterday and she confirmed that those agencies are getting the same info/products we are (based on my previous work with CISA, etc, I suspected they were). I am on the same wavelength as you, and can double check with (b)(6) ust to be on the safe side if you'd like.

If they are indeed already getting the same info/reports, I don't think we should send duplicative copies.

(b)(5) DPP

Happy to chat further.
Best, (b)(6)

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, October 22, 2020 4:34 PM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: FireEye Report Forthcoming - NAEBC Remains Active

(b)(6)

(b)(5) DPP

V/r,

(b)(6

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, October 22, 2020 4:27 PM
To: GEC-Russia Team <GEC-RussiaTeam@state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @mandiant.com>; Bray, Leah (b)(6) @state.gov>
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Thanks,
(b)(6)

(b)(6)
Global Engagement Center
U.S. Department of State
FireEye Inc.
(b)(6)

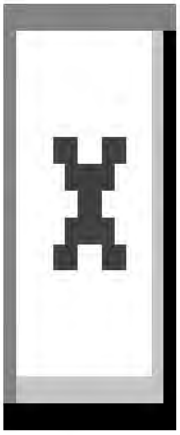
Sender: (b)(6) @state.gov>

Recipient: (b)(6) @state.gov>;
state.gov>;
(b)(6) @state.gov>

From:	(b)(6) @state.gov>
To:	(b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject:	Re: FireEye Report Forthcoming - NAEBC Remains Active
Date:	Thu, 22 Oct 2020 21:10:26 +0000

Profile below and the video => smells

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVyBLLmXVBk&feature=emb_logo



From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, October 22, 2020 4:52 PM
To: GEC-R-EXP <GEC-R-EXP@state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Fw: FireEye Report Forthcoming - NAEBC Remains Active

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http://www.ilanamercer.com/biographical/

https://freewestmedia.com/author/ilana/

https://naebc.com/category/authors/ilanamercer/

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, October 22, 2020 4:27 PM
To: GEC-Russia Team <GEC-RussiaTeam@state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @mandiant.com>; Bray, Leah (b)(6) @state.gov>
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Thanks,

(b)(6)

(b)(6)
Global Engagement Center
U.S. Department of State
FireEye Inc.
Cell: (b)(6)

Sender: (b)(6) @state.gov>

Recipient: (b)(6) @state.gov>; @state.gov>

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>;
(b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: RE: FireEye Report Forthcoming - NAEBC Remains Active
Date: Thu, 22 Oct 2020 20:57:57 +0000

Thanks (b)(Perhaps we should add CYBERCOM to that distro as well.

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, October 22, 2020 4:34 PM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: FireEye Report Forthcoming - NAEBC Remains Active

(b)(6)

(b)(5) DPP

V/r,

(b)(6)

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, October 22, 2020 4:27 PM
To: GEC-Russia Team <GEC-RussiaTeam@state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>; Amanda Gilbert (b)(6) ; Bray, Leah (b)(6) @state.gov>
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Please let me know if you have any questions and I'll follow up with the official report as soon as it publishes to our FireEye Intelligence Portal.

Thanks,
Sarah

(b)(6)

Global Engagement Center

U.S. Department of State

FireEye Inc.

Cell: (b)(6)

Sender: (b)(6) @state.gov>

Recipient: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: FireEye First Look: Hunter Biden Videos
Date: Tue, 27 Oct 2020 14:42:53 +0000

Thanks (b)(6) appreciate the first look. Would you also please add (b)(6) and (b)(6) (b)(6) to distro for these. They are collaborating with me on elections-related monitoring, and that way I don't have to forward to them ☺.

Best, (b)(6)
From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, October 27, 2020 8:51 AM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>; GEC-ChinaTeam <GEC-ChinaTeam@state.gov>; GEC_DataAnalytics <GECDataAnalytics@state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>; Bray, Leah (b)(6) @state.gov>; Amanda Gilbert (b)(6) @mandiant.com>
Subject: FireEye First Look: Hunter Biden Videos

Good Morning All -

Please see the attached **TLP:Red** First Look that can be shared within the 5tate Dept. This First Look is **TLP:RED** because it incorporates observations associated with Yonder factions.

We observed activity on Twitter, Reddit, 4chan and Nitter promoting the alleged Hunter Biden sex tapes leaked by GTV[.]org. We cannot currently confirm foreign attribution and have yet to identify any coordinated, inauthentic behavior amplifying the narratives however we are continuing to monitor any amplification or promotion of this content. We are flagging this for the GEC's situational awareness due to the salacious nature of our findings and the proximity to the 2020 U.5. Presidential Election.

Please let me know if you have any questions or feedback and we will continue to flag any relevant updates regarding this activity.

Thanks!
(b)(6)

(b)(6)
Global Engagement Center
U.S. Department of State
FireEye Inc.
Cell: (b)(6)

Sender: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Recipient: (b)(6) @state.gov>

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
To: GEC-Russia Team <GEC-RussiaTeam@state.gov>
Subject: Re: FireEye First Look: Hunter Biden Videos
Date: Thu, 29 Oct 2020 18:28:38 +0000

Team,

Please do not distro this report for now. I am working with (b)(6) and interagency partners on how to proceed. I was working on an effort with (b)(6) to flag activity from these outlets to FBI this afternoon, but this report sweetens the pot and provides additional information. Standby for updates.

Best Regards,

(b)(6)
From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, October 29, 2020 2:07 PM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>; Bray, Leah (b)(6) @state.gov>; Amanda Gilbert (b)(6) @mandiant.com>; GEC-Russia Team <GEC-RussiaTeam@state.gov>; (b)(6) (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: FireEye First Look: Hunter Biden Videos

Good Afternoon All -

Following up to the First Look that we shared on Tuesday on activity on Twitter, Reddit, 4chan and Nitter promoting the alleged Hunter Biden sex tapes leaked by GTV[.]org, we conducted additional research into whether or not the Russia-nexus sites identified in the Russian Pillars report were pushing related content.

The attached First Look is **TLP:GREEN** and if interested, can be shared with all USG partners.

Please let us know if you have any questions on the content or about sharing. We'd also be interested in whether or not you have continued interest in these narratives.

Thanks!
(b)(6)

(b)(6)
Global Engagement Center

U.S. Department of State
FireEye Inc.
Cell: 215.527.0095

From: (b)(6)
Sent: Tuesday, October 27, 2020 8:51 AM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>; GEC-ChinaTeam <GEC-ChinaTeam@state.gov>; GEC_DataAnalytics <GECDataAnalytics@state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>; Bray, Leah (b)(6) @state.gov>; Amanda Gilbert (b)(6) @mandiant.com>
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Thanks!
(b)(6)
Global Engagement Center
U.S. Department of State
FireEye Inc.
Cell: (b)(6)

Sender: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Recipient: GEC-Russia Team <GEC-RussiaTeam@state.gov>

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: 2 Nov Updates
Date: Tue, 3 Nov 2020 12:49:45 +0000

Good Morning -

My apologies. I think that's correct, Yonder likely can't be mentioned by name but I will double check.

Thanks!
(b)(6)

(b)(6)
Global Engagement Center
U.S. Department of State
FireEye Inc.
Cel (b)(6)
From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Monday, November 2, 2020 5:58 PM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: 2 Nov Updates

Hi (b)(6) ..you might need to check with A&R but I'm not sure we can publicly announce Yonder as a partner to GEC. Check with (b)(6)

(b)(6)

(b)(6)
Director, Technology Engagements
Global Engagement Center
(b)(6) @state.gov **VISIT US @** TET Home Page
(b)(6)

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Monday, November 2, 2020 5:33 PM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: 2 Nov Updates

Hello (b)(6)

Highlights from last week are included below:

(U) FireEye is continuing to work with GEC partner Yonder to draft a strategic report related to the Russian disinformation and propaganda ecosystem in Latin America. FireEye and Yonder are collaborating on a strategic report that identifies both trending narratives in the region and associated Russia-nexus domains of interest. The report is on track to be delivered on Friday, 6 November.

(U) FireEye reported on additional insights associated with 'Votergate' and additional observations associated with two domains flagged by the Election Integrity Partnership. FireEye initially reported on activity on 4chan's "Politically Incorrect" board claiming to have identified vulnerabilities in the voting systems of multiple locations coined 'Votergate.' Further research identified that Facebook, Twitter and Reddit appeared to effectively control the spread of the narrative. FireEye also provided additional examples of amplification of two suspicious domains flagged by the EIP.

(U) FireEye identified limited activity on Twitter, Reddit, 4chan and Nitter promoting the alleged Hunter Biden sex tapes leaked by GTC[.]org and observed amplification of the narrative from domains associated with the Russian Pillars report. FireEye worked with the GEC Russia Team to enable the GEC Russia Team share relevant research in a derivative work product with USG partners and with Stanford's Election Integrity Partnership.

(U) FireEye investigated activity associated with a WordPress Blog, "Radio Free Myanmar", that was identified as disseminating disinformation. In response to a request for further information from USAGM, FireEye investigated the suspicious blog and identified relevant reporting related to Facebook accounts that were leveraged to disseminate the Radio Free Myanmar content.

Please let me know if you have any questions or if I can provide anything additional at this time!

Thank you!

(b)(6)
(b)(6)
Global Engagement Center
U.S. Department of State
FireEye Inc.
Cell: (b)(6)

Sender: (b)(6) @state.gov>

Recipient: (b)(6) @state.gov>;
(b)(6) @state.gov>

From:	(b)(6) @accenturefederal.com" (b)(6) @accenturefederal.com>
To:	(b)(6) @state.gov (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject:	RE: [External] Re: Vaccine Coverage Estimation Model (V-CEM) Brief for SCA
Date:	Thu, 19 Nov 2020 14:55:12 +0000

Definitely, great idea!
Do you want to send them a brief ahead of time? (if so, when?) or do you want highlights to talk/walk through during demo on Tuesday?

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, November 19, 2020 9:47 AM
To: (b)(6) @accenturefederal.com>
Subject: [External] Re: Vaccine Coverage Estimation Model (V-CEM) Brief for SCA

This message is from an EXTERNAL SENDER - be CAUTIOUS of links and attachments. THINK BEFORE YOU CLICK.

This email contains a reference to coronavirus or COVID-19. Please be aware of coronavirus-themed active phishing campaigns, and use extra vigilance when responding or clicking.

Can we pull out some SCA insights in advance perhaps tomorrow or Monday? I can tee-up the dashboard during the brief to show SCA and will explore before the meeting.

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, November 19, 2020 9:41 AM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) <(b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) (b)(6) @accenturefederal.com>
Cc: (b)(6) @geciq.com>
Subject: Vaccine Coverage Estimation Model (V-CEM) Brief for SCA
When: Tuesday, November 24, 2020 9:30 AM-10:30 AM.
Where: Teams Meeting Link below

Hi (b)(6) and Team - Please let me know if this time works for you. Invite others as needed.

We would like to know how we can make our analyses/dashboards actionable for your team in the SCA region.

Thank you,
(b)(6)

Microsoft Teams meeting

Join on your computer or mobile app
Click here to join the meeting
Or call in (audio only)
(b)(7)(E) United States, Orlando
Phone Conference ID: (b)(7)(E)
Find a local number | Reset PIN
Learn More | Meeting options

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, November 18, 2020 4:33:41 PM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @geciq.com>
Subject: Re: GEC Weekly Operational Update Report 11.13.2020

Thanks (b)(6)

Just an FYI for everyone here (b)(6) has a background and degree in public health. I'm sure he'll find your vaccine estimation model incredibly interesting!

I chatted with (b)(6) in Colombo and he said it was fine for (b)(6) to be on it. He's the dedicated M&E Specialist to Colombo. Can he be added?

Thank you for the doc!
Best,
(b)(

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, November 18, 2020 11:21
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @geciq.com>
Subject: Re: GEC Weekly Operational Update Report 11.13.2020

Hi (b)(6)

Attaching the one-pager overview of the GEC-IQ platform.

It doesn't look like (b)(6) is on the list for the PAS-Colombo demo so an internal briefing can be arranged with (b)(6)

Everyone on the email should have access to Tableau Enterprise to view the Vaccine Estimation Model Coverage dashboard, which is different than GEC-IQ.
Pasting that information from the way, way bottom of the email chain:

- **(U) The GEC Makes its Vaccine Coverage Estimation Model Available to the Department of State.** All DOS employees can now view the **Vaccine Coverage Estimation Model (V-CEM)** dashboard without logging into GEC-IQ. A future iteration of the dashboard will be available for non-DOS government users on a needed basis.
  - (U) The V-CEM dashboard, which was built by the GEC, is a near real time, global monitoring capability for estimating the tone and volume of media coverage regarding top vaccine development efforts and long-term trends of structural relations with the U.S., China, and Russia. V-CEM gathers global news coverage in over 50+ languages from approximately 172 countries. These stories are then analyzed based on their volume and tone on the leading global vaccine development efforts.
  - (U) DOS employees can access the dashboard if already logged into OpenNet by going to the website https://tahleauenterprise.geciq.com/ or by logging in through Okta (the State Department's secure platform for accessing cloud applications) with their OpenNet credentials or PIV/CAC card reader. Once on the Okta homepage, click on the **GEC-IQ Tableau** button to launch Tableau Enterprise, search for "vaccine" and view the dashboard.

Happy to walk your team through that particular dashboard and consider its utility for SCA examining Russia or China's influence in the region as well as how it plays a role with the vaccine roll out.
(b)(6)

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, November 18, 2020 10:55 AM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @geciq.com>
Subject: Re: GEC Weekly Operational Update Report 11.13.2020

Hi (b)(6)
One of the team isn't on yet, (b)(6) There is a demo for PAS-Colombo next week that he'll be on, but we aren't quite sure what the full scope of the GEC-IQ we can offer to post. So, might be good to have our own internal briefing. Or, do you have a document that provides a good overview?

Best,

(b)(6

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, November 17, 2020 13:16
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6)
(b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @geciq.com>
Subject: Re: GEC Weekly Operational Update Report 11.13.2020

Hi (b)(6

Yes, looping in our GEC-IQ USG platform lead, (b)(6)

Is the interest in a particular part or functionality of GEC-IQ? Would you like a demo/refresher for the team?

(b)(6)

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, November 17, 2020 11:57 AM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov> (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6)
(b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: GEC Weekly Operational Update Report 11.13.2020

No problem, (b)(6)

+the CMI crew.

Can we arrange a time to chat? As we continue to build our country profiles, we are starting to see an interest in access to the IQ. We wanted to brainstorm to see what that might look like.

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, November 17, 2020 11:56
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: GEC Weekly Operational Update Report 11.13.2020

Fantastic!! Thank you!

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, November 17, 2020 9:16 AM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: GEC Weekly Operational Update Report 11.13.2020

Hi (b)(6)
Yes, I can access now! Thank you.

Best,
(b)(6)

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Monday, November 16, 2020 14:54
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: GEC Weekly Operational Update Report 11.13.2020

Hi (b)(6

I checked with the Tech Team and you should see the button now (as of Friday eve). If you don't mind checking again, can you confirm when you get a chance?

Thank you!
(b)(6)

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Friday, November 13, 2020 10:07 AM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: GEC Weekly Operational Update Report 11.13.2020

Hi (b)(6)
I couldn't access it through either link because I'm not assigned tableau in Okta. Any clue how I get assigned Tableau?

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Friday, November 13, 2020 09:58
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Fw: GEC Weekly Operational Update Report 11.13.2020

Hi (b)(6

Do you (or a designated person) mind testing if access to Tableau Enterprise works for you on your OpenNet or through Okta? The instructions are the last bullet below. No need for GEC-IQ to view the dashboard! Will also be posting the DDI here.

Much appreciated!
(b)(6)

From: (b)(6) @state.gov> on behalf of Bray, Leah (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Friday, November 13, 2020 9:44 AM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>

(b)(6)

State, military and other agency addressees

(b)(6)

State, military and other agency addressees

State, military and other agency addressees

(b)(6)

Subject: GEC Weekly Operational Update Report 11.13.2020

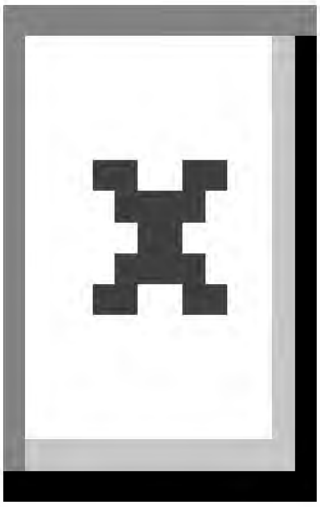
11/13/2020

Colleagues,

(U) Ongoing GEC Activities to Expose Propaganda and Disinformation.

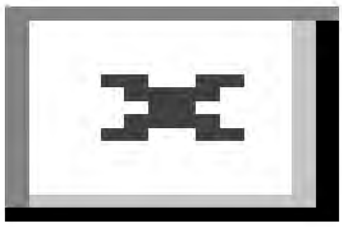
(U) Countering Russian Disinformation.

- **(U) *Russian Pillars Report* Featured in Leading UK Newspaper.** The UK-based newspaper *The Times* ran a frontpage article on the British government's cyberwar against anti-vaccine Russian propaganda, citing the GEC's *Pillars of Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem* report and highlighting three proxy sites mentioned in the *Pillars* report: SouthFront, News Front, and Geopolitica.ru.
    - **(U) The author of the article, Lucy Fisher, promoted the article and the *Pillars Report* in tweets, which included in a link to the report.**



(U) Countering Iranian Disinformation.

- ~~**(SBU)**~~ **A GEC Partner Exposes Tehran's Laissez-faire Approach to COVID-19**. The two-minute video, produced by a GEC partner and viewable on YouTube, reveals the scale of the epidemic within Iran's borders and highlights the Iranian regime's focus on detaining those accused of spreading "rumors" about the disease rather than working on pandemic mitigation efforts. **The video also showed how militia fighters deployed to Syria, many of whom disregarded health precautions, were spreading the illness. 1,600 of 6,200 YouTube views in the first two days came from people who searched for "Hizballah" in Arabic; 73 percent of those who did that search watched the video.** The video was also published on three other platforms. View COVID-19 video in English here.



(U) Image from the video depicting COVID-19 infected Shia Pilgrims and militia fighters traveling to Qom, Iran.

(U) Undermining and Exposing Terrorists.

- ~~(SBU)~~ **Pro-ISIS *Rocket.Chat* Channel Urges Renewed Allegiance for ISIS Emir.** The Counter Extremism Project (CEP), an international non-partisan think tank, identified the post (made initially on October 23), which called on ISIS supporters to renew their pledge of allegiance to Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Quraishi. The *Rocket.Chat* channel stated that video and audio pledges to ISIS would be published on Telegram and other platforms to showcase the group's strength.
    - ~~(SBU)~~ **Since the September 17 launch of the GEC lead al-Mawla CONOP, ISIS has increased its requests for online pledges. It is the GEC's assessment that this is an attempt to rebuild lost credibility resulting from the CONOP's release of damaging interrogation reports.**

(U) Countering CCP Disinformation.

- **(U) The GEC Facilitates Coordination between Australia, New Zealand, and the United States on Building Journalism Capacity in the Pacific Islands.** As part of the GEC's efforts to work with America's allies and partners to confront disinformation and propaganda, the GEC facilitated the first meeting between the State Department, Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade to share information on journalism capacity-building programs across the Pacific Islands.
    - (U) The representatives agreed to develop a framework for de-conflicting activities moving forward. To facilitate that effort, the GEC has generated a catalog of ongoing media support activities conducted by the three countries. This deconfliction effort seeks to maximize the impact and reach of programming by the U.S. and its allies to bolster Pacific Islands media against foreign influence and to avoid over-burdening small media outlets.
    - (U) The group agreed to meet on a quarterly basis moving forward to advance coordination and collaboration to counter disinformation in the Pacific Islands. This effort is an off-shoot of the U.S.-Australia Disinformation Working Group first announced this Summer at the Australia-United States Ministerial Consultation.

(U) Additional Significant GEC Activities.

- **(U) On November 6, the GEC and DHS's Online Counter Disinformation Game, Harmony Square, was Reviewed Positively in the Harvard Misinformation Review.**
  - **(U) Within four days of the announcement of research by the** Harvard Misinformation Review**, the game gained over 23,000 players.** The game has received extensive media coverage with over 60 articles resulting from Harvard's review and an earlier press release from Cambridge University.
  - (U) The peer reviewed research found that the game increased psychological resistance against manipulation techniques commonly used in political misinformation. Drawing on "inoculation theory," the game functions as a psychological "vaccine" by exposing people to weakened doses of the common techniques used in political misinformation especially during elections.
  - (U) GEC introduced DHS to the game concept during a GEC Tech Demo in 2019. As a result, GEC and DHS partnered with the game developer DROG to develop what eventually became Harmony Square.
  - (U) The GEC will conduct an international rollout of the game in coming weeks, while DHS is finalizing its preparations for a domestic rollout.

- **(U) The GEC Announces Election-related Assistance to Ecuador.** At the November 10 U.S.-Ecuador Bilateral Expanded Political Dialogue, Special Envoy Lea Gabrielle announced that the GEC would provide training to the Ecuadorians in preparation for their upcoming elections.
  - **(U) The GEC will conduct training on its collaborative analytics platform, GEC-IQ, as well as disinformation and propaganda-related training for Ecuadorian government communicators and analysts.** These training events are scheduled to take place before the end of the year.
  - (U) Ecuador has been the victim of previous coordinated disinformation campaigns, most recently surrounding its response to COVID-19. The GEC's assistance will help enable the conduct of free and fair elections while blunting the impact that disinformation and adversarial propaganda may have on the electoral outcome.

- **(U) The GEC's Principal Deputy Coordinator (PDC) Daniel Kimmage Spoke to Thousands of Tech Sector Participants at the November 9 Africa Tech Festival Panel.** His participation was in support of the GEC's upcoming U.S.-Africa Tech Challenge.
  - (U) PDC Kimmage spoke about the GEC and highlighted the U.S.-Africa Tech Challenge while providing the GEC's perspective on how technology has an impact on disinformation and counter-disinformation efforts. He emphasized that private industry should work with the GEC to develop tools to alert users on disinformation campaigns.
  - **(U) After the Tech Festival, panel member Emmanuel Lubanzadio, Twitter's Head of Public Policy for Sub-Saharan Africa expressed interest in participating in the GEC's upcoming Africa Tech Challenge.**

- **(U) On November 5, the GEC Briefed its Technology Programs at the DOD's Information Conflict Technical Exchange Meeting.** The meeting was hosted by the Joint Information Operations Warfare Center.
    - (U) The purpose of this government-only meeting was to bring together Military Services, Service Labs, Government Agencies, federally funded research and development centers, and University Affiliated Research Centers which are currently working on programs or research relevant to Information Operations.
    - (U) The GEC used the event to promote its technology programs, with the goal of eliciting additional DOD participation from the 100+ personnel at the meeting.
        - (U) Numerous DOD partners contacted the GEC after the event to request participation.

- **(U) The GEC's Disinfocloud.com (1163 users) Platform Informs the Interagency and Foreign Government Partners about Technology Capabilities and Assessments of Tools to Counter Propaganda and Disinformation (CPD).** Visit the following links for the latest Disinfo Cloud social media postings on Twitter, LinkedIn, the Disinfo Cloud blog, and the Disinfo Cloud Newsfeed. Posts by Disinfo Cloud this week include:
    - (U) As a follow-up to the March 2019 Weapons of Mass Destruction report; Disinfo Cloud is publishing a series of blog posts that highlight recent foreign state-sponsored disinformation and propaganda efforts; explore how governments and intergovernmental bodies are responding to the challenge; highlight what social media platforms are doing as well as activities by civil society and independent organizations; and spotlight tools and technologies that can be leveraged to address the threat.
        - (U) The fourth post on actions by social media platforms to combat disinformation will be published later this week.
    - (U) Disinfo Cloud's weekly disinfo news round-up summarizes publicly available content featured on the Disinfo Cloud newsfeed. This week Disinfo Cloud included the following news highlights:
        - (U) After playing the game Harmony Square, gamers/users had a positive change of behavior. They found misinformation significantly less reliable, are significantly more confident in their assessment of misinformation, and are significantly less likely to share misinformation. Harmony Square is a free online game aimed at inoculating people against online manipulation.
        - (U) The number of Russians who trust television as a source of information has dropped to 23 percent. Russians have become more aware that Russian-state affiliated media has a role in spreading disinformation. PRC influence operations on Twitter have limited impact largely due to poor messaging and network coordination, although new technologies and platforms such as YouTube might offer greater results.

(U) Current Observations and Analysis.

- ~~(SBU)~~ **The GEC Monitors for Foreign Disinformation During the U.S. 2020 Election.** The GEC conducted select monitoring of the overseas information environment for Russian, Iranian, and PRC disinformation. Russian state and proxy media outlets engaged in clear amplification of inflammatory, anti-U.S. themes.
    - ~~(SBU)~~ For example, throughout U.S. elections week, RT and Sputnik continuously promoted through videos and online articles claims of election fraud, protests, and the potential for post-election violence or a "coup" in the United States.
    - ~~(SBU)~~ As the election results started to shift toward former Vice President Joe Biden, RT, Sputnik, and Iranian media began publishing more articles claiming that "the U.S. is broken either way." Russians used third-party influencers and proxy websites such as SouthFront and Global Research to cover election fraud and anti-U.S. "coup" narratives.

- **(U) ISIS Supporters React to U.S. Elections.** Several pro-ISIS channels on Telegram commented on the results of the U.S. elections. A post by *2020 Course of Event* said that regardless of who wins the election, jihadis should be ready "to fight Biden's army or Trump's army." Another post on the same channel asked followers to provide speeches of jihadi leaders who discussed the significance of jihad against America, including clips that document operations in the U.S., specifically killing. Another ISIS supporter posted on Telegram he hoped Trump's rejection of Biden's victory would lead to a U.S. civil war while another pro-ISIS Telegram channel predicted Biden will win the U.S. elections.
    - (U) Pro-ISIS supporters continue to respond to direction given in a recent speech by ISIS spokesman, Abu Hamzah Al-Qurashi, calling supporters worldwide to carry out attacks and to also add their own messages encouraging others to do the same. In the same speech, al-Qurashi told fighters in various ISIS provinces to increase their efforts and attacks, and when referring to Iraq, he predicted U.S. forces will soon leave the country, enabling ISIS to advance against the Iraqi army.

- **(U) The GEC Finds That Global Twitter Conversations and Global Media Outside of China Largely Favored Pro-Democracy Protestors in Hong Kong.** On November 5, the GEC published two reports that found that both global Twitter conversations and global media outside of China largely favored the pro-democracy protestors and criticized Beijing's erosion of Hong Kong's autonomy in the months following Beijing's enactment of China's National Security Law for Hong Kong on June 30.
    - (U) The reports also evaluated receptivity to CCP propaganda on Hong Kong within Hong Kong. Analysis showed that Twitter users self-locating in Hong Kong amplified the announcement of U.S. sanctions against Chief Executive Carrie Lam and other Hong Kong and PRC officials. Hong Kong users also expressed concern that the National Security Law would erode fundamental rights and liberties. Articles in Hong Kong that endorsed sanctions on Chief Executive Lam for using excessive police force were shared at higher volumes than articles from CCP-linked outlets like *East Week*, which claimed the United

States had meddled in Beijing's affairs by supporting protesters in Hong Kong and monitoring Hong Kong's online network systems.

- **(U) The GEC Makes its Vaccine Coverage Estimation Model Available to the Department of State.** All DOS employees can now view the **Vaccine Coverage Estimation Model (V-CEM)** dashboard without logging into GEC-IQ. A future iteration of the dashboard will be available for non-DOS government users on a needed basis.
    - (U) The V-CEM dashboard, which was built by the GEC, is a near real time, global monitoring capability for estimating the tone and volume of media coverage regarding top vaccine development efforts and long-term trends of structural relations with the U.S., China, and Russia. V-CEM gathers global news coverage in over 50+ languages from approximately 172 countries. These stories are then analyzed based on their volume and tone on the leading global vaccine development efforts.
    - (U) DOS employees can access the dashboard if already logged into OpenNet by going to the website https://tableauenterprise.geciq.com/ or by logging in through Okta (the State Department's secure platform for accessing cloud applications) with their OpenNet credentials or PIV/CAC card reader. Once on the Okta homepage, click on the **GEC-IQ Tableau** button to launch Tableau Enterprise, search for "vaccine" and view the dashboard.

(U) In closing, thank you for your close collaboration with the GEC team. Our success is made possible only by the great colleagues we have in State, the interagency, and our international partnerships. We will continue to release these reports on a bi-weekly basis. Please contact the GEC's Acting PPO Director (b)(6) at (b)(6) **@state.gov** if we can be of any assistance.

Best regards,
Leah Bray
Deputy Coordinator for Policy, Plans, and Operations

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

Sender: (b)(6) @accenturefederal.com" (b)(6) @accenturefederal.com>
Recipient: (b)(6) @state.gov (b)(6) @state.gov>

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
CC: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: ~~(SBU)~~ The CCP extensively amplified US political divisions to undermine Chinese views of governance
Date: Tue, 3 Nov 2020 16:39:28 +0000

Hi (b)(6)

I thought ~~SBU~~ was apropos because details on Thresher's media manipulation monitoring capabilities are not shared widely (or publicly, at all) and particularly the tracking of PRC covert accounts seemed sensitive (but still unclassified) to me. If the intent is for this to go beyond (b)(6) and (b)(then I might even recommend taking off Thresher's name altogether. Perhaps FOUO is more apropos? I defer as you'd prefer.

I have responded in green. Please let me know if I can do anything further.

(b)(6)
Program Analyst
GEC | DOS | KTG Contractor
Cell: (b)(6)
(b)(6) @state.gov

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, November 3, 2020 10:58 AM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Fw: ~~(SBU)~~ The CCP extensively amplified US political divisions to undermine Chinese views of governance

(b)(6) - why is this ~~SBU?~~ Also please look at my questions in red and respond. This summary was a good start but had some mis-spellings and us not capitalized, etc. so I want to make sure it's clean and clear before we send it around. Thanks

~~*SBU*~~

(b)(5) DPP

(b)(5) DPP

(b)(5) DPP

~~SBU~~

V/r,
(b)(6)
Program Analyst
GEC | DOS | KTG Contractor
Cell: (b)(6)
(b)(6) @state.gov

Sender: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Recipient: (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
(b)(6) @state.gov>;
To: GEC-ChinaTeam <GEC-ChinaTeam@state.gov>;
(b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: ~~(SBU)~~ The CCP extensively amplified US political divisions to undermine Chinese views of governance
Date: Tue, 3 Nov 2020 15:32:17 +0000

Dear (b)(6)

(b)(5) DPP

Please let me know if there is anything further needed.

(b)(6)
Program Analyst
GEC | DOS | KTG Contractor
Cell: (b)(6)
(b)(6) @state.gov

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, November 3, 2020 9:56 AM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>; GEC-ChinaTeam <GEC-ChinaTeam@state.gov>;
(b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Re: ~~(SBU)~~ The CCP extensively amplified US political divisions to undermine Chinese views of governance

(b)(6)

I have some edits and then you can send forward.

(b)(5) DPP

Thanks, (b)(6)

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, November 3, 2020 9:39 AM
To: GEC-ChinaTeam <GEC-ChinaTeam@state.gov>; (b)(6) @state.gov>; (b)(6) (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: ~~(SBU)~~ The CCP extensively amplified US political divisions to undermine Chinese views of governance

Hi all,
From yesterday's Thresher brief on Chinese electoral propaganda messaging/narratives, my notes below. (b)(6) if I missed anything please feel free to add.

(b)(6)
I can send this to (b)(6) unless you would prefer to. Thanks!

~~SBU~~

(b)(5) DPP

(b)(5) DPP

(b)(5) DPP

~~SBU~~

V/r,
(b)(6)
Program Analyst
GEC | DOS | KTG Contractor
Cell: (b)(6)
(b)(6) @state.gov

Sender: (b)(6) @state.gov>
(b)(6) @state.gov>;
Recipient: GEC-ChinaTeam <GEC-ChinaTeam@state.gov>;
(b)(6) @state.gov>

As part of our multi-pronged approach to countering Kremlin disinformation and propaganda, the GEC tracks, exposes, and counters Kremlin-propagated disinformation through our programming to support independent media as well as internal content creation.

1) **Three main lines of effort**: Exposure and analysis, regional outreach, programming – support of independent media and media engagement, civil society networks, whole of government approach.
2) **Exposure**:
    a. Twice weekly snapshots, where the GEC spotlights Kremlin disinformation with "Snapshots on Russia's Disinformation Trends on Ukraine." The Snapshots spotlight disinformation narratives and share best practices for countering disinformation and are distributed twice a week to 1,400 USG and like-minded government contacts.
    b. GEC publishes Russia's disinformation tactics, fact sheets that debunk Kremlin disinformation narratives, and resources for the public on State's Disarming Disinformation website. We most recently published a bulletin on food security.
3) **Regional outreach and Network Building:**
    a. ~~(SBU)~~ The GEC coordinates support for Ukraine with the Government of Ukraine and international partners. The GEC collaborates with international partners including EEAS, G7 RRM, International Partnership for Countering State Sponsored Disinformation (IPCSD), and NATO to support Ukraine's independent media, analytical sharing, and outreach to social media and technology companies. The GEC also coordinates with Government of Ukraine's Center for Strategic Communication to share select unclassified analysis and reporting.
4) **Programming**:
    a. Russia Team Programming: Team staff currently manage some $20 million in active programming (mostly .7 PD funds, in addition to $800,000 in prior year AEECA funds). Additional money from the March 2022 Ukraine supplemental (up to S20 million) and EUR/ACE (up to S2 million in additional AEECA) may soon come online as well. FY20 initiatives included the launch of the Exporting Best Practices (EBP) Program and Mapping Russian Disinformation in Africa study. FY21's S3 million in .7 PD funds supported an EBP expansion, a "whole-of-society" engagement program in Slovakia, and a series of small grants to EUR and NEA posts for innovative programming. FY22's S2 million base programming budget further funded EBP and embassy small grants, extended support for Belarusian media, and will launch programs in Mexico and the Western Balkans. Russia Team programming budgets have also supported Resilience Support Projects in Slovakia (February 2020), Czech Republic (September 2021), Slovenia (April 2022), and Latvia (TBC, September 2022).
    b. **Ukraine related funding**: Information Access Fund (IAF) managed by the DT Institute just closed out the end of May – S10 million co-funded with DoD – finalized in 2018 finished with the final tranche of funding of seven sub awardees focusing on countering Russian disinformation and capacity building of local independent media with access to factual information. As part of that award the GEC worked with a fact-checking organization, VoxUkraine, to catalogue and

expose Russian-origin narratives targeting Ukraine. The GEC supports media in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine to provide unbiased news, including coverage of the Ukraine invasion.

- **UKR Supplemental funding**: All tentative and TBD / subject to change: the GEC proposes to use a core fund of $20 million to counter and mitigate Russian disinformation and propaganda in Eastern Europe stemming from the Ukraine crisis through a whole-of-society approach that supports international networks of counter-disinformation practitioners, fact-based media content developers, and messaging to audiences identified as vulnerable to Kremlin disinformation operations. These programs will support partner government and civil society organizations to develop counter disinformation best practices, while also working with the private sector to develop and deploy new messaging strategies, technologies, and analytical capabilities in support of these efforts. The GEC, working with U.S. embassies in the region, will also preempt and counter harmful Russian disinformation and propaganda through coordinated messaging campaigns with local partners in Europe. All done in cooperating with USAID. We had a meeting with our working level colleagues before our spend plan was submitted to deconflict and gauge support.

Spend Plan Overview:

1. Support Whole-of-Society Counter-Disinformation Network Activities: $7 million
2. Sustain Independent Media in Kremlin-dominated Information Environments: $4 million
3. Support for Counter-Disinformation Messaging Programs: $6 million
4. Develop Regional Disinformation Analytical Capabilities: $2.5 million

Other info as needed:

~~(SBU)~~ **EUR/ACE coordinates the annual bilateral budget for Ukraine, including approximately $25 million per year for independent media support through USAID and State Department.** The $320 million European Democratic Resilience Initiative (EDRI) will support programming in Europe and Eurasia. EDRI provides support for journalists, pro-democracy, human rights, and anti-corruption activists, support to vulnerable and at-risk groups of Ukrainians, as well as those fleeing Russia and Belarus. R/GEC will utilize $20 million of the $320 million EDRI.

~~(SBU)~~ **PDS Kyiv implements $750,000 as part of post's Counter-Disinformation Capacity Development program.** U.S. and Ukrainian partners, including Texty, Internews Ukraine, Liga, train hundreds of journalists, activists, and civil society organizations to identify and counter Russia's disinformation.

~~(SBU)~~ **PDS Kyiv implements $3,400,000 on a national media literacy program, Learn to Discern (L2D).** L2D trains students to recognize disinformation and empower media and civil society organizations to expose disinformation. The Ukraine Ministry of Education has institutionalized it in their curriculum.

~~(SBU)~~ **DRL provides $1,500,000 for counter disinformation programming Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova.** DRL will assess the impact of disinformation attacks and develop and

support initiatives to build citizens' resilience to information attacks and promote integrity within the overall information space.

Ongoing Engagements with the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs (EUR)
Funded FY20

- **Counter-Disinformation Communities of Practice** (rolling/ad hoc funding): The GEC Russia Directorate and the Public Diplomacy Office of EUR cooperate regularly on matters related to the interagency **Russia Influence Group** (EUR co-chairs along with USEUCOM; the GEC is a member and leader on the countering disinformation and propaganda line of effort) and the 13-nation **International Partnership to Counter State-sponsored Disinformation** (the GEC and EUR/PPD share the U.S. co-chair; the other co-chair is the United Kingdom).
- **The Critical Mass -- Exposing Russian Health Disinformation** ($250,000 FY20 CARES Act Funding): The Critical Mass will research the correlation between Russian health disinformation targeting Ukraine, Georgia, and Kazakhstan and real-world consequences impacting vulnerable populations and public health professionals.
- **BELSAT TV** ($850,000 FY19&20, administered by DT Institute): The GEC and EUR/ACE provide support to Belsat TV to provide unbiased and fact-based reporting to Russian-speaking audiences in viewers in Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and other countries of the former USSR. Belsat TV also provides independent media to Russian viewers. This project supports Belsat TV's development of the Vot Tak program, which provides exclusively Russian-language content.

Funded FY19

- **Tactical Communications Initiative -- Germany** ($800,000 FY19): Currently in the development stage, will target German elites and aim to change opinions on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

Funded FY18

- **GLOBSEC** ($3,002,046.84 FY18): GLOBSEC is mapping the media environments and disinformation landscapes of Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia and is providing this data to key stakeholders in the region to increase awareness and response to disinformation.
- **Sayara International/InfoEnvironment** ($3,496,231.55 FY18): Sayara combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies to research and analyze Russian disinformation narratives in Estona, Latvia, Lithuania and Moldova, and to provide access to the Exovera Media Environment Monitoring tool to Embassy partners.
- **TechSoup** ($4,413,272.41 FY18): TechSoup provides Media Literacy training in TOT format in Bosnia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, and Romania to build a network of individuals capable of recognizing, identifying, exposing, and countering Russian disinformation.
- **DT Institute (formerly Democracy Council of California) Information Access Fund** (EUR Total, including projects below: $10,386,859 FY18): DTI administers IAF program which funds smaller projects dedicated to countering the diverse threat of Russian disinformation (following projects are ongoing):
    - **Atlantic Council** ($494,763 FY18): AC is strengthening local media partnerships in Latin America and South Africa through their Digital Forensic Research Lab's network of Digital Research Units (DRUs.) This project also produces the #VenezuelaWatch Newsletter and the #VenezuelaWatch Alert.
    - **European Values** ($428,339.47 FY18): This project supports the Kremlin Watchers efforts to monitor, research and expose Russian malign influence and to call out Kremlin proxies working in governments in the Visegrad region (excluding Hungary).
    - **Albany Associates for TV8 Moldova** ($310,000 FY18): Provides expert support to TV8 Moldova to strengthen and expand its efforts to refute disinformation and manipulation in the Russian-language information space in Moldova.
    - **Debunk.eu** ($321,149.14 FY18): Debunk.eu will create an online game titled "Bad News" to increase media literacy rates in the Baltic states. The game will be available in English, Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian languages.
    - **IREX Europe** ($342,157.63 FY18): IREX Europe provides editorial and financial support to Euroradio in Belarus to produce and distribute original content that counters Russian disinformation and provide fact-based reporting.
    - **Vilnius Institute** ($56,926 FY18): Vilnius Institute will equip local civic activists with tools to counter Russian disinformation and build resilience against information campaigns directed at destroying personal and institutional trust.

- **Polska Press Group** ($92,778 FY18): PPG is providing trainings for 600 local and regional media journalists and editors across Poland on how to identify, expose and counter disinformation and information space manipulation.
- **EdVentures** ($231,000 FY18): Academic trainings to build capacity of Ukrainian students, primarily military cadets, to recognize, expose and counter foreign disinformation.

Previous GEC Engagements and Programs with EUR

Funded FY20

- **COVID-19 Countering Propaganda and Disinformation funding for post initiatives (global)** ($157,885 FY20): Albania: empowering local communities to fight disinfo ($27,000); Latvia: fact-checking for Russian-speakers ($27,270); UK: media literacy ($54,540); USEU: countering hostile propaganda and disinfo in Europe ($49,100).
- **Tactical Communications Initiative -- Counter COVID-19 Europe** ($2,500,000 FY19 and CARES Act funding): PR firm M&C Saatchi supported GEC in delivering communications assets in seven European posts (e.g., social media ads, web page), to counter COVID-19 disinformation and propaganda from malign actors.
- **Resilience Support Project -- Slovakia** ($80,000 FY20): GEC Russia Directorate deployed a three-person team in February 2020 to enhance Embassy Bratislava's efforts to support the Slovak Government in defending against foreign disinformation targeted at Slovakia's parliamentary elections. Funding also includes fund cites for local grant to GLOBSEC think tank and travel for two Lithuanian "Elves" participating in RSP team.
- **Modified Resilience Support Project -- North Macedonia** ($50,000 FY20): GEC and Embassy Skopje grant to local NGO Most for monitoring election disinformation.
- **Modified Resilience Support Project -- Lithuania** ($100,000 FY20): GEC and Embassy Vilnius grant to NGO Debunk.eu for monitoring election disinformation.

Funded FY19

- **Tactical Communications Initiative -- VE75** ($400,000 FY19): Global PR firm M&C Saatchi produced a 90-second video to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the end of WWII hostilities in Europe and counter Russian historical revisionism. This video was a part of a joint campaign with partner countries through the International Partnership to Counter State-Sponsored Disinformation (IPCSD).
- **Ukraine Cyber Hygiene and Stratcom** ($500,000 FY19): Albany Associates provided support to the Government of Ukraine to develop a capacity-building program that increased skill in strategic cybersecurity communications through educational programs, crisis communication exercises, behavioral change programs, and a public awareness campaign. Done in cooperation with EUR/ACE.
- **1989 (Fall of Communism) Campaign** ($1,330,000 FY19): GEC funding for post initiatives in cooperation with EUR/PPD: Bulgaria: post-communism lifestyle changes ($150,000); Czech Republic: social media campaign on wisdom of Velvet Revolution ($200,000); Hungary: purpose classified at post request ($350,000); Poland: public awareness campaign aimed at youth ($205,000); Slovakia: World Ice Hockey

Championship CPD and social media influencers ($125,000); USEU: Atlantic Council to bring Eastern European and Caucasus journalists to DisinfoWeek events ($300,000).

- **Baltic Way 30th Anniversary Campaign** ($335,765 FY19): GEC funding for post initiatives in cooperation with EUR/PPD: Estonia: social media and outdoor ad campaigns ($52,500); Latvia: Delfi Baltic Way 30 and Baltic Youth Forum ($83,265); Lithuania: communications for Baltic Way 30 events ($200,000).
- **Balkan Support Strategies** ($72,600 FY19): GEC funding for post initiatives: Montenegro: project REACT on NATO and Euro-Atlantic integration ($22,600); North Macedonia: CPD and building professionalism among journalists ($50,000). Done with EUR/PPD and USEUCOM.
- **GEC-funded research projects in EUR: Denmark, Faroe Islands, Greenland, Norway** ($741,500 FY19): How Arctic communities perceive Russian and Chinese influence ($431,000 total cost shared with GEC China Directorate); Denmark: Nord Stream 2, energy security ($81,000); Germany: Nord Stream 2, energy security ($80,000) and Berlin Wall and Russian disinformation ($149,500).
- **GEC-funded post initiatives** ($2,976,217 FY18&19): 24 programs across EUR, in cooperation with EUR/PPD.

Funded FY18

- **DT Institute (formerly Democracy Council of California) Information Access Fund** (EUR Total, including projects below: $10,386,859 FY18): DTI administers IAF program which funds smaller projects dedicated to countering the diverse threat of Russian disinformation (following projects have been completed):
    - **Free Russia Foundation** ($645,096 FY18): FRF highlighted the facts and ramifications of Russian Nord Stream 2 energy policies via conferences hosted in in Berlin, Paris and Amsterdam.
    - **ZINC** ($1,100,000 FY18): Zinc emphasized the positive aspects of the transition from communism to democracy by featuring stories of the generation born after the fall of the Berlin wall and comparisons of their experiences with the experiences of those who lived under communism across Europe.
    - **CSIS** ($365,760 FY18): CSIS analyzed the ways in which Russian and Chinese disinformation propagates through the information space of democratic societies and affects specific outcomes related to public opinion, voting behavior, and statements by officials.
    - **IREX** ($499,621 FY18): IREX's Learn to Discern in Georgia project worked with Georgian youth to build up critical thinking skills to recognize and understand disinformation, and to teach others to do the same, with innovative interactive online education methods.
- **Other GEC-funded grants and cooperative agreements** ($1,609,002 FY18): Programs in Georgia, Latvia, Moldova, Sweden, and the UK and funding for the Hybrid Center of Excellence (Helsinki).

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
CC: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: I2C2 Posted International Products for the Week of November 2 - November 9, 2020
Date: Mon, 9 Nov 2020 15:45:29 +0000

Hi (b)(6)
Regards,
(b)(6)
Colleagues,
Please find the weekly compilation of products we received from International partners for the week of November 2 – November 9. Please include us on any products that we may be missing so that we can provide a holistic picture for GEC. Let us know if you have any questions or if you identify any collaborative opportunities with our partners based on the products, thanks!
If you have any questions regarding the distribution list, please contact (b)(6) **at:** (b)(6) **@state.gov**
(b)(6) Colleagues, Please find the weekly compilation of products w…
posted in R-GEC PPO / COVID-19 Disinformation at Nov 9, 2020 10:25 AM

International Product Highlights for the Week of November 2 – November 9:

1. ~~**(FOUO)**~~ **Australia Home Affairs:**
   COVID-19: Misinformation—fused all-source analysis summary report 27 October 2020 – 2 November 2020: During 27 October 2020 – 2 November 2020, total mentions of COVID-19 narratives were about 10 per cent fewer than in the previous week. Engagement with official sources was typically higher than engagement levels with misinformation propagators for the majority of the reporting period. Meanwhile, an Australian conspiracy theory website has published an article alleging globalists seek to reduce the world population by 94 per cent via a COVID-19 administered 'global extermination program'. An Australian anti-lockdown group has claimed that the primary cause of death during the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic was due to bacterial pneumonia contracted through the use of face masks, insinuating this has—or will—occur during the COVID-19 pandemic. AFP Fact Check have debunked a satirical video circulating on social media in the international and Australian digital environment after some viewers misconstrued the claims in the video as fact. The video presents itself as a recording from 1956 and claims that experts predicted a new virus would emerge from Asia and spread globally in 2020.

2. ~~(FOUO)~~ **OSC Disinformation Digest:**
ASPI Research: Cyber-enabled foreign interference in elections and referendums:
ASPI research has identified 41 elections and seven referendums between January 2010 and October 2020 where cyber-enabled foreign interference was reported, and it finds that there's been a significant uptick in such activity since 2017. State actors have used two attack vectors to interfere in foreign elections and referendums. First, they have used various cyber operations, such as denial of service attacks and phishing attacks, to disrupt voting infrastructure and target electronic and online voting, including vote tabulation. Second, they have used online information operations to exploit the digital presence of election campaigns, politicians, journalists and voters. **SOURCE:** ASPI

3. ~~(FOUO)~~ **OSC Disinformation Digest, Center for Media Engagement: Encrypted propaganda political manipulation via encrypted messaging apps in the United States, India, and Mexico:** To understand who designs, builds, and launches propaganda efforts on encrypted messaging applications (EMAs) in the US, India, and Mexico, the Center for Media Engagement propaganda research team collected and analyzed instances in which EMAs were used to organize and/or disseminate coordinated influence operations. Through this process, we identified and cataloged 28 distinct cases of such EMA influence operations in India, 24 cases in Mexico, and 45 cases in the United States. We began our collection in fall 2019, but the cases themselves range from 2015 to 2020. Each country's cases are divided by topic: elections, incitements of violence, and coronavirus-specific mis- and disinformation. Here we showcase some of these instances to illuminate country-specific strategies for the political use of EMAs and emerging international trends of a phenomenon we term *encrypted propaganda*. **Source:** https://mediaengagement.org/research/encrypted-propaganda/

4. ~~(SBU)~~ **The Hague Center for Strategic Studies (HCSS):**
Two Case Studies: The two case studies are from The Hague Center for Strategic Studies (HCSS), which is one of the Dutch government's main contractors for various security projects/studies. These two case studies (along with a few others) are part of a Dutch government's work on cyber norm setting work (in some cases in alignment with US priorities/efforts on cyber norms). This paper is part of the paper series "From Blurred Lines to Red Lines: How Countermeasures and Norms Shape Hybrid Conflict". The series analyze effective responses against hybrid threats by evaluating the ways in which countermeasures and norms can help shape appropriate state behavior in the hybrid realm. The series unpacks the logic driving norm development across five different cases, yielding a better understanding of the norm strategies, tools of influence, dilemmas and tradeoffs by European states and the US in their

response to adversarial hybrid operations, including cyber operations (Russia); disinformation (Russia); propaganda (ISIS); economic espionage (China); maritime claims (China). SOURCE: https://hcss.nl/report/blurred-lines-red-lines-casestudy-1; https://hcss.nl/report/blurred-lines-red-lines-casestudy-2

5. ~~(SBU)~~ **RICU Disinformation Analysis Team Weekly Analysis: COVID-19 vaccination narratives; POLICY IMPLICATION:** While foreign state media coverage of UK COVID-19 vaccination issues is enduring, this reporting period presented a clear attempt by RT to spin comments made by a British MP to sow confusion regarding the recipient numbers of any future UK vaccination program. Audience reactions to this article garnered anti-vaccine sentiment, showing the risk and vulnerability such misleading narratives may present to the prospect of ensuring public uptake of any future vaccine. Additionally, Chinese and Russian state media outlets continue to praise their respective COVID-19 vaccination efforts; while this reporting period did not observe explicit narratives denigrating UK/Western vaccine production efforts in comparison with Chinese/Russian counterparts, HMG should be alive to the possibility of such narratives emerging. Moreover, HMG should carefully consider how – in its communications efforts regarding any COVID-19 vaccination – it communicates factual detail on the vaccine at local level through trusted channels, including on the nature and benefit of the vaccine itself, as well on the vaccination program for administering it.

International Products for the Week of November 2 – November 9:

1. **IA-2020-00877 - ASFC Intelligence Analysis Update - 27 October-02 November 2020**
2. **DAT_83RD_REPORT**
3. **DAT_85TH_REPORT**
4. **EEAS_ Ukraine _ Statement by the Spokesperson on the fight against corruption after the Constitutional Court decision of 27 October**
5. **European Union _ Biden or Trump_ What the US election could mean for Europe's foreign policy**
6. **OSC Disinformation Digest 4 November 2020**
7. **Online Event_MEDIA ADVISORY - Sustainability in the Black Sea Regional Cooperation _ Advancing the Black Sea Synergy and the European Green Deal**
8. **Dutch Case Study 1_ Protecting Electoral Infrastructure from Russian Cyber operations**
9. **Dutch Case Study 2_ Responding to Russian Disinformation in Peacetime**

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

Sender: (b)(6) @state.gov>

Recipient: (b)(6) @state.gov>;
(b)(6) M@state.gov>

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>

To (b)(6) @state.gov>

Subject: I2C2 Posted International Products for the We ek of October 12 – October 19, 2020

Date: Mon, 19 Oct 2020 17:37:37 +0000

Hi (b)(6)
Regards,
(b)(6)

Colleagues,
Please find the weekly compilation of products we received from International partners for the week of October 12 – October 19. Please include us on any products that we may be missing so that we can provide a holistic picture for GEC. Let us know if you have any questions or if you identify any collaborative opportunities with our partners based on the products, thanks!
If you have any questions regarding the distribution list please contact (b)(6) **at:** (b)(6) **@state.gov**
(b)(6) Colleagues, Please find the weekly compilation of products…
posted in R-GEC PPO / COVID-19 Disinformation at Oct 16, 2020 11:34 AM

International Product Highlights for the Week of October 12 – October 19, 2020:

1. ~~**(SBU)**~~ **EUvsDisinfo News and Analysis:**
   MH17, what happened since March?: According to EUvsDisinfo, there were 24 cases of disinformation about MH17 around the start of the trial on 9 March. It dropped a bit in April and May, with six and seven cases per month, respectively. In June and July, it peaked again with 17 and 18 cases, respectively. Then it dropped again in August and September (one case each month). It's hard to explain the June and July waves of cases exactly. Nothing happened publicly in the trial process in those months. **SOURCE:** EUvsDisinfo

2. ~~**(SBU)**~~ **DisinfoLab focused on tackling sophisticated disinformation campaigns targeting the EU, its member states, core institutions, and core values.**
   Shaping Europe's digital future, Second set of reports – Fighting COVID-19 disinformation Monitoring Program: The EU Commission publishes a further set of reports provided by the signatories of the Code of Practice on Disinformation as part of the COVID-19 monitoring and reporting program set out in the Joint Communication "Tackling COVID-19 disinformation - Getting the facts right." In general, the reports provide a good overview of actions taken by the platforms to address disinformation around COVID-19. However, there are still substantial gaps. In some instances, data has been provided at global,

rather than at EU or Member State level. In other instances, it is unclear whether the data provided relates to actions taken to address COVID-19 disinformation, or a broader range of objectives. SOURCE: https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/second-set-reports-fighting-covid-19-disinformation-monitoring-programme

3. ~~(FOUO)~~ **OSC Disinformation Digest:**
How Russia Today skirts high-tech blockade to reach US readers: RT continues to draw a large American audience, helped unwittingly by some of America's most prominent conservative websites. The reason: those news outlets agreed to join a distribution network that allows other members' content to be displayed on their home pages. The company responsible is Mixi.Media, which assembled a network of right-leaning publishers, including National Review, The Daily Caller and Newsmax, as well as mainstream sites like RealClearPolitics. Also in Mixi's fold are RT and Sputnik. Links that Mixi places on its partners' websites often appear under headings such as 'From Our Partners,' but the source isn't always clear until after the headline has been clicked. That is by design. Mixi is the largest source of RT's 'referral traffic' in the US, delivering 19% of visitors coming from other websites in July, not including social media.

4. ~~(FOUO)~~ **OSC Disinformation Digest:**
Removing coordinated inauthentic behavior on Facebook: Facebook has removed ten networks from various countries that were conducting coordinated inauthentic behavior. Targets included audiences in the US, Kenya, Botswana, Myanmar, Azerbaijan, Nigeria, Russia, the Philippines, South East Asia, Turkey, Syria, Ukraine, Japan, Armenia, Georgia, Belarus and Moldova. More than half of the networks targeted domestic audiences in their countries. Two of the networks engaged primarily in leaving comments on posts by media entities and public figures — relying on real people, not automation — to create the perception of wide-spread support of their narratives. *OSC comment: DFRLab, Graphika and the Stanford Internet Observatory carried out independent analysis of these networks.* **SOURCE:** Facebook

5. ~~(SBU)~~ **NATO Centre of Excellence StratCom: New Publication "Clarifying Digital Terms":** NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence has published a new report "Clarifying Digital Terms," created by the NATO StratCom COE Terminology Working Group. The purpose of this glossary is to encourage the use of precise and simple language that bridges the terminological divide between policymakers, soldiers, tech companies, academics, and programmers. It is at the intersection of their respective fields, that digitalization's potential for positive change as well as ensuing challenges can be recognized and addressed. Sharing a common vocabulary is the first step. This publication includes proposed definitions for terms like algorithm, artificial

intelligence, cyber, digital engagement, digital forensics and much more.
SOURCE: https://stratcomcoe.org/clarifying-digital-terms

International Products for the Week of 12 – October 19, 2020:

1. **EEAS Kyrgyz Republic Elections _ Statement by the Spokesperson on the latest developments**
2. **European External Action Service _ Russia_High Representative-Vice-President Josep Borrell speaks to Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov**
3. **European Union External Action _ Tajikistan_ Statement by the Spokesperson on the presidential elections**
4. **European Union External Action_Foreign Affairs Council _ Remarks by the High Representative at the press conference**
5. **IA-2020-00824 - ASFC Intelligence Analysis Update - 07-12 October 2020**
6. **OSC Disinformation Digest 14 October 2020**
7. **European Union External Action_Canada_ High Representative-Vice-President Borrell speaks to Foreign Affairs Minister Champagne**
8. **European Union External Action_Demonstrating Europe's commitment to Africa**
9. **European Union External Action_Kyrgyz Republic_Elections_Resignation of Kyrgyz President**
10. **European Union External Action_Ukraine_ Statement by the Spokesperson on the attempted conscription by Russia in Crimea**
11. **EUvsDisinfo Publication October 15_ Pro-Kremlin Disinformation Week**
12. **US Elections_With disclosure about his emails, the hunt for Hunter Biden has reopened**
13. **NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence _ Clarifying Digital Terms**
14. **EU DISINFO LAB_Second set of reports – Fighting COVID-19 disinformation Monitoring Program**

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

Sender: (b)(6) @state.gov>

Recipient: (b)(6) @state.gov>

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Heads up.
Date: Fri, 30 Oct 2020 14:36:12 +0000

Hey (b)(6)
Sorry to bother you, but apparently you wrote a piece on election security/Biden laptop misinformation. Forgive me if I have this wrong, but (b)(6) briefed it in this morning's meeting and the SE asked to see it right away.
Just thought you might want to know that whatever you wrote is getting some attention.
Hope all is well on the Russia Team. In other news.. I still don't know if they are ever going get me over there or not. After my positive interviews with (b)(6) said PPO was too shorthanded to let me go. .
Happy Halloween!

(b)(6)
Chief of Plans and Emerging Threats
Global Engagement Center (GEC)
Department of State

Office: UNCLASS (b)(6)
(b)(6) @state.gov | SIPR (b)(6) @state.sgov.gov |
JWICS (b)(6) @state.ic.gov

"Mission: To direct, lead, synchronize, integrate, and coordinate efforts of the Federal Government to recognize, understand, expose, and counter foreign state and foreign non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts aimed at undermining or influencing the policies, security, or stability of the United States, its allies, and partner nations. "

Sender: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Recipient: (b)(6) @state.gov>

From: "Gabrielle(Potts), Lea" <(b)(6))state.gov>
SentVia: (b)(6))state.gov>
To: Gabrielle(Potts), Lea (b)(6))state.gov>
Subject: GEC Weekly Operational Update Report 12.11.2020
Date: Fri, 11 Dec 2020 18:59:00 +0000

Colleagues,

Please find our GEC Weekly Operational Report below. I have also attached our abbreviated GEC Operations Update slides prepared for the Secretary, and the GEC reports referenced in the Operational Report.

Have a wonderful weekend.

Best,

Lea

Lea Gabrielle

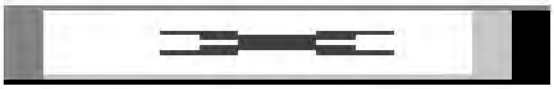
Special Envoy

Global Engagement Center

U.S. Department of State

(b)(6) @state.gov

From: Bray, Leah (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Friday, December 11, 2020 12:54 PM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>



12/11/2020

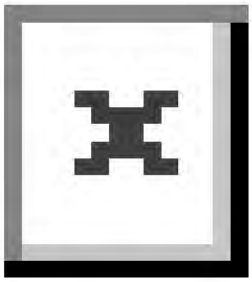
(U) Ongoing GEC Activities To Expose Propaganda and Disinformation.

(U) Countering Russian Disinformation.

- ~~(SBU)~~ **GEC-Supported Hybrid COE Leads Online Exercise for Pandemic Resilient Response 2020**. The European Center of Excellence (COE) for Countering Hybrid Threats in Helsinki, Finland, together with the Multinational Medical Coordination Centre/European Medical Command and the German Federal Office for Civil Protection and Disaster Relief, hosted the November 24-26 Resilient Response 2020 (RERE 2020) exercise. The RERE 2020 online pandemic response exercise allowed national teams to simulate protecting their populations from a novel virus, while simultaneously countering hybrid threats. **The exercise was designed and administered by** (b)(6) **a U.S. GEC sponsored employee to the Hybrid COE whose position of** (b)(6) (b)(6) **is funded by the GEC.**
  - ~~(SBU)~~ The exercise featured 12 national teams and representatives from EU, NATO, and EUCOM, with more than 120 participants across Europe. Teams designed and implemented strategies to overcome the pandemic and thwart hybrid threats using national and multilateral response options. Findings will be presented as part of Germany's EU Presidency conclusions, which will focus on COVID-19 and ways in which hybrid threats such as disinformation challenge resiliency.
  - ~~(SBU)~~ A post-exercise evaluation found that nations made good choices when encountering hybrid threats; however, many responses to disinformation were reactive, not proactive.
  - ~~(SBU)~~ The COE anticipates drafting a Strategic Analysis Paper by February 2021 on the wargame's outcomes that synergizes previous pandemic response exercises.

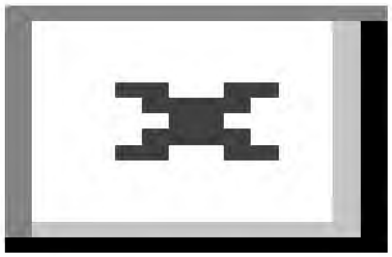
(U) Countering Iranian Disinformation.

- ~~(SBU)~~ **GEC Partner Podcast Series Tops Persian Language Downloads.** *Short and Sweet* is a multimedia production about world politics that includes audio podcasts and supporting YouTube videos. **It is now the most downloaded Persian-language educational podcast on iTunes, outpacing even BBC Persian.** *Short and Sweet* works to provide audiences a more comprehensive view of the world today. Topping the ratings in this way demonstrates the value and impact of GEC-supported programs in the region.



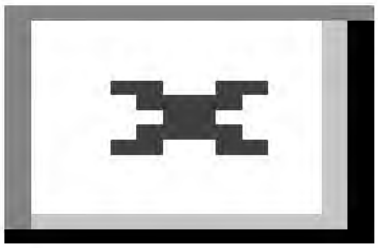
(U) Image of "Short and Sweet" podcast cover.

- ~~(SBU)~~ **GEC-Partner Broadcast Exposes Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Use of Child Soldiers.** Following reports of child fighters dying in Deir ez-Zor Province, TV program ***Political Depth*** **discussed the IRGC's practice of recruiting Syrian children into the militias it sponsors.** Program guests explained that Iran's longstanding use of child soldiers in Syria had become more widespread in the past 2 years, as impoverished parents increasingly "are forced to accept the recruitment of their children," and that only in Somalia is child recruitment more common than in Syria.
  - ~~(SBU)~~ **In addition to airing on TV, the episode was published on Halab Today's website, Facebook page (4.2 million followers), and YouTube channel (300k subscribers).**
  - (U) In a similar vein, another outlet reported on its Facebook page about the Fatemiyoun Brigade's announcement that it had recruited a new batch of child soldiers, and a third outlet published several photographs documenting the Iranian militia presence in eastern Syria, including images of child soldiers.



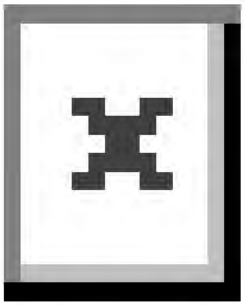
(U) Image from an interview on the "Political Depth" broadcast.

- ~~(SBU)~~ **GEC Partner Reports on Iranian Militias Spreading COVID-19 in Syria.** Ibrahim Al-Idlibi, a prominent media figure in the Syrian opposition, **gave an interview to *Al-Arabiya Al-Hadath*, during which he explained how the Iranian militia presence in Northwest Syria had exacerbated the COVID-19 epidemic in Syria.** He pointed out that fighters regularly cross into Syria and that the first cases of the disease in Syria emerged in regions where there is a heavy Iranian militia presence. He added that Syrian regime and Iranian militia strikes had displaced thousands of civilians into Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps, where cramped conditions and limited access to sanitary facilities have contributed to the spread of COVID-19.



(U) Image from Interview about Iranian role in COVID-19 spread in Syria.

- ~~(SBU)~~ **Great Iranian Firewall?** Regime hardliners and modernizers continue to struggle over whether to take additional steps to restrict access to the Internet. This GEC partner's cartoon depicts a regime hardliner coming to the realization that the Iranian voices seeking factual information and demanding their right to free expressions are too numerous to silence.



(U) Image caption: What? We cannot make them all shut up!

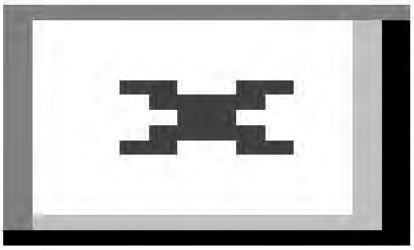
- ~~(SBU)~~ **GEC Pushed Digital Media Messaging in Arab Media To Highlight Iranian Malign Influence.** The GEC acquired and pushed 11 unique video clips to Arabic media the week of November 29 to counter Iranian disinformation and propaganda in the Middle East.
    - (U) Arab audiences who saw these news broadcasts mostly saw content that highlighted:
        - ~~(SBU)~~ Hizballah drug smuggling in southern Syria.
        - ~~(SBU)~~ Lebanese protests condemning Hizballah's lack of prosecution despite being involved in the Beirut port explosion.
        - ~~(SBU)~~ Public doubt that Iran would be able to fulfill its promise to respond to Mohsen Fakhrizadeh's death.
        - ~~(SBU)~~ Iranian mines interfering with Iraqi agriculture.
        - ~~(SBU)~~ Criticisms of Houthi control of Yemen's Central Bank.
        - ~~(SBU)~~ Children killed by the Houthis in Yemen.
    - ~~(SBU)~~ The 11 video clips appeared 26 times on Arabic network television, including broadcasts by MENA TV, Al Hadath, Al Ghad Al Arabi, Rudaw, Al Jazeera, Belqees TV, and Roya, reaching a broad viewership base in the Middle East.

(U) Undermining and Exposing Terrorists.

- ~~(SBU)~~ **GEC Partner Broadcasts to Millions About ISIS Depravity and Community Resilience.** From November 19 to December 3, large regional Arabic television stations Sky News Arabia, Al-Arabiya, and Al-Hadath – as well as MENA TV, Al-Tagheer and Al-Ghad Al-Arabi – broadcast 8 previously produced media clips 34 times through the Digital Media Services (DMS) capability.
    - (U) Audiences viewing the broadcasts saw content highlighting:

- ~~(SBU)~~ Kurdish forces rescuing children of ISIS-linked parents.
- ~~(SBU)~~ A Syrian teacher's story of almost being executed by ISIS.
- ~~(SBU)~~ A mother still awaiting the return of her son who was kidnapped by ISIS 5 years ago.
- ~~(SBU)~~ Mosul youths rebuilding a church in their community.
- ~~(SBU)~~ ISF forces hunting down ISIS remnants along the Tigris river.
- ~~(SBU)~~ Iraqi military officials discussing intelligence operations to keep track of ISIS in western Iraq.
- ~~(SBU)~~ The Global Coalition vowing to help local forces fight ISIS in Syria.

o ~~(SBU)~~ These video clips support GEC's efforts to degrade the ISIS brand by providing fact-based, non-USG reporting on local perceptions of ISIS focused on events in Iraq and Syria. **The DMS produced-content from the 2-week period reached audiences through broadcasts on Sky News Arabia, which claims to have a viewership of 50 million, and Al-Arabiya and Al-Hadath, whose live stream broadcasts on YouTube reach a combined audience of about 10 million.**

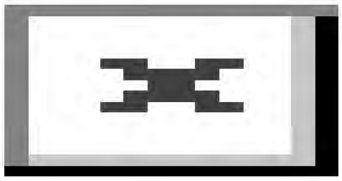


~~(SBU)~~ A Syrian teacher nearly executed by ISIS shares his experience. Aired by MENA TV on November 16.

(U) Countering CCP Disinformation.

- **(U) GEC Coordinates 15 Country Virtual Counter Foreign Interference Summit.**
  - (U) GEC Special Envoy Lea Gabrielle helped open the second iteration of the Australia-led Counter Foreign Interference Summit (vCFI) along with her Australian counterpart.
  - (U) The U.S. Department of Justice led the U.S. delegation consisting of representatives from across the interagency to this 2-day gathering of 15 like-minded countries plus the EU.
  - (U) Day one of vCFI offered participating governments insights from leading think tanks on trends in foreign interference, how to identify when influence moves into interference, and perspectives on direct political interference from threat actors.
  - (U) Day two moved into a robust discussion among participant states on arriving at common definitions of terms, principles and best practices and offered updates

from the Summit's working groups that have been meeting over the past several months in advance of the Summit.



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(b)(5) DPP

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Best regards,
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FL-2023-00013 A-
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"UNCLASSIFIED"
05/30/2025 Page 142

مجسمو مفید

با اردشیر طیبی

إعلام محلي
إيران تجند الأطفال ضمن صفوف ميليشياتها شرق سوريا
العمق السياسي

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MENA
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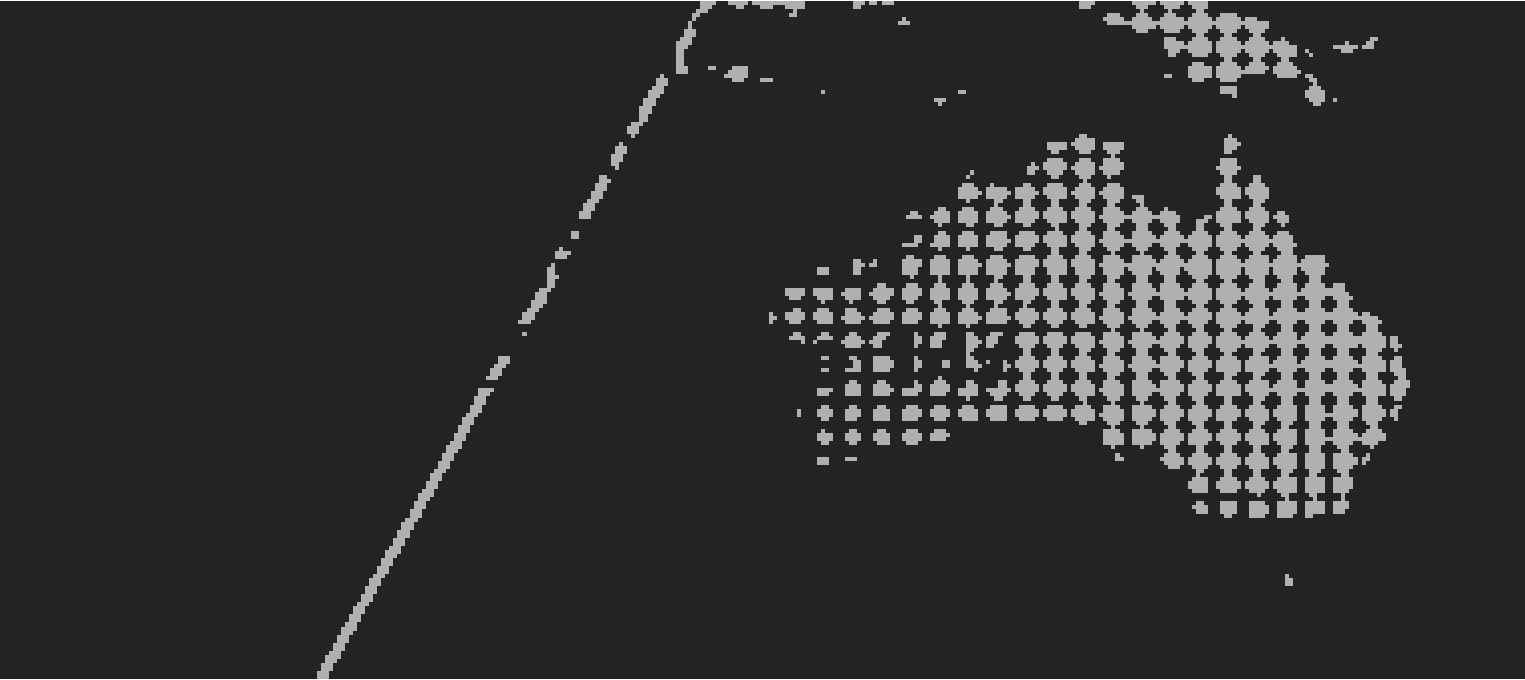

From: (b)(6)

SentVia:

To: addressees @State.gov, military and other agencies

CC: (b)(6)

(b)(6)

State.gov and military addressees

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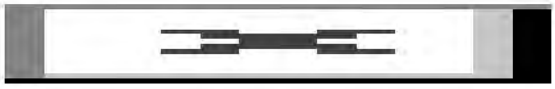
Subject: GEC Weekly Operational Update Report 12.11.2020

Date: Fri, 11 Dec 2020 17:54:15 +0000



12/11/2020

Colleagues,

(U) Ongoing GEC Activities To Expose Propaganda and Disinformation.

(U) Countering Russian Disinformation.

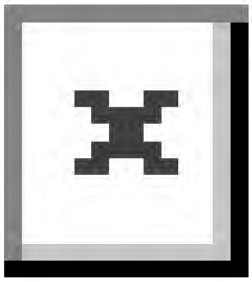
- ~~(SBU)~~ **GEC-Supported Hybrid COE Leads Online Exercise for Pandemic Resilient Response 2020**. The European Center of Excellence (COE) for Countering Hybrid Threats in Helsinki, Finland, together with the Multinational Medical Coordination Centre/European Medical Command and the German Federal Office for Civil Protection and Disaster Relief, hosted the November 24-26 Resilient Response 2020 (RERE 2020) exercise. The RERE 2020 online pandemic response exercise allowed national teams to simulate protecting their populations from a novel virus, while simultaneously countering hybrid threats. **The exercise was designed and administered by Shiho Rybski, a U.S. GEC sponsored employee to the Hybrid COE whose position of Director of Training and Exercises is funded by the GEC.**
  - ~~(SBU)~~ The exercise featured 12 national teams and representatives from EU, NATO, and EUCOM, with more than 120 participants across Europe. Teams

designed and implemented strategies to overcome the pandemic and thwart hybrid threats using national and multilateral response options. Findings will be presented as part of Germany's EU Presidency conclusions, which will focus on COVID-19 and ways in which hybrid threats such as disinformation challenge resiliency.

- ~~(SBU)~~ A post-exercise evaluation found that nations made good choices when encountering hybrid threats; however, many responses to disinformation were reactive, not proactive.
- ~~(SBU)~~ The COE anticipates drafting a Strategic Analysis Paper by February 2021 on the wargame's outcomes that synergizes previous pandemic response exercises.

(U) Countering Iranian Disinformation.

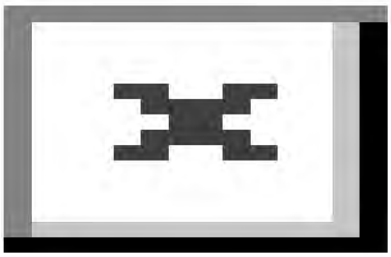
- ~~(SBU)~~ **GEC Partner Podcast Series Tops Persian Language Downloads.** *Short and Sweet* is a multimedia production about world politics that includes audio podcasts and supporting YouTube videos. **It is now the most downloaded Persian-language educational podcast on iTunes, outpacing even BBC Persian.** *Short and Sweet* works to provide audiences a more comprehensive view of the world today. Topping the ratings in this way demonstrates the value and impact of GEC-supported programs in the region.



(U) Image of "Short and Sweet" podcast cover.

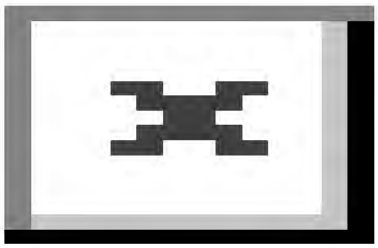
- ~~(SBU)~~ **GEC-Partner Broadcast Exposes Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Use of Child Soldiers.** Following reports of child fighters dying in Deir ez-Zor Province, TV program ***Political Depth*** **discussed the IRGC's practice of recruiting Syrian children into the militias it sponsors.** Program guests explained that Iran's longstanding use of child soldiers in Syria had become more widespread in the past 2 years, as impoverished parents increasingly "are forced to accept the recruitment of their children," and that only in Somalia is child recruitment more common than in Syria.
  - ~~(SBU)~~ **In addition to airing on TV, the episode was published on Halab Today's website, Facebook page (4.2 million followers), and YouTube channel (300k subscribers).**

- (U) In a similar vein, another outlet reported on its Facebook page about the Fatemiyoun Brigade's announcement that it had recruited a new batch of child soldiers, and a third outlet published several photographs documenting the Iranian militia presence in eastern Syria, including images of child soldiers.



(U) Image from an interview on the "Political Depth" broadcast.

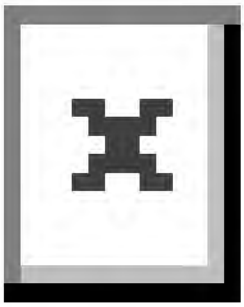
- ~~(SBU)~~ **GEC Partner Reports on Iranian Militias Spreading COVID-19 in Syria.** Ibrahim Al-Idlibi, a prominent media figure in the Syrian opposition, **gave an interview to *Al-Arabiya Al-Hadath*, during which he explained how the Iranian militia presence in Northwest Syria had exacerbated the COVID-19 epidemic in Syria.** He pointed out that fighters regularly cross into Syria and that the first cases of the disease in Syria emerged in regions where there is a heavy Iranian militia presence. He added that Syrian regime and Iranian militia strikes had displaced thousands of civilians into Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps, where cramped conditions and limited access to sanitary facilities have contributed to the spread of COVID-19.



(U) Image from Interview about Iranian role in COVID-19 spread in Syria.

- ~~(SBU)~~ **Great Iranian Firewall?** Regime hardliners and modernizers continue to struggle over whether to take additional steps to restrict access to the Internet. This GEC partner's cartoon depicts a regime hardliner coming to the realization that the Iranian

voices seeking factual information and demanding their right to free expressions are too numerous to silence.



(U) Image caption: What? We cannot make them all shut up!

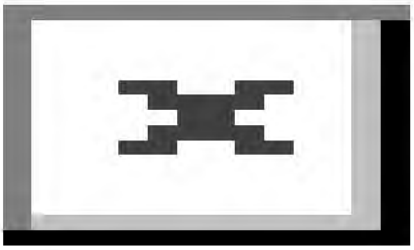
- ~~(SBU)~~ **GEC Pushed Digital Media Messaging in Arab Media To Highlight Iranian Malign Influence.** The GEC acquired and pushed 11 unique video clips to Arabic media the week of November 29 to counter Iranian disinformation and propaganda in the Middle East.
    - (U) Arab audiences who saw these news broadcasts mostly saw content that highlighted:
        - ~~(SBU)~~ Hizballah drug smuggling in southern Syria.
        - ~~(SBU)~~ Lebanese protests condemning Hizballah's lack of prosecution despite being involved in the Beirut port explosion.
        - ~~(SBU)~~ Public doubt that Iran would be able to fulfill its promise to respond to Mohsen Fakhrizadeh's death.
        - ~~(SBU)~~ Iranian mines interfering with Iraqi agriculture.
        - ~~(SBU)~~ Criticisms of Houthi control of Yemen's Central Bank.
        - ~~(SBU)~~ Children killed by the Houthis in Yemen.
    - ~~(SBU)~~ The 11 video clips appeared 26 times on Arabic network television, including broadcasts by MENA TV, Al Hadath, Al Ghad Al Arabi, Rudaw, Al Jazeera, Belqees TV, and Roya, reaching a broad viewership base in the Middle East.

(U) Undermining and Exposing Terrorists.

- ~~(SBU)~~ **GEC Partner Broadcasts to Millions About ISIS Depravity and Community Resilience.** From November 19 to December 3, large regional Arabic television stations Sky News Arabia, Al-Arabiya, and Al-Hadath – as well as MENA TV, Al-Tagheer and Al-Ghad Al-Arabi – broadcast 8 previously produced media clips 34 times through the Digital Media Services (DMS) capability.
    - (U) Audiences viewing the broadcasts saw content highlighting:

- ~~(SBU)~~ Kurdish forces rescuing children of ISIS-linked parents.
- ~~(SBU)~~ A Syrian teacher's story of almost being executed by ISIS.
- ~~(SBU)~~ A mother still awaiting the return of her son who was kidnapped by ISIS 5 years ago.
- ~~(SBU)~~ Mosul youths rebuilding a church in their community.
- ~~(SBU)~~ ISF forces hunting down ISIS remnants along the Tigris river.
- ~~(SBU)~~ Iraqi military officials discussing intelligence operations to keep track of ISIS in western Iraq.
- ~~(SBU)~~ The Global Coalition vowing to help local forces fight ISIS in Syria.

o ~~(SBU)~~ These video clips support GEC's efforts to degrade the ISIS brand by providing fact-based, non-USG reporting on local perceptions of ISIS focused on events in Iraq and Syria. **The DMS produced-content from the 2-week period reached audiences through broadcasts on Sky News Arabia, which claims to have a viewership of 50 million, and Al-Arabiya and Al-Hadath, whose live stream broadcasts on YouTube reach a combined audience of about 10 million.**



~~(SBU)~~ A Syrian teacher nearly executed by ISIS shares his experience. Aired by MENA TV on November 16.

(U) Countering CCP Disinformation.

- **(U) GEC Coordinates 15 Country Virtual Counter Foreign Interference Summit.**
  - (U) GEC Special Envoy Lea Gabrielle helped open the second iteration of the Australia-led Counter Foreign Interference Summit (vCFI) along with her Australian counterpart.
  - (U) The U.S. Department of Justice led the U.S. delegation consisting of representatives from across the interagency to this 2-day gathering of 15 like-minded countries plus the EU.
  - (U) Day one of vCFI offered participating governments insights from leading think tanks on trends in foreign interference, how to identify when influence moves into interference, and perspectives on direct political interference from threat actors.
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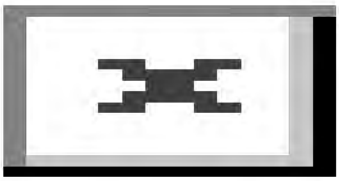

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To: (b)(6)

State.gov and military addressees

CC:

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state.gov and other agency addressees

Subject: GEC Weekly Operational Update Report 11.13.2020

Date: Fri, 13 Nov 2020 14:44:38 +0000

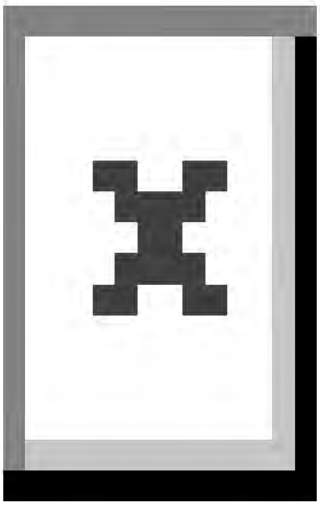
11/13/2020

Colleagues,

(U) Ongoing GEC Activities to Expose Propaganda and Disinformation.

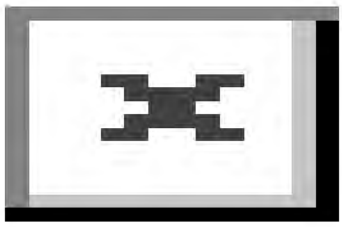
(U) Countering Russian Disinformation.

- **(U)** ***Russian Pillars Report*** **Featured in Leading UK Newspaper.** The UK-based newspaper *The Times* ran a frontpage article on the British government's cyberwar against anti-vaccine Russian propaganda, citing the GEC's *Pillars of Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem* report and highlighting three proxy sites mentioned in the *Pillars* report: SouthFront, News Front, and Geopolitica.ru.
  - **(U) The author of the article, Lucy Fisher, promoted the article and the** ***Pillars Report*** **in tweets, which included in a link to the report.**



(U) Countering Iranian Disinformation.

- ~~(SBU)~~ **A GEC Partner Exposes Tehran's Laissez-faire Approach to COVID-19**. The two-minute video, produced by a GEC partner and viewable on YouTube, reveals the scale of the epidemic within Iran's borders and highlights the Iranian regime's focus on detaining those accused of spreading "rumors" about the disease rather than working on pandemic mitigation efforts. **The video also showed how militia fighters deployed to Syria, many of whom disregarded health precautions, were spreading the illness. 1,600 of 6,200 YouTube views in the first two days came from people who searched for "Hizballah" in Arabic; 73 percent of those who did that search watched the video.** The video was also published on three other platforms. View COVID-19 video in English here.



(U) Image from the video depicting COVID-19 infected Shia Pilgrims and militia fighters traveling to Qom, Iran.

(U) Undermining and Exposing Terrorists.

- ~~(SBU)~~ **Pro-ISIS *Rocket.Chat* Channel Urges Renewed Allegiance for ISIS Emir.** The Counter Extremism Project (CEP), an international non-partisan think tank, identified the post (made initially on October 23), which called on ISIS supporters to renew their pledge of allegiance to Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Quraishi. The *Rocket.Chat* channel stated that video and audio pledges to ISIS would be published on Telegram and other platforms to showcase the group's strength.
    - ~~(SBU)~~ **Since the September 17 launch of the GEC lead al-Mawla CONOP, ISIS has increased its requests for online pledges. It is the GEC's assessment that this is an attempt to rebuild lost credibility resulting from the CONOP's release of damaging interrogation reports.**

(U) Countering CCP Disinformation.

- **(U) The GEC Facilitates Coordination between Australia, New Zealand, and the United States on Building Journalism Capacity in the Pacific Islands.** As part of the GEC's efforts to work with America's allies and partners to confront disinformation and propaganda, the GEC facilitated the first meeting between the State Department, Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade to share information on journalism capacity-building programs across the Pacific Islands.
    - (U) The representatives agreed to develop a framework for de-conflicting activities moving forward. To facilitate that effort, the GEC has generated a catalog of ongoing media support activities conducted by the three countries. This deconfliction effort seeks to maximize the impact and reach of programming by the U.S. and its allies to bolster Pacific Islands media against foreign influence and to avoid over-burdening small media outlets.
    - (U) The group agreed to meet on a quarterly basis moving forward to advance coordination and collaboration to counter disinformation in the Pacific Islands. This effort is an off-shoot of the U.S.-Australia Disinformation Working Group first announced this Summer at the Australia-United States Ministerial Consultation.

(U) Additional Significant GEC Activities.

- **(U) On November 6, the GEC and DHS's Online Counter Disinformation Game, Harmony Square, was Reviewed Positively in the Harvard Misinformation Review.**
  - **(U) Within four days of the announcement of research by the** Harvard Misinformation Review**, the game gained over 23,000 players.** The game has received extensive media coverage with over 60 articles resulting from Harvard's review and an earlier press release from Cambridge University.
  - (U) The peer reviewed research found that the game increased psychological resistance against manipulation techniques commonly used in political misinformation. Drawing on "inoculation theory," the game functions as a psychological "vaccine" by exposing people to weakened doses of the common techniques used in political misinformation especially during elections.
  - (U) GEC introduced DHS to the game concept during a GEC Tech Demo in 2019. As a result, GEC and DHS partnered with the game developer DROG to develop what eventually became Harmony Square.
  - (U) The GEC will conduct an international rollout of the game in coming weeks, while DHS is finalizing its preparations for a domestic rollout.

- **(U) The GEC Announces Election-related Assistance to Ecuador.** At the November 10 U.S.-Ecuador Bilateral Expanded Political Dialogue, Special Envoy Lea Gabrielle announced that the GEC would provide training to the Ecuadorians in preparation for their upcoming elections.
  - **(U) The GEC will conduct training on its collaborative analytics platform, GEC-IQ, as well as disinformation and propaganda-related training for Ecuadorian government communicators and analysts.** These training events are scheduled to take place before the end of the year.
  - (U) Ecuador has been the victim of previous coordinated disinformation campaigns, most recently surrounding its response to COVID-19. The GEC's assistance will help enable the conduct of free and fair elections while blunting the impact that disinformation and adversarial propaganda may have on the electoral outcome.

- **(U) The GEC's Principal Deputy Coordinator (PDC) Daniel Kimmage Spoke to Thousands of Tech Sector Participants at the November 9 Africa Tech Festival Panel.** His participation was in support of the GEC's upcoming U.S.-Africa Tech Challenge.
  - (U) PDC Kimmage spoke about the GEC and highlighted the U.S.-Africa Tech Challenge while providing the GEC's perspective on how technology has an impact on disinformation and counter-disinformation efforts. He emphasized that private industry should work with the GEC to develop tools to alert users on disinformation campaigns.
  - **(U) After the Tech Festival, panel member Emmanuel Lubanzadio, Twitter's Head of Public Policy for Sub-Saharan Africa expressed interest in participating in the GEC's upcoming Africa Tech Challenge.**

- **(U) On November 5, the GEC Briefed its Technology Programs at the DOD's Information Conflict Technical Exchange Meeting.** The meeting was hosted by the Joint Information Operations Warfare Center.
    - (U) The purpose of this government-only meeting was to bring together Military Services, Service Labs, Government Agencies, federally funded research and development centers, and University Affiliated Research Centers which are currently working on programs or research relevant to Information Operations.
    - (U) The GEC used the event to promote its technology programs, with the goal of eliciting additional DOD participation from the 100+ personnel at the meeting.
        - (U) Numerous DOD partners contacted the GEC after the event to request participation.

- **(U) The GEC's Disinfocloud.com (1163 users) Platform Informs the Interagency and Foreign Government Partners about Technology Capabilities and Assessments of Tools to Counter Propaganda and Disinformation (CPD).** Visit the following links for the latest Disinfo Cloud social media postings on Twitter, LinkedIn, the Disinfo Cloud blog, and the Disinfo Cloud Newsfeed. Posts by Disinfo Cloud this week include:
    - (U) As a follow-up to the March 2019 Weapons of Mass Destruction report; Disinfo Cloud is publishing a series of blog posts that highlight recent foreign state-sponsored disinformation and propaganda efforts; explore how governments and intergovernmental bodies are responding to the challenge; highlight what social media platforms are doing as well as activities by civil society and independent organizations; and spotlight tools and technologies that can be leveraged to address the threat.
        - (U) The fourth post on actions by social media platforms to combat disinformation will be published later this week.
    - (U) Disinfo Cloud's weekly disinfo news round-up summarizes publicly available content featured on the Disinfo Cloud newsfeed. This week Disinfo Cloud included the following news highlights:
        - (U) After playing the game Harmony Square, gamers/users had a positive change of behavior. They found misinformation significantly less reliable, are significantly more confident in their assessment of misinformation, and are significantly less likely to share misinformation. Harmony Square is a free online game aimed at inoculating people against online manipulation.
        - (U) The number of Russians who trust television as a source of information has dropped to 23 percent. Russians have become more aware that Russian-state affiliated media has a role in spreading disinformation. PRC influence operations on Twitter have limited impact largely due to poor messaging and network coordination, although new technologies and platforms such as YouTube might offer greater results.

(U) Current Observations and Analysis.

- ~~(SBU)~~ **The GEC Monitors for Foreign Disinformation During the U.S. 2020 Election.** The GEC conducted select monitoring of the overseas information environment for Russian, Iranian, and PRC disinformation. Russian state and proxy media outlets engaged in clear amplification of inflammatory, anti-U.S. themes.
    - ~~(SBU)~~ For example, throughout U.S. elections week, RT and Sputnik continuously promoted through videos and online articles claims of election fraud, protests, and the potential for post-election violence or a "coup" in the United States.
    - ~~(SBU)~~ As the election results started to shift toward former Vice President Joe Biden, RT, Sputnik, and Iranian media began publishing more articles claiming that "the U.S. is broken either way." Russians used third-party influencers and proxy websites such as SouthFront and Global Research to cover election fraud and anti-U.S. "coup" narratives.

- **(U) ISIS Supporters React to U.S. Elections.** Several pro-ISIS channels on Telegram commented on the results of the U.S. elections. A post by *2020 Course of Event* said that regardless of who wins the election, jihadis should be ready "to fight Biden's army or Trump's army." Another post on the same channel asked followers to provide speeches of jihadi leaders who discussed the significance of jihad against America, including clips that document operations in the U.S., specifically killing. Another ISIS supporter posted on Telegram he hoped Trump's rejection of Biden's victory would lead to a U.S. civil war while another pro-ISIS Telegram channel predicted Biden will win the U.S. elections.
    - (U) Pro-ISIS supporters continue to respond to direction given in a recent speech by ISIS spokesman, Abu Hamzah Al-Qurashi, calling supporters worldwide to carry out attacks and to also add their own messages encouraging others to do the same. In the same speech, al-Qurashi told fighters in various ISIS provinces to increase their efforts and attacks, and when referring to Iraq, he predicted U.S. forces will soon leave the country, enabling ISIS to advance against the Iraqi army.

- **(U) The GEC Finds That Global Twitter Conversations and Global Media Outside of China Largely Favored Pro-Democracy Protestors in Hong Kong.** On November 5, the GEC published two reports that found that both global Twitter conversations and global media outside of China largely favored the pro-democracy protestors and criticized Beijing's erosion of Hong Kong's autonomy in the months following Beijing's enactment of China's National Security Law for Hong Kong on June 30.
    - (U) The reports also evaluated receptivity to CCP propaganda on Hong Kong within Hong Kong. Analysis showed that Twitter users self-locating in Hong Kong amplified the announcement of U.S. sanctions against Chief Executive Carrie Lam and other Hong Kong and PRC officials. Hong Kong users also expressed concern that the National Security Law would erode fundamental rights and liberties. Articles in Hong Kong that endorsed sanctions on Chief Executive Lam for using excessive police force were shared at higher volumes than articles from CCP-linked outlets like *East Week*, which claimed the United

States had meddled in Beijing's affairs by supporting protesters in Hong Kong and monitoring Hong Kong's online network systems.

- **(U) The GEC Makes its Vaccine Coverage Estimation Model Available to the Department of State.** All DOS employees can now view the **Vaccine Coverage Estimation Model (V-CEM)** dashboard without logging into GEC-IQ. A future iteration of the dashboard will be available for non-DOS government users on a needed basis.
    - (U) The V-CEM dashboard, which was built by the GEC, is a near real time, global monitoring capability for estimating the tone and volume of media coverage regarding top vaccine development efforts and long-term trends of structural relations with the U.S., China, and Russia. V-CEM gathers global news coverage in over 50+ languages from approximately 172 countries. These stories are then analyzed based on their volume and tone on the leading global vaccine development efforts.
    - (U) DOS employees can access the dashboard if already logged into OpenNet by going to the website https://tahleauenterprise.geciq.com/ or by logging in through Okta (the State Department's secure platform for accessing cloud applications) with their OpenNet credentials or PIV/CAC card reader. Once on the Okta homepage, click on the **GEC-IQ Tableau** button to launch Tableau Enterprise, search for "vaccine" and view the dashboard.

(U) In closing, thank you for your close collaboration with the GEC team. Our success is made possible only by the great colleagues we have in State, the interagency, and our international partnerships. We will continue to release these reports on a bi-weekly basis. Please contact the GEC's Acting PPO Director (b)(6) **@state.gov** if we can be of any assistance.

Best regards,
Leah Bray
Deputy Coordinator for Policy, Plans, and Operations

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

Addressees same as on first 5 pages

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(U) Global Engagement Center Operations Update

December 11, 2020

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

(U) GEC Partner Podcast Series Tops Persian Language Downloads

~~(SBU)~~ **GEC-sponsored production on world politics is most downloaded Persian educational podcast.**

- ~~(SBU)~~ *Short and Sweet* is a multimedia production series about world politics, that includes audio podcasts and supporting YouTube videos. **It is now the most downloaded Persian-language educational podcast on iTunes, outpacing even BBC Persian.**
- ~~(SBU)~~ Short and Sweet works to provide audiences a more comprehensive view of the world ~~today.(SBU)~~ Topping the ratings in this way demonstrates the value and impact of GEC-supported programs in the region.

(U) Image of "Short and Sweet" podcast cover.

~~(SBU)~~ GEC Delivers Key Training in Lead-Up to Ecuador Elections

~~(SBU)~~ GEC trains Ecuadorian government officials to use GEC data sharing platform in support of fair elections in 2021.

- ~~(SBU)~~ On December 2, the GEC delivered training on GEC-Insights Quantified (GEC-IQ), the GEC's online collaborative analytics, coordination, cooperation, and data-sharing platform. ~~(SBU)~~ The training supports Ecuadorian counter-disinformation and counter-adversarial propaganda efforts in advance of the February 2021 elections for president and National Assembly members.

- ~~(SBU)~~ The delivery of this training prior to the end of CY 2020 was a key deliverable in the U.S.-Ecuador Bilateral Expanded Political Dialogue. ~~(SBU)~~ The GEC is planning further engagements, including collaborative analysis, training, and technical assistance, in advance of the upcoming elections in Ecuador.

(U) Image of Ecuador Public Service Ad urging people to vote.

~~(SBU)~~ GEC Provides Thought Leadership for European Pandemic and Disinformation Exercise

~~(SBU)~~ GEC-supported partner Hybrid Center of Excellence (COE) leads online exercise for pandemic response.

- ~~(SBU)~~ (b)(6) working for the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats in Helsinki, Finland, designed and administered the November 24-26 Resilient Response 2020 (RERE 20) exercise. ~~(SBU)~~ RERE 2020 was an online pandemic response exercise allowing 12 teams from across the EU, NATO, and EUCOM to try to simulate protecting their populations from a novel virus while simultaneously countering hybrid threats. The exercise was co-hosted by the Multinational Medical Coordination Centre/ European Medical Command and the German Federal Office for Civil Protection and Disaster Relief.
- ~~(SBU)~~ A post-exercise evaluation found that nations made good choices when encountering hybrid threats, but many responses to disinformation were reactionary, not proactive.

Hybrid CoE

(U) Hybrid COE branding.

(U) The GEC Supports Coordination on Disinformation in the Pacific

(U) GEC-coordinated virtual Counter Foreign Interference (vCFI) summit yields robust discussion among nations.

- (U) GEC Special Envoy Gabrielle helped open the second iteration of the Australia-led Counter Foreign Interference Summit along with her Australian counterpart. (U) The U.S. Department of Justice led the U.S. delegation consisting of representatives from across the interagency to this 2-day gathering of 15 like-minded countries plus the EU. (U) Day one of vCFI offered participating governments insights from leading think tanks on trends in foreign interference, how to identify when influence moves into interference, and perspectives on direct political interference from threat actors.

- (U) Day two moved into a robust discussion among participant states on common definitions of terms, principles, and best practices and offered updates from the Summit's working groups that have been meeting over the past several months in advance of the Summit.

(U) Image from vCFI Summit Promotional Material.

~~SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED~~

GEC I2C2 Weekly Action Review: October 13 – 19 October, 2020

COMMUNICATE:

GEC I2C2 Met With CYBERCOM J35 To Discuss Collaboration: On 13 Oct, the GEC LNO to CYBERCOM met with J35's (b)(6) at Fort Meade to discuss opportunities for collaboration between the GEC and CYBERCOM, how collaboration was handled in the past and how more can be done better in the future.

The Dutch Shared Internal News Media Article with I2C2 on the Bidens' Implications in Ukraine and Impact on US Elections: On 15 September, Guus van Zwoll, Senior Policy Officer, Task Force International Cyber Policies, shared with I2C2 International Partner Engagement Planner an article on the Bidens' implication in Ukraine, and the authenticity of their involvement. The share is unique as it was flagged by our Dutch partner as a potential Hack and Leak, and covered by *Trouw*, a prominent Dutch daily newspaper. I2C2 forwarded the story to GEC elections team, and pertinent threat teams.

~~(SBU)~~ **I2C2 Shared Resilience Support Project Reports with the US Embassy, The Hague:** On 16 October, the I2C2 International Partner Engagement Planner participated in a virtual meeting with (b)(6) Office of Political and Economic Affairs, U.S. Embassy, The Hague, and the Cyber/Digital Policy Officer and lead on disinformation/related topics. The I2C2 International Partner Engagement Planner forwarded the DHS/CISA Strategic Communications Plan, as well as the reporting from the RSP Slovakia Project in response to a request by (b)(6) in an earlier meeting. The I2C2 Elections Planner is working to obtain a one-pager outlining the details of RSPM for the US Embassy, The Hague. The effort is appreciated, is believed will be helpful in a forthcoming meeting with the Dutch on information sharing, CPD, and US and Dutch elections in March.

COORDINATE:

~~(SBU)~~ **I2C2 Facilitates Meeting between the GEC and OSE's China Teams:** On 16 October, I2C2 facilitated a meeting with the GEC and the Open Source Center's (OSE) China Team to best collaborate on future programs and analysis. OSE shared its current and future programmatic focuses and its ability to identify narratives in Chinese media and answered questions pertaining to their foreign media coverage supporting GEC programs. I2C2 will work with OSE's Identifying Foreign Influence Team to schedule follow-on meeting between the two organizations.

~~(SBU)~~ **GEC I2C2 Meets with CYBERCOM J35 to Discuss Collaboration**: On 13 October, GEC's LNO to CYBERCOM met with J35's (b)(6) at Fort Meade to discuss collaboration between the GEC and CYBERCOM, how this has been done in the past, and how we can do this more and better in the future.

~~(SBU)~~ **The Dutch Shared Internal News Media Article with I2C2 on the Bidens' Implications in Ukraine and Impact on US Elections**: On 15 October, Guus van Zwoll, Senior

Policy Officer, Task Force International Cyber Policies, shared with I2C2 International Partner Engagement Planner an article on the Bidens' implication in Ukraine, and the authenticity of their involvement. The share is unique as it was flagged by our Dutch partner as a potential Hack and Leak, and covered by *Trouw*, a prominent Dutch daily newspaper. I2C2 forwarded the story to GEC elections team, and pertinent threat teams.

~~(SBU)~~ **I2C2 Shared Resilience Support Project Reports with the US Embassy, The Hague:** On 16 October, as a follow-up to a virtual meeting with (b)(6) Office of Political and Economic Affairs, U.S. Embassy, The Hague, and the Cyber/Digital Policy Officer and lead on disinformation/related topics, and per (b)(6) request, I2C2 International Partner Engagement Planner forwarded the DHS/CISA Strategic Communications Plan, as well as the reporting from the RSP Slovakia Project. Meanwhile, I2C2 Elections Planner is working to get a one-pager outlining the details of RSPM for the US Embassy, The Hague. (b)(6) appreciates this effort, as he believes it will be useful, and helpful in his forthcoming meeting with the Dutch on information-sharing, CPD, and US and Dutch elections in March.

CONVENE:

~~(SBU)~~ **I2C2 facilitates GEC support to interagency and academic election war rooms:** On 16 October, inn support of GEC election security efforts, I2C2 facilitated several meetings with both the interagency and academic community to offer support to their respective election war rooms. In the coming week a plan will be solidified for GEC assistance in monitoring disinformation and misinformation in the lead up to and the days following the election.

LOOK AHEAD:

I2C2 CYBERCOM LNO
On 20 Oct 20,(b)(6) meeting with TET (JD Maddox) and USAF Blue Horizons team at HST to discuss overlap and potential collaboration (Blue Horizons is a USAF think-tank/prototype team tasked with rapidly leveraging commercial/government capahilities to address a current mission critical challenge). The focus of this team (led by (b)(6) (b)(6) is looking at how can the USAF leverage capabilities in Air, Space, Cyber to uniquely deter, disrupt, or deny state-sponsored disinformation campaigns threatening US national security.

I2C2 OSE LNO:
On 20 Oct 20, (b)(6) meeting with TET (JD Maddox) and USAF Blue Horizons team at HST to discuss overlap and potential collaboration (Blue Horizons is a USAF think-tank/prototype team tasked with rapidly leveraging commercial/government capabilities to address a current mission critical challenge). The focus of this team (led by(b)(6) (b)(6) is looking at how can the USAF leverage capabilities in Air, Space, Cyher to uniquely deter, disrupt, or deny state-sponsored disinformation campaigns threatening US national security.

On 22 Oct, I2C2 will conduct a call with OSE's Identifying Foreign Influence Team to best coordinate sustainable interaction between our organizations, specifically increasing the threat team's involvement with OSE's analytic tools and methodology. I2C2 will go through a proposed meeting schedule to include times and dates to best coordinate working and senior level engagement between our two organizations. OSE's regional programmers and analysis have expressed their appreciation for the GEC's products and their desire to work with the GEC.

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Page 191

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From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>;
(b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: FYI from Embassy Kyiv's daily update
Date: Wed, 6 Jan 2021 15:35:06 +0000

Case dismissed on Ukraine interference in US election: Serhiy Leshchenko, journalist, blogger former MP and now member of Ukrzaliznytsia supervisory board, announced in social media that the Supreme Court of Ukraine has thrown out the case about Ukraine's alleged interference in the U.S. presidential elections in 2016: "The Supreme Court denied ex-deputy Borys Rozenblat, who tried to sue me and NABU head Artem Sytnyk for interfering in the U.S. presidential elections in 2016, which allegedly consisted of the [sharing] of the 'black accounts' of the Party of Regions." Leshchenko noted that, initially, the decision in favor of Rozenblat was made by Kyiv District Administrative Court, notorious for its politicized rulings. "Based on this decision of the court, then Prosecutor General Yuriy Lutsenko told Trump's lawyer Rudy Giuliani that the Ukrainian court had allegedly recognized the facts of Ukraine's interference in the U.S. elections in 2016," Leshchenko said. According to Leshchenko, Lutsenko systematically misled Giuliani and, in order to protect himself, invented a story that former U.S. Vice President Joseph Biden, in the interests of his son Hunter, pressed the Prosecutor General's Office to close the case against ex-Minister of Ecology Mykola Zlochevsky and his gas company Burisma. "Kolomoiskyy's and Medvedchuk's propaganda laboratory helped to spread this lies virus in Ukraine," Leshchenko wrote. **UkrPravda**

(b)(6)
USEUCOM J39 Liaison, Russia Team
(Booz Allen Hamilton Contractor)
Global Engagement Center
U.S. Department of State
State SA-5 Desk: (b)(6)
OpenNet: (b)(6) @state.gov | ClassNet: (b)(6) @state.sgov.gov

Sender: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Recipient: (b)(6) @state.gov>;
(b)(6) @state.gov>

Active Russia Team Programs

Project or Campaign Title	GEC Funding Type	Implementer (Name/ Post)	Total Funding
Exporting Best Practices	**Cooperative agreement**	Atlantic Council	**$2,549,542**
Mapping Disinformation in Africa	**Cooperative agreement**	Code for Africa	**$588,687**
GLOBSEC Stratcom 2.0	**Cooperative Agreement**	GLOBSEC	**$749,233**
Disinformation Response Network (DRN)	**Cooperative agreement (AEECA)**	TechSoup	**$1,499,939**
Balkans Journalist Exchange	**Cooperative Agreement**	Atlantic Council- Serbia	**$149,410**
Mexico Journalism Project	**Cooperative Agreement**	IWPR	**$250,000**
Belsat TV	**Cooperative agreement**	Belsat TV	**$249,890**
		Total Ongoing GEC Program Funding	**$ 6,036,701.00**

~~SBU/FOUO~~ Last updated:8/9/22

Project or Campaign Title	GEC Funding Type	Implementer (Name/ Post)	Total Funding		Countries or Region	Brief Project Description
GEC-funded Grants & Cooperative Agreements						
Exporting Best Practices	**Cooperative agreement**	Atlantic Council	**$ 2,549,542.00**	**2/17/21-2/28/23**	WHA;sub-Saharan Africa (pilot country selection TBD)	This project will minimize the strategic gap in the information environment that Russian adversarial actors take advantage of to use disinformation and propaganda to manipulate countries in WHA and AF by connecting government communicators and CSOs in key pilot countries with disinformation subject matter experts in experiences countries including but not limited to the UK's RESIST, Lithuanian Elves, and Debunk.eu as well as TechSoup's expansive CSO and activist network, aided by DRFLabs expertise.
Mapping Disinformation in Africa	**Cooperative agreement**	Code for Africa		**2/12/21-2/28/23**	Sub-Saharan Africa: Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa. Tier two: Burundi, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, DRC, Ghana, Mali, Niger, South Sudan, Sudan, and Tanzania. Tier three: Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Zimbabwe .	The Consortium supported by Code for Africa will map the disinformation and information environment of sub-saharn africa and provide this analysis and relevant data to key policy makers, decision-makers, and civil society to begin to build capacity to counter Russian disinformation in Africa.
GLOBSEC Stratcom 2.0	**Cooperative Agreement**	GLOBSEC	**$749,233**	**08/31/21-06/30/23**	Slovakia	WOG/WOS approach to CSD with Slovakian Government
		Total Ongoing GEC Program Funding	**$ 3,298,775.00**			

Project or Campaign Title - CLOSED OUT	GEC Funding Type	Implementer (Name; Pvt/)	Total Funding		Countries or Region	Brief Project Description
Analyzing the Tactics of Propaganda	Grant	ORSFA (Arizona State University)	$ 497,538.00	Closed	UK; Latvia; Sweden	An initiative with Arizona State University to conduct computational analysis of news and social media feeds targeting audiences to identify Russia's tactics, ideological techniques, and operational procedures.
Disinformation in Georgia	Grant	ORSFA (Arizona State University)	$ 261,805.00	Closed	Georgia	A project to draw on Arizona State University's digital data mining program, Looking Glass, to identify, analyze, and refute disinformation directed at Georgia both within Georgia and internationally in partnership with the Tbilisi-based Economic Policy Research Center (EPRC) and Georgia's largest private broadcast TV channel, Rustavi 2.
Support to TV8 Moldova	Cooperative agreement	Albany Associates International LTD	$ 349,659.00	Closed	Moldova	To provide expert support to TV8, one of Moldova's few remaining independent media outlets, to strengthen and expand its efforts to refute disinformation and manipulation in the Russian-language information space.
Ukraine Cyber Hygiene and Stratcom Project	Cooperative agreement	Albany Associates International LTD (pending)	$ 500,000.00	9/30/19-8/30/20	Ukraine	(ASECA funds.) Embassy Kyiv and EUR/ACE are working closely with international donor partners on coordinating foreign assistance to Ukraine, including on cybersecurity, which is a relatively new assistance engagement effort.
Sayara International - InfoEnvironment	DoD co-funded	Sayara International	$ 3,456,231.55	9/28/18-3/31/21	Latvia; Lithuania; Estonia; Moldova	(DoD co-funding $993,858.) This project combines qualitative and quantitative methodologies to research and analyze Russian disinformation narratives. Sayara is conducting target audience analysis with surveys on the ground with in-country partners and partnering with Exovera to use Natural Language Processing (NLP), a rudimentary form of artificial intelligence, to scrape data from traditional and social media sources to compile and categorize prevalent narratives in the region. This analysis is distributed to regional embassies through bi-weekly Media Environment Monitoring reports and is available through the interactive Exovera tool.
	Sub-award	Exovera	$ 1,196,069.00			Sub-awarded machine learning tool company to run the narrative tracking platform for the award.
Tech Soup - Disinformation Training	DoD co-funded	TechSoup	$ 4,413,272.41	9/28/18 - 3/31/21	Poland; Czech Republic; Slovakia	(DoD co-funding $2,413,352.00.) TechSoup is conducting a series of trainings in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Moldova, Romania, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina to build a network of individuals that are capable of recognizing, identifying, exposing, and countering Russian disinformation and propaganda and training the vulnerable populations in their own countries to do the same. The project seeks to maximize the impact of the trainings by creating an online Resource Hub to store shortened versions of the trainings and connect the trainers in a sustainable network that endures beyond the lifecycle of the project.
	Sub-award	Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA)	$ 1,023,419.42		Lithuania; Estonia; Latvia	Local partner assisting TechSoup with training in local region.
	Sub-award	ePanstwo	$ 453,000.00		Poland	Host Personal Democracy Forum Central and Eastern Europe (PDF CEE) event in Gdansk, Poland.
	Sub-award	Funky Citizen	$ 662,340.00		Romania; Bulgaria; Moldova	Local partner assisting TechSoup with training in local region.
	Sub-award	Zasto Ne	$ 638,784.00		Bosnia and Herzegovina; North Macedonia; Kosovo; Montenegro; Serbia	Local partner assisting TechSoup with training in local region.
	Sub-award	BNTC	$ 400,000.00		Non-specific	To develop curriculum and training methodologies based on years of experience developing learning tools for media literacy.
Democracy Council of California (DCC) - Information Access Fund	DoD co-funded	Democracy Council of California (DCC)	$ 10,881,622.00	9/28/18-6/1/21	DCC: Russian Federation, DCC-Information Access Fund: Specified in NOFOs	(DoD co-funding $7,190,624.00.) Democracy Council acts as a sub-award mechanism to provide small grants to implementers from a diverse range of countries and a wide range of projects, to build United States allies and partner's capabilities to independently recognize, understand, expose, and counter Russian disinformation. As part of this award, DCC will also issue a sub-award to Zinc Network to train key local social media influencers to co-produce content to reach critical audiences with material that communicates strategic, democratic messages and develop those influencers into a distinct network.
	Sub-award	Free Russia Foundation	$ 933,000.00		Germany; France; the Netherlands	FRF will conduct NordStream 2 awareness conferences in Berlin, Paris and Amsterdam. The campaign will disseminate key arguments associated with ramifications of Russian energy policies and North Stream 2 pipelines to decision makers, families, households, local communities, and towns in key European countries.
	Sub-award	ZINC	$ 2,100,000.00		Non-specific (Europe)	Information campaign emphasizing the positive aspects of the transition from communism to democracy by featuring stories of the generation born after the fall of the Berlin wall and comparisons of their experiences with the experiences of those who lived under communism across Europe.
	Sub-award	CSIS	$ 365,760.00		UK; Japan; Australia; and Germany	The project seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of Russian information operations in democratic countries; to assess the distribution and consumption of disinformation; and to analyze the ways in which Russian and Chinese disinformation propagates through the information space of democratic societies and affects specific outcomes related to public opinion, voting behavior, and statements by officials.
	Sub-award	IREX	$ 2,000,621.00		Georgia	IREX's Learn to Discern in Georgia project is working to build the skills of more than 18,000 Georgian youth, empowering them to distinguish disinformation from facts and demand reliable information. The project seeks to equip Georgian youth, including those from disadvantaged groups and/or ethnic minority communities, with the critical information consumption (CIC) needed to make informed decisions on important issues such as democratic governance, Euro-Atlantic integration and related reforms, and geopolitical stability.
	Sub-award	Atlantic Council	$ 994,963.00		Latin America; South Africa	AC is growing and strengthening local media partnerships in Latin America and South Africa, established largely by their Digital Forensic Research Lab's network of Digital Research Units (DRUs.) The Council is working to create two new DRUs, one in Bogota, Columbia and one in Cape Town, South Africa. AC is also incorporating two new research outputs: The #VenezuelaWatch Newsletter and the #VenezuelaWatch Alert.
	Sub-award	European Values (award likely by 26 March)	$ 848,350.47		Poland; Czech Republic; Slovakia	Monitoring, researching and exposing Russian malign influence and calling out Kremlin proxies working in governments in the Visegrad region (excluding Hungary).
	Sub-award	Liberty TV (dead)	$ 273,800.00		Russian-speaking former Soviet republics	Liberty TV seeks to create and promote a 36-episode late night style shows in Russian language covering social, cultural and political events in Russia and the region of its influence (Baltics, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia and similar) on their YouTube channel.
	Sub-award	Albany Associates for TV8 Moldova (awarded)	$ 410,000.00		Moldova	(Funding estimated.) To provide expert support to TV8, one of Moldova's few remaining independent media outlets, to strengthen and expand its efforts to refute disinformation and manipulation in the Russian-language information space.
	Sub-award	Debunk.eu (not Lithuanian "Elves") (awarded)	$ 111,349.74		Non-specific	Debunk.eu will create an online game titled "Bad News" to increase media literacy rates in the Baltic states, where the long-term impact would be a more propaganda and disinformation resilient society. The target audience will be high school students, their parents, and the older generation and Debunk.eu expects to reach one million citizens across three countries and over 100,000 of them to play the game, with a targeted resilience level by approximately a 20% increase. The game will be coded/developed in English and translated into Lithuanian; Latvian; and Estonian languages.
	Sub-award	IREX Europe	$ 947,437.53		Belarus	original multimedia content that counters Russian disinformation. Financial support will be structured as advertising contracts with program beneficiaries to comply with Belarus' legal prohibition on media organizations receipt of grants from international organizations.
	Sub-award	Vilnius Institute	$ 98,836.00	$ 0.00	Lithuania	Vilnius Institute will equip local civic activists with tools to counter Russian disinformation and build resilience against information campaigns directed at destroying personal and institutional trust. They will first research how and why disinformation narratives spread to different audiences in Lithuania. Based on this research, they will create ten #PackOfLies animated cartoons that will improve media literacy by equipping viewers with tools to detect disinformation themselves. Subsequently, they will create a "Anti-disinfo Toolbox" for educators.
	Sub-award	Polska Press Group (awarded)	$ 91,700.00		Poland	Trainings for 600 local and regional media journalists and editors across Poland on how to identify, expose and counter disinformation and information space manipulation in their own communities. PPG staff, reputable Polish journalists and external experts will provide this training in 15 locations across Poland.
	Sub-award	Edventure Partners			Ukraine	Competition with local university students to develop counter Russian disinformation programming.
	Sub-award	Isans/ Prospect Foundation			Belarus	Research conducted on the disinformation landscape of Belarus, tracking narratives and actors.
	Sub-award	TV8 Moldova	$ 374,000	09/01/20-12/21	Moldova	extend the project to facilitate news and analysis by TV8 TV channel (Media Alternativa NGO) in the period estimated to follow likely snap parliamentary elections. This effort will counter the avalanche of misinformation, manipulation, and propaganda in the media space by providing impartial and accurate news and analysis on current events. More precisely, this project will center around the production of 'What was that? (Что это было?) weekly program and regular dissemination of short videos across TV8's digital channels and social media.
	Sub-award	European Values Center	$ 500,000	09/21-08/22	Czech Republic; Poland; Slovakia	This already established network of EVC's investigative bloggers will continue to unmask and broadcast via social media instances of Kremlin-sponsored disinformation and other messaging efforts to manipulate public opinion maliciously. EVC will increase the number of Kremlin Watchers and counter-disinformation content and establish a volunteer network of social media influencers who will re-post and engage in relevant social media discourse. EVC will further develop messaging products aimed at transatlantic foreign policy and security experts, parliament members, and leading journalists. These products will raise awareness about how adversarial Russian actors effectively undermine national security interests in these three countries as well as
	Sub-award	Euroradio	$ 225,000	09/21-05/22	Belarus (and regional)	Euroradio is planning to engage with young adults (25-34) and soon-to-be retirees (55-64), many of whom find themselves in a difficult economic situation, are heavy consumers of Russian TV channels, and active Russian Orthodox Church believers. To do this, Euradio will focus on producing fact-based news and information, including the production of Absurdny Ranking (a draft title), a 10-15 min weekly video podcast that will debunk three news disseminated via fake or pro-Kremlin outlets, and, Doctor, help me! A 10-15min weekly video podcast will review medical information, healthcare tips and debunk Russian medical disinformation messages directed at the Belarusian audience. Also, Euroradio will expand the network of media outlets
	Sub-award	Vok Ukraine	$ 303,700	09/21-08/22	Ukraine, Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Malta, Portugal, and Spain	Vox Ukraine will create a searchable database where disinformation is catalogued and then recorded, refuted, or explained. This will provide easy-to-use, high-quality information that will increase the capacity of civil society and media organizations in Western Europe to aid in the identification of and response to Russian disinformation and manipulative narratives. The database will also explain the purpose of the fake and true stories. The portal will be developed on the basis of an existing Vox Ukraine tool called the Anthology of Lies – a database of fact-checked statements by Ukrainian politicians. In collaboration with Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Malta, Portugal, and Spain, based on the European Union model, this database will support
	Sub-award	Metamorphosis	$ 350,000	09/21-05/22	North Macedonia	The goal of Metamorphosis is to expose Russian disinformation, propaganda, and influence in North Macedonia by creating an anti-disinformation hub and subsequent trainings and resources that will be available to a network of media outlets and journalists. There will also be a public-facing education campaign to target those who believe that foreign influences are nonexistent or irrelevant. The outlets will develop a series of journalistic products, including daily news that presents verified facts or debunks current disinformation and investigative stories that provide in-depth analysis of select aspects of Russian influence. Specifically, these investigative stories will look at narratives that intend to undermine the integration of Macedonia into NATO and
	Sub-award	Glas Sumadije	$ 122,400	09/21-05/22	Serbia	Glas Sumadije's goal is to reduce Russia's negative media influence on socio-political developments in Serbia by offering credible resources and trainings to journalists in the region. This will be done by outreach followed by strengthening Glas Sumadije's media outlet and web portal that will feature information free of Russia influence available for public consumption. Media monitoring and assessment of local media, roundtable discussions, literacy workshops will be part of this project to enhance journalistic capability and build capacity for uncovering and countering Russian disinformation and propaganda. A training will also be organized for new hire journalists as part of their onboarding to strengthen journalistic and ethical standards when
	Sub-award	Zasto Ne	$ 600,000	09/21-05/22	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia	Zasto Ne is launching the first region-wide initiative spanning from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Montenegro, Serbia, and North Macedonia. The project of online workshops and fact-checking resources aims to empower citizens to analyze media content with the ability to identify Russian disinformation and propaganda and raise media literacy. In turn, the goal is to motivate regional governments to take proactive measures to counteract disinformation and the adoption of strategies and legislation to be more effective. In addition to publicizing debunked cases of disinformation and propaganda that also publicly names the perpetrators. Zasto ne will also create a regional report on the state of foreign-influenced disinformation, including COVID-19 disinformation that will be shared via a promotional campaign for the research and its findings.

GLOBSEC - Exposing Russian Disinfo	**DoD co-funded**	**GLOBSEC**	**$ 3,002,046.84**	**9/28/18 - 12/31/21**	Poland; Slovakia	(DoD co-funding $1,002,665.48.) GLOBSEC is mapping the media environment and disinformation landscape of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. The program hopes to build resiliency in the governments of these countries against Russian disinformation and propaganda.
	Sub-award	Center for Democratic Transition	$ [illegible]		Montenegro	GLOBSEC research partner providing narrative analysis in local language.
	Sub-award	Political Capital KFT	$ [illegible]		Hungary	GLOBSEC research partner providing narrative analysis in local language.
	Sub-award	International and Security Affairs Centre – ISAC Foundation	$ [illegible]		Serbia	GLOBSEC research partner providing narrative analysis in local language.
	Sub-award	GlobalFocus	$ [illegible]		Romania	GLOBSEC research partner providing narrative analysis in local language.
	Sub-award	Prague Security Studies Institute	$ [illegible]		Czech Republic	GLOBSEC research partner providing narrative analysis in local language.
	Sub-award	Center for the Study of Democracy	$ [illegible]		Bulgaria	GLOBSEC research partner providing narrative analysis in local language.
	Sub-award	Association for Promotion of Euro-Atlantic Ideas and Values, Euro-Atlantic Council of Macedonia	$ [illegible]		North Macedonia	GLOBSEC research partner providing narrative analysis in local language.
IAF Support to Belsat TV	**Cooperative agreement**	Democracy Council of California (for Belsat TV)	**$ 800,000.00**	**3/25/20-1/31/22**	Russian-speaking former Soviet republics	Belsat will be responsible to produce a yearlong program by: 1) adding additional television content to Belsat's on-going Russian-language Vot Tak television program, 2) creating a separate Russian-language Vot Tak website--publishing more Russian-language original content, written in the Russian language rather than showing Russian-language translations from Belsat's Belarusian-language website, and 3) expanding the presence of the Russian-language Vot Tak program in social media.
Exposing Russian Health Disinformation	**Cooperative agreement**	The Critical Mass	**$ 250,000.00**	**9/29/20-9/30/21**	Ukraine, Georgia, Kazakhstan	TCM will research the impact of Russian health disinformation on public health officials and the ability to respond to health crises by conducting case studies in these three states. Results will be disseminated via webinar and articles.

Project or Campaign Title	GEC Funding Type	Implementer (Name/ Post)	Total Funding		Countries or Region	Brief Project Description
Helsinki Hybrid Center of Excellence	**Cooperative agreement**	European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats	**$ 500,000.00**		(In Finland): Non-specific (CoE members)	To train CoE's member states to counter electoral interference and disinformation. EUR will continue to assess CoE funding needs in the future to determine the appropriate level of ongoing U.S. support.
Contracts						
Audience Research: The Arctic	**INR contract**	Epinion	**$ 135,000.00**		Denmark, Norway (Greenland and the Faroe Islands)	($431,000 total cost shared with GEC China Team.) The U.S. government has an interest in understanding how communities perceive Russian activity and growing Chinese investment in the region. This research will generate the necessary baseline of data required to construct an effective messaging campaign intended to combat Russia's malign influence operatons and China's Belt and Road propaganda.
Audience Research: Nord Stream II in Denmark	**INR contract**	Epinion	**$ 81,000.00**		Denmark	GEC has an interest in understanding how European publics perceive energy security, energy diversity, natural gas/fossil fuel consumption, and how the public perceives the construction of the new Russian gas pipeline called Nord Stream II. A combination of focus groups and surveys will examine how people understand energy security and its relationship to energy diversity, how people discuss reducing carbon emissions and green energy, and investigate the association of Russian gas and their hidden political costs (like those imposed in Ukraine). The project will investigate the association of Russian gas and hidden political costs in Denmark – and public awareness of these costs.
Audience Research: Nord Stream II in Germany	**INR contract**	Forsa	**$ 80,000.00**		Germany	A combination of focus groups and a national survey used to examine how people understand energy security issues and the relationship to energy diversity. The project will investigate the association of Russian gas and hidden political costs in Germany – and public awareness of these costs. Project used to provide ENR, Emb Berlin, EUR, and GEC message testing and content recommendations to counter Russian propaganda about NS II.
Audience Research: Berlin Wall	**INR contract**	Forsa	**$ 149,500.00**		Germany	In conjunction with the 30th anniversary of the fall of communism in Europe, this research provides GEC the needed target audience analysis to understand what Russia might say, who they might target, and why certain themes may (or may not) resonate with German audiences. This analysis will be used by GEC to support EUR bureau in two ways: one, to promote positive USG messaging around the anniversary event, and two, to prepare a response in the event that Russia launches a disinformation campaign around the anniversary event.
Tactical Communications Initiative (TCI), Part 1	**GEC contract**	Northrop Grumman	**$ 2,077,400.00**		Non-specific	The Russia team is standing up a new approach called the Tactical Communications Initiative (TCI) which is focused on owning the information space to force the Russians to respond to our narratives. TCI will be run through world-class advertising and marketing firms which have on the ground expertise in communicating with hard to reach audiences. TCI will give GEC the ability to support efforts to win back information space in Europe and potentially other regions where Russia enjoys advantages based on proximity, lack of counter programming, or commonality of language.

Audience Research: Orthodox Communities	**INR contract (pending award)**	(Execution on hold pending budget authorization)	**$ 365,000.00**		Non-specific (countries in which Orthodox Christianity predominates)	A key tool in the Kremlin's toolkit has long been assumed to be the Orthodox Church; this transnational research project intends to substantiate what propaganda Russia disseminates through its relationship to the Church, and determine how that information is received by publics in States with large Orthodox communities. The research will interrogate how Orthodox communities perceive American efforts to counter the Kremlin's malign influence. By understanding perceptions of both Russia and of the United States, the project will enable the USG to communicate more effectively in these communities and counter Russia's disinformation among previously hard-to-reach audiences.
Fund Cites to Posts						
Fighting Misinformation through Fact-Checking Technology	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Ankara	**$ 50,000.00**		Turkey	Journalism training workshops: This project will use Google Ventures' Design Sprint method over four separate workshops to teach and train participants from 12 Turkish organizations on tools for fact-checking and stopping disinformation.
Engaging Orthodox Communities to Counter Disinfo	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Athens	**$ 100,000.00**		Greece	The Embassy will work with Romfea.gr, the most popular Orthodox news web portal in Greece, to produce more reliable and objective content, as well as to call out Russian efforts to use the Church for political ends and to focus on longstanding cultural affinity that regional Orthodoxy has had with the Patriarchate in Istanbul vice the Moscow patriarch. Romfea.gr will also provide content in English to reach a wider audience of influencers in the Orthodox world.
Countering Kremlin Disinfo throughout the Caucasus Space through Strengthening Journalistic Professionalism	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Baku	**$ 200,000.00**		Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia	Translation of English-language online journalism graduate certificate program into Russian, and teaching of that course. Audience: 30-200 regional journalists who do not have the English skills to do the existing course (which is taught in Georgia). Could potentially include any Russian-speaking journalist who wants to access the courses online. Amplification via social media channels and program alumni/graduates.
Misinfo Conference	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Brussels	**$ 80,000.00**		(In Belgium): Non-specific (Western Europe)	Sponsorship of two-day regional Misinfo conference to further awareness and collaboration with European partners and assist participants to produce action plans to counter disinformation. Misinfocon is a global movement focused on building solutions to online trust, verification, fact checking, and reader experience, launched at MIT in 2017 and brings together social scientists, technology firms, news organizations, and experts in cybersecurity, advocacy, media literacy and other fields.
#Misinformation #Propaganda #Fake News - A Danish Perspective	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Copenhagen	**$ 50,000.00**		Denmark	Interactive and cross-disciplinary one-day workshop on disinformation and fake news, including leading politicians, state officials, journalists, scientists, head teachers, and students (university and high school).
European Digital Diplomacy Exchange (EDDE)	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Ljubljana	**$ 500,000.00**		Slovenia	PAS Ljubljana and EUR/PD continue to build the strategic digital communications capacities of key allies and training and encouraged them to use these skills more proactively and collaboratively in the battle against disinformation.
"Feed Me the Truth": Media Literacy to Combat Disinfo Among Young Adults	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Madrid	**$ 500,000.00**		Spain	PAS Madrid will use American Spaces network to organize a series of events for Spanish youth to increase their ability to detect disinformation. Program will use Newseum kits provided by IIP's Office of American Spaces. Amplification via social media.

Mobile Disinfo Lab	**Fund cite to post**	Consulate Munich	**$ 32,800.00**		Germany	A series of educational events on media literacy and the use of digital tools in debunking disinformation and fake news. Participants learn about the importance of media literacy for all citizens in contemporary society and the role of critical thinking, and analysis. The value of digital tools supporting cross-national dialogue to understand and debunk propaganda and fake news is emphasized in the context of the sessions.
IMMUNE – Improving Media Literacy by Understanding Mechanisms and Strategies of News Feeds	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Prague	**$ 23,000.00**		Czech Republic	Awareness-raising program about disinformation and the mechanisms disinformation campaigns use to target users online. Program partnered with Transparency International Czech Republic (TICZ).
Empowering Senior Citizens by Teaching Media Literacy Skills and Bridging the Generation Gap	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Prague	**$ 57,100.00**		Czech Republic	Empowering a critical voting block (seniors) through workshops, educational tours to newsrooms, and online resources on disinformation and fake news (Note: This is an extension request of a pilot funded last year under the Unfunded Priorities Competition.)
21st Century Democracy: Countering Disinformation	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Reykjavik	**$ 12,000.00**		Iceland	Three-part speaker program ($4k each) on media literacy and awareness; the role of social media and the technology industry; geopolitical elements of disinformation. Focused on ages 30 and under.
Countering Disinfo through Media Literacy	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Riga	**$ 500,000.00**		Latvia	Develop a bot that identifies and debunks fake news on Twitter. (Co-funded by the British Embassy in Riga.)
Disinfomation Recognition Reporting Tours to Moldova and Estonia for Italian Media	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Rome	**$ 28,000.00**		(In Moldova and Estonia): Italy	Italian Journalists travel to Tallinn and Chisinau for a reporting tour to build Italian media's capacity to recognize and counter Russian disinformation.
Fighting Fake News Network	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Skopje	**$ 249,253.00**		North Macedonia	A counter-disinformation program focused on rebuilding Macedonian citizens' trust in democratic values by combatting disinformation and fake news through comprehensive research and media monitoring in Macedonia, and creating fact-based narratives spread across different vital communication channels.
Media Literacy TechCamp	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Sofia	**$ 50,000.00**		Bulgaria	Media literacy program and TechCamp built capacity in young Bulgarians throughout the country to understand the threat of disinformation and engage in local media environment.
English for Journalists	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Sofia	**$ 49,064.00**		Bulgaria	Build a regional model of language training for journalists likely to be susceptible to Russian disinformation. (Partial funding request to build on a program funded via 2017's R Innovation Fund.)
USEU Press Tour	**Fund cite to post**	USEU Brussels	**$ 55,000.00**		Western Europe	Western European journalists to travel to the Czech Republic and the Baltics to gain first-hand awareness of Russian disinformation campaigns.
Analytical Support for Danish Elections	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Copenhagen	**$ 55,000.00**		Denmark	Funding for local counter-disinfo digital analytics support ahead of the Danish elections.
Stockholm FBI Journalism Training Initiative	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Stockholm	**$ 180,000.00**		Sweden; Norway; Denmark; Finland; Iceland	This project builds off of a previous GEC-funded and FBI-led cyber training held in Poland in late 2018. The initiative trained 20 cybersecurity practitioners in how to best protect their government and electoral systems from the hacking used in adversarial foreign influence operations. The three-day training included briefings on foreign influence operations following by in-depth technical training.

D-Day Commemoration	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Paris	**$ 65,000.00**		France	Support for post's D-Day 75th anniversary commemoration activities.
Cyprus Counter-Disinformation Conference	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Nicosia	**$ 50,000.00**		Cyprus	To fund a counter-disinformation two-day event to build the awareness of, and capacity to resist, state-sponsored disinformation among students and teachers, as well as participating journalists and Cypriot policy makers.
Baltic Way Campaign	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Vilnius	**$ 200,000.00**		Lithuania	To facilitate communication strategy related to the Baltic Way 30th anniversary commemorative events.
	Fund cite to post	Embassy Riga	**$ 83,265.00**		Latvia	Delfi Baltic Way 30, Latvian National Commission for UNESCO, and Baltic Youth Forum.
	Fund cite to post	Embassy Tallinn	**$ 52,500.00**		Estonia	Outdoor campaign, social media campaigns and Baltic Chain event utilizing Vabamu Musuem of Occupations and Freedom.
1989 Campaign	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Bratislava	**$ 125,000.00**		Slovakia	Half of Embassy Bratislava's campaign revolved around the May 2019 World Ice Hockey Championships, which were particularly vulnerable to Russian disinformation. The other half of the campaign focuses on social media influencers and other famous Slovaks creating content to explain how their lives and passions would not be possible if not for post-Soviet values.
	Fund cite to post	Embassy Warsaw	**$ 205,000.00**		Poland	Embassy Warsaw's campaign focuses on broad public outreach campaigns online that revolve around a number of in-person embassy-supported events. Post is working with a marketing/PR firm to run a public awareness campaign to get young and uninformed audiences acquainted with the events of 1989 and the U.S. role in helping Poland emerge from communism towards a more positive future.
	Fund cite to post	Embassy Sofia	**$ 150,000.00**		Bulgaria	Embassy Sofia's campaign will center around the fact that access to quality food, clothing, and housing was difficult to obtain in communist Bulgaria. Luxury goods like chocolate bars could only be found in foreign currency stores, if at all. Easy access to Western goods in 2019, especially luxuries like chocolate, is an important symbol of the growth in Bulgaria since 1989.
	Fund cite to post	Embassy Prague	**$ 200,000.00**		Czech Republic	Embassy Prague will utilize a host of products and platforms to remind people of the importance and benefits of freedom and the wisdom of the Velvet Revolution. Post is partnering with social media influencers to create relevant content, developing print, outdoor, and digital advertisements, and creating documentary shorts about some of the events that will take place to celebrate 1989. These events include the "Free to Rock" movie tour celebrating the role of rock 'n roll in bringing about the 1989 democratic revolutions; a bicycle tour following the former Iron Curtain; Narodni Fest (Freedom Festival); NATO Days in Ostrava, the "Telling Our Stories" Professional Fellows tour and hackathon; Zinc Network "30 under 30" campaign, and more.
	Fund cite to post	Embassy	**$ 350,000.00**		Hungary	Program information on ClassNet at post request.
	Fund cite to post	USEU	**$ 300,000.00**		Eastern Europe; Caucasus; Central Asia	Mission USEU co-sponsorship of the Atlantic Council's DisinfoWeek 2020 conference and workshops in Brussels. GEC contribution will pay for 50 journalists and civil society representatives to travel from Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia to participate in the event, which will have a special emphasis on the continuities of disinformation techniques employed by the former Soviet Union and today's Russian Federation.

Balkans Support Strategies	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Podgorica	**$ 22,600.00**		Montenegro	Project 2019 REACT, promoting NATO and Euro-Atlantic integration among students from northern (and traditionally pro-Russian) region. Week-long camp, study visit, and national essay contest will focus on CSD in Montenegro.
	Fund cite to post	Embassy Skopje	**$ 50,000.00**		North Macedonia	Production of quality media content on CSD over a 12-month period to counter false narratives and improve professionalism among local investigative journalists.
USOSCE International Reporting Tour on Countering Disinformation	**Fund cite to post**	USOSCE	**$ 40,000.00**		(In Austria and Ukraine): Central Asia Regional	International reporting tour to Vienna and Ukraine for journalists from Central Asian OSCE participating states on the topic of OSCE programs to counter disinformation.
Research and Surveys Concerning U.S. Military Presence in Poland	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Warsaw	**$ 30,000.00**		Poland	In order to be proactive and control/maintain the narrative high ground with regard to the U.S. and NATO force presence in Poland and to combat disinformation initiatives from Russia and its operatives, post will work with the GEC A&R Team to contract an analysis of messaging data and sources of negative and misleading reports that may damage on U.S.-Polish relations. Post will seek to obtain real-time information on the veracity of news sources and negative reporting on U.S.-Polish efforts to enhance military cooperation and mitigate threats to NATO's eastern flank.
Co-sponsorship of Press Freedom/Media Literacy Workshop in Gdansk	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Warsaw	**$ 20,000.00**		Poland	Foreign amplification of anti-Semitic, Islamophobic, anti-LGBTQI and xenophobic themes and narratives presents an enormous challenge to Polish society, threatening the stability of democracy and social cohesion. This workshop will address the deleterious effects of domestic hate speech and raise awareness among participating journalists of how foreign adversaries are acting to exploit cleavages in Polish society in order to weaken the country and its ties with allies and partners.
CSD Program Agencia Lupa	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Buenos Aires	**$ 298,000.00**		Argentina	To help enhance lower-middle class Argentines' resilience to state-sponsored disinformation and propaganda, Embassy Buenos Aires will partner with a) Chequeado, a regionally renowned fact-checker, to build a nation-wide network of fact-checkers to counter disinformation with data-driven and fact-based narratives; and b) contract an established communications firm to execute fact-based messaging campaigns on priority issues.
CSD Program Chequeado	**Fund cite to post**	Embassy Brasilia	**$ 150,000.00**		Brazil	Embassy Brasilia and its consulates partners with Agencia Lupa, a leading Brazilian fact-checking organization, to build a nation-wide network of fact-checkers to expose and counter state-sponsored disinformation aimed at undercutting U.S.-Brazil relations.

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
To: GEC-Russia Team <GEC-RussiaTeam@state.gov>
Subject: Fwd: Poisoner, Hacker, Meddler, Spy: How Russian Agents Ran Wild in 2020
Date: Thu, 31 Dec 2020 16:31:58 +0000

Nice overview of Russian intelligence activities in 2020

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---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: **New from SpyTalk** <spytalk@substack.com>
Date: Thu, Dec 31, 2020 at 04:57
Subject: Poisoner, Hacker, Meddler, Spy: How Russian Agents Ran Wild in 2020
To: <(b)(6) @gmail.com>

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Poisoner, Hacker, Meddler, Spy: How Russian Agents Ran Wild in 2020

Some wins, some loses, but overall a record to be proud of if you're Vladimir Putin

Jeff Stein and Patricia Ravalgi
Dec 31

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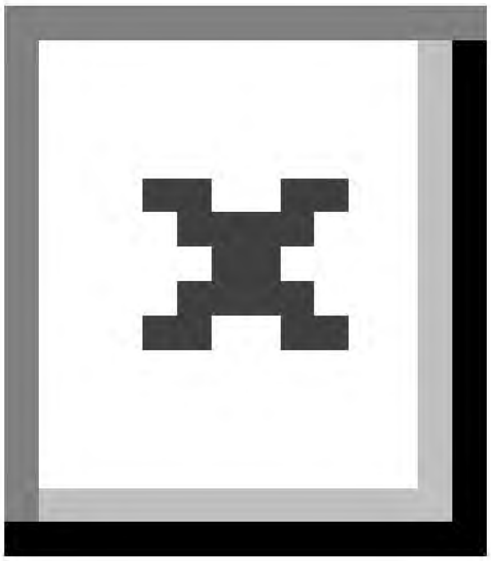
If Russian intelligence were a baseball team, they'd be the Houston Astros good, powerful, even lethal, but cheaters who broke the rules in a game already known for bending them. And they pretty much got away with it.



"I like that analogy," says retired top former CIA clandestine operations official Marc Polymeropoulos. "I would add that the Houston players were never really sanctioned either, right? They lost their manager and GM, but players got off scot free. Sound familiar?"

Whatever the analogy, Russia's spies took the field like bruising athletes in 2020, scoring big, clever, espionage wins in the West but also tripping over themselves with clumsy murder plots that further blackened their names on the competitive field of international relations. You'd think the manager would be fired with such a record, but then again, this team is run by Vladimir Putin. He just doesn't care.

"What surprises me is Putin's willingness to risk getting caught over such small fry," says John Sipher, who knows a thing or two about the Russians, having been a CIA station chief in Moscow. All those targets were "no real threat to Putin."

The opposition figure Alexei Navalny, he noted, "gets something like three per cent support" across Russia, yet last August the FSB, Moscow's internal security organ, tried to poison him to death with the nerve agent Novichok.

It's a pattern: Two years ago, the GRU, Russia's thuggish military intelligence agency, sent death squads to liquidate a long ago turncoat agent, Serge Skripal, with Novichok. (It nearly killed him.) In February Bulgarian authorities charged three Russian agents in absentia with trying to poison a Sofia arms dealer and two associates in 2015. Last year Moscow used more old fashioned methods to eliminate a Chechen separatist fighter in Germany last year—a bullet to the head on a Berlin street.

It's Murder Inc. with guns and poison—no cloaks, no daggers, thank you very much..

Douglas London, another retired former senior CIA official, says the hits "serve a purpose, and there's little cost."

"He likes the macho image," he adds. "It's just old school Russian."

"It is over the line but he hasn't paid a price for any of it," Sipher told *SpyTalk*.

Well, let's say it's a price Putin can live with: a bitch slap from the governments he's offended, in the form of expulsions and sanctions. A *SpyTalk* review—inspired by Rob Lee, a PhD candidate at Kings College in London found that 14 Russian spies were publicly expelled from seven nations in 2020, most for espionage, a few for political meddling. In a Hollywood-quality farce, two Russian "diplomats" were expelled from Prague this year after they were found to have planted a phony story in a local media outlet saying another Russian a rival in their embassy, as it turned out— was plotting to poison Czech officials. In a comedic climax, Moscow reacted with high dudgeon to the PNG's. In next-door Slovakia, meanwhile, three Russians were expelled in retaliation for Moscow obtaining false Slovak visas to enter Germany for the Berlin assassination.

The same went for other places where Moscow's agents were apparently caught red-handed in espionage or political intrigue.

Spies Gonna Spy

Just last week in Colombia, for example, two suspected Russian intelligence officers were expelled for reportedly collecting intelligence on the "energy industry and mineral commodities" and for "attempting to recruit sources in the city of Cali."

A week earlier, Bulgaria gave a Russian diplomat 72 hours to leave the country, "after prosecutors alleged he had been involved in espionage since 2017," according to Reuters, citing the foreign ministry.

On December 10, The Netherlands expelled "two alleged Russian diplomats" for targeting its "high-tech sector with a substantial network of sources," according to the BBC. The expelled Russians, it said, were accredited diplomats working from the Russian Embassy in The Hague.

Likewise back in August, Norway expelled a Russian "diplomat" involved in espionage targeting an Oslo consultancy in shipbuilding, renewable energy and the oil and gas industry. A week later, Austria expelled a Russian "diplomat" who had allegedly been involved for years in economic espionage at a technology firm, aided by an Austrian citizen. Russia responded in kind.

Moscow meddled more seriously in Guyana, on the northern mainland of South America, according to a news report in March from its capital. "A Russian, Russian-American, and Libyan were expelled on charges that they attempted "to interfere in the electoral process at the behest of" an opposition party, via a "conspiracy to tap into the Guyana Elections Commission computer system."

Ukraine, on the other hand, didn't settle for booting Russian agents. At virtual war with Moscow since its invasion and annexation of Crimea in 2014, Ukraine just this week "shut down four intelligence networks anddetained eleven agents of the Russia secret services, three of whom were involved in attempted sabotage and terrorist attacks on critical infrastructure facilities,"Kyev announced. "Another FSB agent was detained in Luhansk region. He tried to hand over to the foreign side the secret documentation on the Neptun missile system developed

by the Ukrainian defense industry," it added. Further counterintelligence investigations are ongoing.

Back in the USA

Russia's Ukrainian agents, meanwhile, continued to meddle in U.S. politics, in particular the campaign by Trump and his lawyer Rudy Giuliani to smear Joe Biden's son Hunter. In September the Treasury Department said it was going to sanction Ukrainian Andriy Derkach, a pro-Russian member of the Ukrainian parliament, for conspiring with Giuliani to fabricate charges against Hunter Biden. "Derkach...has been an active Russian agent for over a decade, maintaining close connections with the Russian Intelligence Services," Treasury found. Giuliani is also reportedly under investigation in Manhattan for "potentially illegal gains from his work with" the Soviet-born U.S. businesmen Lev Parnas and Igor Fruman "in a Ukrainian natural-gas business."

Washington had little recourse but sanctions, or indictments in absentia, against Russian agents in the Hunter Biden affair and other, even more egregious, attacks on the U.S in 2020, since all of the perpetrators were beyond the reach of U.S. law enforcement.

In October, for example, the U.S. charged six current and former members of Russia's military intelligence agency "for allegedly carrying out some of the world's most destructive hacking attacks from 2015 to 2019, including knocking out Ukraine's power grid and causing almost $1 billion in damage to three American companies." All of the accused are outside of the U.S.

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Likewise, U.S. officials are still sorting out legal options for dealing with the recently discovered, massive Russian intrusion into the computer systems of multiple federal agencies, including the departments of defense, treasury, homeland security, agriculture and commerce. "While U.S. officials believe that a Russia-linked entity or Russian individuals are responsible for the attacks, they have not yet finalized their designation on which actors are responsible," a senior administration official told CNN.

From Russia's embassy came more indignation: "another unfounded attempt of the U.S. media to blame Russia for hacker attacks on U.S. governmental bodies."

Goodbye, So Long

Two years ago, in reaction to the Skripal poisoning, the U.S. and 28 other countries punted more than 150 Russian officials from their shores. Washington alone expelled 60 Russians, including 12 intelligence officers from Moscow's mission to the U.N. headquarters in New York, and closed the Russian consulate in Seattle.

In 2020, Putin appeared a bit more careful about foreign assassinations. Or maybe it was just a coincidence, a lack of timely targets.

The Russian strongman shows no sign of changing menus. Quite the contrary: He's been lionizing his intelligence services. Kicking off 2020 last January, his SVR chief held an unprecedented ceremony to honor several operatives who had served with distinction around the world.

Putin has good reason to puff his chest, say top former CIA officials with long histories battling Moscow Centre: Trump has not made Russia pay any substantial price for its excesses.

> "It's not that the Russians are that good, but over the course of the last four years, the political climate has impeded the U.S. intelligence community from leveraging its capabilities and advantages, with the White House providing the Kremlin top cover from consequences," London, who recently retired from a 34-year career in the CIA's Clandestine Services Division, told *SpyTalk*.

"There are no rules in espionage, even though it's an internationally recognized norm," says Dan Hoffman, who besides running the CIA station in Moscow led large-scale espionage campaigns against Russia in Europe and elsewhere. "Putin plays by no rules, just the maximum he can get away with."

"He is either just a KGB thug or he's really more scared that we think." adds JohnSipher. "I tend to think he simply continues to see the world like a Soviet Chekist and this is what they do."

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2020 Jeff Stein Unsubscribe

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Recipient: GEC-Russia Team <GEC-RussiaTeam@state.gov>

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Fwd: GEC I2C2 Weekly Action Review: October 20 - 26 October, 2020
Date: Tue, 27 Oct 2020 16:13:29 +0000

FYI

Sent via the Samsung Galaxy S8+, an AT&T 5G Evolution capable smartphone
Get Outlook for Android
From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, October 27, 2020 11:55:39 AM
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>;(b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: GEC I2C2 Weekly Action Review: October 20 - 26 October, 2020

(b)(6)

The WAR for this week is attached for your perusal and approval. I'm waiting for Serge and others to provide updated information for the Look Ahead section.

V/R,

(b)(6)
Operations Officer I Interagency and International Coordination Cell (I2C2)
Global Engagement Center (GEC)
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All Native Group, a Division of Ho-Chunk, Inc.

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Page 211

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5) DPP

Page 212

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5) DPP

Page 213

Withheld pursuant to exemption

(b)(5) DPP

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
To: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Fw: Two Recent FireEye Reports
Date: Wed, 21 Oct 2020 15:30:54 +0000

Director (b)(6)

Attached are two FireEye documents that mention within our last coorespondance

V/r

(b)(6)
Liaison Planner to USAID | Interagency and International Coordination Cell (I2C2)
Global Engagement Center (GEC)
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"Mission: To direct, lead, synchronize, integrate, and coordinate efforts of the Federal Government to recognize, understand, expose, and counter foreign state and foreign non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts aimed at undermining or influencing the policies, security, or stability of the United States, its allies, and partner nations. "

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, June 16, 2020 11:01 AM
To: GEC-Russia Team <GEC-RussiaTeam@state.gov>
Cc: (b)(6) @state.gov>; Bray, Leah <(b)(6) @state.gov>; GEC I2C2 Internal <GECI2C2Internal@state.gov>
Subject: Two Recent FireEye Reports

Good Morning Russia Team -

Attached are two FireEye reports that were published recently to our FireEye customer Intelligence Portal. The reports are:

- 20-00010916: **'Ghostwriter' Overview: Pro-Russia Influence CAMpaign Leverages Fabricated Content and Website Compromises to Push Anti-US, Anti-NATO , and COVID-19 Related Narratives**
    - This report is an analysis of a suspected ongoing pro-Russia influence campaign, which we have dubbed "Ghostwriter". The Ghostwriter campaign primarily targets audiences in Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland with English-language articles authored by suspected inauthentic personas that promote anti-U.S. and anti-

NATO narratives. The operations occasionally leveraged compromised websites and email accounts from various entities to disseminate fabricated content in support of the narratives, including those of media outlets and government institutions in the target countries, and also impersonated authentic journalists and public officials to that same end. As part of the report, we summarize six recent notable operations in detail which we assess with moderate confidence comprise part of the larger Ghostwriter campaign.

- 20-00010917: **Suspected Ukrainian and Russian-Language 'Secondary Infektion' Operation Promote Narrative That Outside Group Orchestrated Anti-Racism Protests in US, UK and Ukraine**
  - This report is an analysis of a suspected Russian and Ukrainian-language information operation that we assess with moderate confidence to comprise part of the ongoing suspected Russian "Secondary Infektion" influence campaign. The operation, which was conducted in June 2020, promoted the narrative that a single financial and political group orchestrated anti-racism protests in the U.S., UK, and Ukraine.

These reports are pre-approved for sharing with US Federal Civilian Departments and Agencies to include FBI, DHS, USAGM, USAID etc. This does not initially include members of the DoD, IC or Combatant Commands. If interested in sharing with anyone outside of US Federal Civilian Depts. and Agencies, please reach out and I am able to assist!

Happy to answer any questions.

Thanks!

(b)(6)

Global Engagement Center
U.S. Department of State
FireEye Inc.
Cell: (b)(6)

Sender: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Recipient: (b)(6) @state.gov>

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>

All military addressees

To: (b)(6)

Subject: Fw: Special Envoy's Daily Briefing, 12 January 2021

Date: Tue, 12 Jan 2021 13:49:47 +0000

DoD Colleagues:

Attached please find today's GEC Daily Media Brief. Flagging several pieces (Yahoo and AP) on the far-right media ecosystem.

v/r

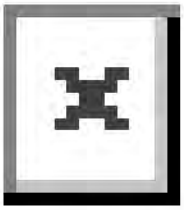
(b)(6)
GEC I2C2
(b)(6)

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, January 12, 2021 7:34 AM
To: Gabrielle(Potts), Lea <(b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Special Envoy's Daily Briefing, 12 January 2021

Good Morning Special Envoy Gabrielle,

Please find your daily capture of propaganda and disinformation news, below and attached.

Special Envoy's Daily Brief
Jan. 12, 2021



Trending Propaganda and Disinformation News

Parler Is Down. What Will Happen to the Far-Right Media Ecosystem?

Yahoo!

In recent days, Parler had drawn an enormous amount of attention for serving as a platform for organizers of the January 6th attempted coup at the Capitol, with many accusing the platform of turning a blind eye to calls for violence. Indeed, in its letter to Parler, Amazon Web Services, Parler's cloud hosting service, said it had reported 98 individual calls to violence over the past week. "We've seen a steady increase in this violent content on your website, all of which violates our terms," AWS wrote. "It's clear that Parler does not have an effective process to comply with the AWS terms of service." Yet while Apple, Google, and Amazon's action against Parler might seem draconian on the surface, experts in the right-wing media ecosystem suspect it is little more than a PR play [.]

Readership: 162,754,779

A theater of propaganda: The Capitol, cameras and selfies

Yahoo!

NEW YORK (AP) — One of the defining images of the Capitol Hill siege was of a man dangling from the balcony of the Senate chamber. Clad in black and with a helmet over his head, he might have been hard to identify even after he paused

to sit in a leather chair at the top of the Senate dais and hold up a fist. [Josiah] Colt was far from the only one documenting the insurrection from within last Wednesday in Washington. Many in the mob that ransacked the Capitol did so while livestreaming, posting on Facebook and taking selfies, turning the United States Capitol into a theater of real-time — and often strikingly ugly and violent — far-right propaganda.

Readership: 162,754,779

US sanctions Russia-linked disinformation network for involvement in attempts to influence US election

CNN

(CNN)The US announced sanctions Monday against a group of Russian-linked Ukrainians, including two people who worked closely with Trump allies to discredit President-elect Joe Biden during the 2020 election campaign. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced sanctions against seven individuals and four entities "that are part of a Russia-linked foreign influence network associated with" accused Russian agent Andrii Derkach, designating them for their involvement in efforts to try to influence the election. "Russian disinformation campaigns targeting American citizens are a threat to our democracy," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in his own statement. "The United States will continue to aggressively defend the integrity of our election systems and processes."

Readership: 23,391,150

Trending Adversary Narratives

Ending the chaos and restoring order - China.org.cn

China.org.cn

As observers and scholars alike scramble to predict the future of U.S.-China relations under the incoming Biden administration, President Trump once again successfully proved that he is still the one who calls the shots. Being totally engrossed in his loss in the election, plotting schemes to overturn the election

result, and continuously staying blind to his country's spiking COVID-19 cases; on January 5, Mr. Trump found the time to sign an executive order banning transactions with eight Chinese software applications, including Alipay and WeChat Pay, according to the White House. Once again, national security is the outgoing administration's major concern cited behind the move.

Readership: 341,064

Official: Iran to Design New Heavy-Water Reactor

Kayhan International

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- A senior Iranian lawmaker says the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) is taking the initial steps to design another heavy-water reactor similar to an existing one in the city of Arak. Abolfazl Amouei, the spokesman for the parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, said the AEOI's spokesman had announced the matter in a meeting with members of the committee also attended by the Iranian deputy foreign minister for legal and international affairs, Mohsen Baharvand. Amouei said the implementation of a new law called the "Strategic Action Plan to Lift Sanctions and Safeguard Interests of Iranian People" was examined during the meeting.

Readership: 68,896

GEC Mentions

Nothing Significant to Report

Sources and Methods

The bullets above are compiled from four Boolean searches from TrendKite. The precise searches can be modified to fit business needs.

Today's search revealed 3953 artifacts based on the queries above, from which we parsed out what we found to be the most meaningful stories for the GEC's leadership and mission by readership. Search criteria are based on USG leadership profiles.

v/r,

(b)(6)

Analytics and Research Team
Global Engagement Center
U.S. Department of State
Accenture Federal Services Affiliate
State HST Desk: (b)(6)

Sender: (b)(6) @state.gov>

All military addressees

Recipient: (b)(6)

Special Envoy's Daily Brief Jan. 12, 2021

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From: (b)(6) @state.gov>

All military plus HHS addressees

To: (b)(6)

CC:

Subject: Fw: Special Envoy's Daily Brief - 7 JAN 2021

Date: Thu, 7 Jan 2021 17:16:24 +0000

DoD Colleagues:

Attached please find today's GEC Daily Media Brief. Flagging Forbes and USA Today pieces on COVID-19 conspiracies.

Best,

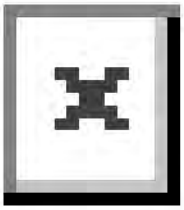
(b)(6)

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, January 7, 2021 8:14 AM
To: Gabrielle(Potts), Lea (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Special Envoy's Daily Brief - 7 JAN 2021

Good Morning Special Envoy Gabrielle,

Please find below and attached this morning's edition of your daily news and propaganda capture.

Special Envoy's Daily Brief Jan. 7, 2021



Trending Propaganda and Disinformation News

China Wages Cognitive Warfare To Topple Taiwan Government: Report

MSN

China is waging "cognitive warfare" against Taiwan and aims to topple its government by targeting the public with escalating misinformation campaigns this year, according to a national security think tank in Taipei. In its year-end report analyzing Beijing's political and military policies in 2020, the government-funded Institute for National Defense and Security Research said Chinese efforts to influence the Taiwanese public's voting behavior has so far backfired, but it expected more of the same strategy this year.

Readership: 71,798,074

China is having a field day with U.S. Capitol chaos

The Washington Post

As democratic governments around the world reacted with horror to President Trump supporters' storming of the Capitol, China's official propagandists could barely contain their schadenfreude. If you don't allow the storming of your own legislature, they asked, how could you support it in Hong Kong? It was an illustration of how Trump's subversion of American democracy has provided cover for authoritarian governments like China's. Beijing has found the chaos

incited by Trump a convenient defense for its authoritarian policies and iron-fisted suppression of dissent.

Readership: 33,563,185

COVID-19 Conspiracies: How Can We Deal With Misinformation?

Forbes

The rush to roll-out COVID-19 vaccines in the United States, United Kingdom and other countries has contributed to a new viral spread—that of false health information and malicious disinformation campaigns about the vaccines. Misinformation regarding health matters is an age-old problem, but one that social media has exacerbated—with dangerous consequences. Any increase in traction for anti-vaccination activists inevitably leads to a decline in vaccination rates and an increase in preventable illnesses, as noted by the recent resurgence in measles outbreaks in the United States. A recent nationally representative U.S. study found that the self-reported intent of getting a COVID vaccine declined from 74% in early April to 56% in early December 2020.

Readership: 26,855,122

COVID-19 vaccines lies and hoaxes: How to inoculate yourself, family and friends against deadly misinformation

USA Today

Top scientists have created an online guide to arm people with scientific facts and practical tips to fight lies, hoaxes and conspiracy theories that are threatening public trust in the COVID-19 vaccines. More than two dozen leading experts in vaccine psychology, education and virology say they volunteered contributions to The COVID-19 Vaccine Communication Handbook to take on misinformation and propaganda spread by anti-vaccination activists that could lower vaccination rates and cause needless deaths. Even as coronavirus cases surge and hospitals overflow with critically ill patients, opposition to the vaccines is resonating, not just with fringe communities but with swaths of mainstream America.

Readership: 25,993,705

QAnon and the storm of the U.S. Capitol: The offline effect of online conspiracy theories

The Conversation

What is the cost of propaganda, misinformation and conspiracy theories? Democracy and public safety, to name just two things. The United States has received a stark lesson on how online propaganda and misinformation have an offline impact. For weeks, Donald Trump has falsely claimed the November presidential election was rigged and that's why he wasn't re-elected. The president's words have mirrored and fed conspriacy theories spred by followers of the QAnon movement. While conspiracy theorists are often dismissed as "crazy people on social media," QAnon adherents were among the individuals at the front line of the storming of Capitol Hill.

Readership: 6,964,811

Social media allowed a shocked nation to watch a coup attempt in real time

TechCrunch

Today's historic and terrifying coup attempt by pro-Trump extremists in Washington, D.C. played out live the same way it was fomented — on social media. Once again Twitter, streaming sites and other user-generated media were the only place to learn what was happening in the nation's capital — and the best place to be misled by misinformation and propaganda. In the morning, official streams and posts portended what people expected of the day: a drawn-out elector certification process in Congress while a Trump-led rally turned to general protests.

Readership: 5,081,380

Trending Adversary Narratives

Creating conditions for a very frozen conflict? US Navy to step up patrols in frigid Arctic waters off Russia's northern borders

RT

As Arctic ice retreats further each year, it helps to open up another front in the perennial standoff between Russia and the US, with both nations racing to dominate the space and control the emerging maritime trade route. In a call with reporters on Tuesday, US Secretary of the Navy Kenneth Braithwaite announced that American sailors would increasingly set course for the frigid waters of the far North. "You will see the Navy operating again in a more permanent manner above the Arctic Circle," he said, adding that the US will "operate more assertively" to challenge Russia's claims in the region.

Readership: 13,008,224

Do you realize now what you have done? US gets the kind of 'democracy' it championed overseas Op-ed

RT

A crowd of protesters stormed Congress protesting a presidential election they claimed had been fraudulent. When this happened in Serbia in 2000, the US called it democracy. When it happened in Washington, DC – not so much. Scenes from the US Capitol on Wednesday, as protesters backing President Donald Trump disrupted the joint session of Congress meeting to certify the election of Democrat Joe Biden, looked very much like Belgrade in October 2000. The sight was later repeated in Ukraine – twice, in 2004 and 2014 – Georgia, Moldova, Belarus, and several Central Asian former Soviet republics. On every occasion, the US backed the "people power," because American NGOs and embassies were supporting what became known as "color revolutions."

Readership: 13,008,224

Iran to Welcome Biden Administration's Return to Path of Law: President

iran Goverment

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani says Tehran will welcome it if the incoming administration of US President-elect Joe Biden would choose to return to the rule of law and comply with its commitments under the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran. "We will welcome it if the other side obeys the law. A person who acts in a cruel way in the alley, breaks the windows with stone, but suddenly comes to his mind

and says he doesn't want to break windows anymore; shouldn't we welcome it? We'd welcome such a move," Rouhani said in a Wednesday address to a cabinet session.

Readership: 1,296

GEC Mentions

Nothing Significant to Report

Trending Academic Research

The Pendulum: How Russia Sways Its Way to More Influence in Libya

War on the Rocks

[...] To maximize its control over locals and minimize its dependence on them, Moscow has built leverage over the years using a sophisticated mixture of tools, ranging from disinformation to diplomacy to banking interference to clandestine military intervention. Lethal equipment deliveries to the L…

Sources and Methods

The bullets above are compiled from four Boolean searches from TrendKite. The precise searches can be modified to fit business needs.

Today's search revealed 4788 artifacts based on the queries above, from which we parsed out what we found to be the most meaningful stories for the GEC's leadership and mission by readership. Search criteria are based on USG leadership profiles.

Very Respectfully,

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All military plus HHS addressees

To: (b)(6)

Subject: Fw: Special Envoy's Daily Brief

Date: Thu, 15 Oct 2020 13:40:01 +0000

J-39/OWS/Army Colleagues:

Attached please find today's GEC Daily Media Brief. Flagging a *Guardian* story on YouTube banning misinformation about COVID-19 vaccinations.

v/r

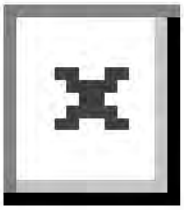
(b)(6)

From: (b)(6) @state.gov>
Sent: Thursday, October 15, 2020 7:27 AM
To: Gabrielle(Potts), Lea (b)(6) @state.gov>
Subject: Special Envoy's Daily Brief

Good Morning Special Envoy Gabrielle,

Please find below and attached this morning's edition of your daily news and propaganda capture.

Special Envoy's Daily Brief
Oct. 15, 2020



Trending Propaganda and Disinformation News

Facebook and Twitter restrict controversial New York Post story on Joe Biden

The Guardian

Facebook and Twitter took steps on Wednesday to limit the spread of a controversial New York Post article critical of Joe Biden, sparking outrage among conservatives and stoking debate over how social media platforms should tackle misinformation ahead of the US election. In an unprecedented step against a major news publication, Twitter blocked users from posting links to the Post story or photos from the unconfirmed report. Users attempting to share the story were shown a notice saying: “We can’t complete this request because this link has been identified by Twitter or our partners as being potentially harmful.” Users clicking or retweeting a link already posted to Twitter are shown a warning the “link may be unsafe”.

Readership: 27,826,696

YouTube bans misinformation about Covid vaccinations

The Guardian

YouTube has banned misinformation about Covid vaccinations, just days after Facebook took similar action on its own platform. The company says that the fact that such a vaccine might be imminent makes it the right time to take action, and

expand its pre-existing policies against Covid-19 medical misinformation. “A Covid-19 vaccine may be imminent, therefore we’re ensuring we have the right policies in place to be able to remove misinformation related to a Covid-19 vaccine from the platform,” a YouTube spokesperson said. “Any content that includes claims about Covid-19 vaccinations that contradict expert consensus from local health authorities or the World Health Organization (WHO) will be removed from YouTube.”

Readership: 27,826,696

Trending Adversary Narratives

Putin, Erdogan call for activation of political process on Nagorno-Karabakh

tass.com

Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish colleague Recep Tayyip Erdogan have discussed the situation around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict during a phone call on Wednesday, the Kremlin press service informed on the outcomes of the talks between both countries' leaders. "Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan have called for activation of political process, namely based on the progress reached within the OSCE Minsk Group," the Kremlin informed. Both sides have reaffirmed the importance of a humanitarian ceasefire reached on October 10 in Moscow. Vladimir Putin has also expressed serious concern over the participation of Middle Eastern militants in the hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Readership: 258,903

Iran’s funds in Iraq over $5 billion: Top banker

Pars Today

Iran’s central bank governor Abdolnaser Hemmati says he is “hopeful” his visit to Baghdad on Monday and successful talks with Iraqi officials would enable Tehran to use more than $5 billion of its funds in the country. Money from Iran’s exports of gas and electricity has accumulated and been trapped in a bank account in Iraq because of the illegal US sanctions. Hemmati secured a trade agreement

with officials in Baghdad Monday to use payments from energy exports to buy essential goods from Iraq. “The recent trip to Iraq was a success and we hope to be able to use our resources in Iraq, which are more than five billion dollars,” he told reporters after a cabinet meeting in Tehran Wednesday.

Readership: 159,785

Beijing's climate pledge could pave way to net-zero global economy

Chinadaily Global Edition

The announcement at the UN General Assembly by Chinese President Xi Jinping that China would become carbon neutral by 2060 and ensure its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions peak by 2030 marks a historic precedent. As one of the world's largest emitting economies, China will need to drastically cut GHG emissions every year. Announcing its new climate target, China has raised the bar for national climate commitments globally, joining the ranks of a dozen other countries that have made similar commitments, such as Austria, Finland, France, Germany and Japan, but also Fiji, New Zealand, Ireland, Singapore and South Africa.

Readership: 78,731

GEC Mentions

Portman Highlights Efforts to Combat Global Disinformation and Propaganda Threats & Cyberattacks in Bush Center Democracy Talks Series

Rob Portman

In a George W. Bush Center Democracy Talks series interview, Senator Portman discussed his work to combat disinformation and cyberattacks both in the United States and abroad by highlighting the bipartisan Countering Foreign Propaganda and Disinformation Act, which he authored with Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT) and that was signed into law in December 2016. The law improves the ability of the United States to counter foreign propaganda and disinformation by establishing

an interagency center, the Global Engagement Center (GEC), housed at the State Department to coordinate and synchronize counter-propaganda efforts throughout the U.S. government in support of friends and allies overseas.

Readership: 26,062

Trending Academic Research

Facebook Users May Spread Russian Propaganda Less Often If They Know Its Source

RAND Research Topic: Science and Technology

Russian propaganda is hitting its mark on social media, generating strong partisan reactions that help intensify political divisions. But Facebook users are less apt to press the like button on content when they learn that it is part of a foreign propaganda campaign.

Sources and Methods

The bullets above are compiled from four Boolean searches from TrendKite. The precise searches can be modified to fit business needs.

Today's search revealed 2675 artifacts based on the queries above, from which we parsed out what we found to be the most meaningful stories for the GEC's leadership and mission by readership. Search criteria are based on USG leadership profiles.

Very Respectfully,

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Military plus HHS addressees

Recipient: (b)(6)

iSANS | *The International Strategic Action Network for Security*

The Evolution of the Kremlin's Hostile Influence in Belarus in the Aftermath of the 2020 Elections and Lukashenko's Efforts to Retain Power

Analytical report

May 2021

About iSANS – the International Strategic Action Network for Security

International Strategic Action Network for Security (iSANS) is an international expert initiative established in 2018 and aimed at detecting, analyzing, and countering hybrid threats against democracy, rule of law, and the sovereignty of states in Western, Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia.

The initiative's attention is focused on hostile networks of influence using hybrid tools and comprised of fake public initiatives, corrupt political figures serving foreign interests, fake news, disinformation and propaganda networks, and networks of hate groups complemented by the export of corruption instruments, economic penetration, various covert operations, and military threats.

Experts with many years of diverse academic and practical experience from both sides of the Atlantic have joined forces in iSANS to strengthen the resilience of the democratic project at all levels, including the general public, civil society and the media, academic and expert communities, national governments, and international organizations.

The initiative's priority is to defend the international legal framework and democratic order against purposeful attempts to undermine, compartmentalize, and abolish it by states and political forces contemptuous of universal democratic and human rights values.

iSANS is a practical initiative seeking to counter threats and find solutions to problems detected. For this purpose, it collaborates with the media in publicizing its findings and reaches out to national and international policy makers with practical recommendations on actions to be taken.

For more information and publications by iSANS, please visit https://isans.org/en.

DT Institute

This initiative was made possible by the Global Engagement Center at the U.S. Department of State, through the Information Access Fund (IAF) administered by the DT Institute. The opinions, conclusions, or recommendations contained herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the view of the U.S. government or the IAF.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 5

Part I. A Risky Game between Minsk and the Kremlin during the Crisis: Catch Me if You Can

Lukashenko's ultimate loss of legitimacy in 2020 7

Why Lukashenko, from the Kremlin's point of view, should not repeat the fate of Yanukovych 8

What demands did Putin put to Lukashenko during the protests and what is happening with their implementation? 9

Management of Russian operations of influence on Belarus 10

Changes in the Kremlin's policy of influencing Belarus after the August 2020 elections 11

Kremlin foreign policy objectives regarding Belarus 13

Potential framework for external positioning of Russia 14

Involvement of Belarus in the conflict surrounding Crimea and Donbass and the Kremlin's aggressive policy 16

Continuation of the war against national history and symbols as a crusade against the "West" 17

Western trajectory and an attempt to avoid sanctions: Lukashenko tries to stick his foot in the closing door 21

A seasonal flare-up in Belarus: "Operation Conspiracy", a Security Council decree, and constitutional reform as a "Turkmen model" of retaining and ensuring the continuity of power 22

A staged coup attempt in Belarus: Joint mission by the Belarusian KGB and the Russian FSB 24

From "Operation Conspiracy" to an emergency decree on retaining power 29

Lukashenko's scenarios for reforming the Constitution and maintaining power 32

Evolution of Russian propaganda and operations of influence in Belarus after August. Making Belarusian society expect help from Moscow 34

Reconfiguring the Russian network of influence in Belarus after August 37

The sum amount of the "Russian factor" in the Belarusian crisis in May 2021 40

What the Kremlin has achieved and not yet achieved so far regarding Belarus 45

Part II. Inside Belarus: Zoom In

Attempts at party building after August: various initiatives and counteraction by Lukashenko 48

New vigilantes: Who are the *yabatki*? 58

State-owned media, propaganda, and a disinformation "think-tank" 63

Conclusion 81

Endnotes 84

Annex: infographics for Evolution 107

Introduction

The Kremlin's strategy for influencing the situation in Belarus has undergone significant changes since the start of the revolutionary events in August last year. This evolution is especially noticeable in comparison with Moscow's previous approaches towards Belarus in the periods up to 2018 and in 2018-2019, described and analyzed in our earlier reports[1].

Central to the Kremlin's new strategy after the 2020 presidential elections are the active export to Belarus of the Russian model of control of the authorities over society, based on a combination of mass propaganda and large-scale repression against dissent; an attempt to impose political reform in the form of party building in the interests of Moscow; and forcing Belarus to participate actively in the anti-Western and anti-Ukrainian policies of Russia. All these processes are characterized by the growing role of the special services in governing the state in both countries.

At the moment, the Kremlin has achieved the following goals: there has been an almost complete synchronization of state propaganda on Russian and Belarusian television, not only regarding events in Belarus, but also relative to the West and other foreign policy narratives important for the Kremlin; the Russian repressive model of government control over society has been successfully exported to Belarus; Lukashenko has cut off his path to resuming normal relations with the West because of the crimes he has committed and has been forced to pay off Putin for his support; and there has been a catastrophic deterioration in relations between Belarus and Ukraine and concurrent loss of status as a negotiating neutral platform in the "Minsk" process on Donbass.

At the same time, Lukashenko is successfully sabotaging the political reform process of developing a system of political parties capable of being conductors of Russian influence proposed by Putin. He replaced it with an emergency decree and "constitutional reform" aimed at retaining control through the transfer of power to two unelected bodies – the Security Council in an emergency and the All-Belarusian People's Assembly, chaired by Lukashenko, under normal conditions. This design will ensure the continuity of the regime's power and not be dependent on elections and the risks of associated protests.

Lukashenko's maneuvers in relations with Moscow can be viewed as his usual cunning attempt to shift the Kremlin's attention from demands for internal changes (forcing the surrender of sovereignty) to the outer perimeter (assistance to Moscow in a confrontation with NATO and new aggressive rhetoric towards Ukraine). But for the Kremlin, considering the new round of its confrontation with Ukraine and the West, these changes in Belarus's foreign policy turn out to be a priority over the implementation of plans to accelerate the "deep integration" of the two countries. Moscow will be able to implement these plans later, but for now it can gradually increase its influence, including through its special services and the continuation of economic control. Essentially, Lukashenko's successful crackdown on protests and his belligerent rhetoric toward the West are now more important to Moscow than integration and economic interests.

The fate of Lukashenko himself in Moscow's plans remains uncertain. Replacing Lukashenko in response to mass protests is not something the Kremlin is willing to agree to, as it sets a bad example for Russia. It is beneficial for the Kremlin to keep under its control a weak, in its view, Lukashenko who has lost his legitimacy and status of a guarantor of sovereignty and who has lost his reputation as a master of international deals. The Kremlin is giving him time – albeit with the support of Moscow – to deal with a

society that has risen up for a peaceful revolution and finally drive himself into the trap of complete dependence on the Russian leadership. At a convenient moment, when, according to the Kremlin's calculations, the protests will finally subside and Russian influence in Belarus will increase, it will be both easier and politically more profitable to replace the country's illegitimate and globally despised leader for a more convenient figure. It will not look like a regime change stemming from a popular revolution with the support of the democratic West, but a Russian liberation of Belarus from an irritating, hapless, and criminal leader.

This report is divided into two parts. In the first part, we describe and analyze the evolution of the Kremlin's policies and toolkit for establishing Russian control in Belarus after the start of the revolutionary events in August 2020 and assess Lukashenko's attempts to gain Moscow's support, at the same time evading Moscow's demands that threaten his future while pursuing his own political reform to maintain power. To gain a deeper understanding of Moscow's current priorities regarding Belarus, we place this bilateral process in the context of the growing international ambitions of the Russian leadership. The second part of the report focuses on an in-depth description of the existing situation in Belarus regarding attempts at party building, the creation of a movement of pro-government vigilantes, and the situation of state media and propaganda.

The purpose of this report is to describe and analyze the interactions between the Kremlin and the Lukashenko regime in the period following the August 2020 elections and the start of mass protests. At the same time, we believe that further events in Belarus largely depend not only on these two authoritarian regimes, but, of course, on Belarusian society itself, civil society, and the opposition, which have already proven themselves incredibly during the peaceful revolution and undoubtedly will continue to do. Belarusian society is a very important actor in and of itself, and its actions could undoubtedly disrupt the game and plans of the two dictators, however unlikely this may seem now amid mass repressions.

The role of the international community – including the governments of democratic countries, international organizations, foreign non-governmental organizations, and the global Belarusian diaspora – in exerting effective pressure on Minsk and the Kremlin, on the one hand, and supporting democratic forces in Belarus, on the other, also holds great importance and potential. Today this potential is not fully unlocked, but we hope that international civil solidarity and the responsibility of democratic politicians will show itself very soon.

These two key topics – the role of and opportunities for Belarusian society and the international community in the current political crisis and the struggle for freedom, human rights, and democracy in Belarus – are beyond the scope of this report and require a separate analysis. In this report, we focus on the influence of the Russian authorities on events in Belarus and Lukashenko's attempts to gain support from Moscow with minimal losses for himself and to retain his power, protecting it from both his own people and Russian control.

Part I. A Risky Game between Minsk and the Kremlin during the Crisis: Catch Me if You Can

Lukashenko's ultimate loss of legitimacy in 2020

Let us recall the basic chain of events in the context of the presidential elections in Belarus. The flawed policy of the Belarusian authorities regarding the first wave of Covid-19 in Belarus[2], together with the growing economic crisis, by the summer of 2020 led to the loss of the last social contract between Belarusian society and Lukashenko. Prior to that, the social contract was articulated by the authorities as "Lukashenko is the defender of state sovereignty and the guarantor of a minimum level of social protection" (including health care). Lukashenko's criminal inaction and disdainful statements during the first wave of the epidemic was ridiculed throughout the media, including Russian media[3], and resulted in deep outrage across Belarusian society. The lack of an accountable state response to the pandemic led to the emergence of mutual civil assistance, leading to the rapid growth of self-organization in society[4] and the creation of many new social ties. These processes have become especially noticeable among the younger generation of Belarusians aged 20 to 40[5].

Belarus arrived at the election campaign at the beginning of summer with a society more active and angry at the authorities, and with Lukashenko, who was frantic because of the unfortunate circumstances he faced before the elections. This hysteria may have been skillfully fueled by the Kremlin to weaken Lukashenko and make him more accommodating in matters of "deep integration" with Russia[6].

Lukashenko went to the elections as a "guarantor of sovereignty" and "protector from the Russian threat" after almost two years of active pressure from the Kremlin. At the same time, the degree of anti-Russian and "anti-Maidan" hysteria was growing in the state media of Belarus each day[7].

During the election campaign, Lukashenko continued to make mistakes. At first, he refused to register the main candidates, who were moderate in comparison with the "old opposition," and arrested first Sergei Tikhanovsky and then Viktor Babariko and his team, declaring him an "agent of the Kremlin" (the current theory speaks about "adversaries of Lukashenko in Russia"). Through these actions, Lukashenko essentially with his own hands concentrated the protest voices around Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, who unexpectedly took the place of her arrested husband. As a result, Belarusians took part in a protest vote, united around one opposition candidate.

Another miscalculation of the panicked Lukashenko was the unprecedentedly open, flaunted election fraud, which may have become the last straw that broke the patience of Belarusians. According to rough estimates – the most possible given conditions of total falsification – the protest vote worked: Lukashenko clearly and tremendously lost to Tikhanovskaya and received the smallest number of votes in the entire history of his rule. Outraged by the false official election results, demonstrative fraud, arrests of key candidates, and Lukashenko's previous failure to respond to the pandemic, angry and much more united Belarusians took to the streets in the hundreds of thousands. Thus began a peaceful revolution, which marked a fundamental turn in the history of Belarus, after which it became impossible to return to the continuation of Alexander Lukashenko's 26-year rule.

Unprecedented violence during the dispersal of protests and mass torture of detainees, and the repression that soon unfolded against virtually all active groups of society, including the lowest level of courtyard communities, completed the catastrophe of the ruling regime[8].

In four months of key events (the beginning of the Covid pandemic, the election campaign, unprecedented election fraud, and post-election repression), Lukashenko lost all his legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of Belarusians[9]. From the perspective of most Belarusians and the international community, he is not only an illegitimate ruler, but also a criminal who flagrantly violated key norms of international human rights law. As a result, Lukashenko became completely dependent on the Kremlin, from which he is now trying to clumsily extricate himself[10].

Recall that in August, after a pause, Putin expressed his full support for Lukashenko and then sent a troop of consultants to Belarus who helped to establish a process of synchronization of propaganda[1], and, most likely, provided consultations necessary for the effective implementation of the Russian model of control over society analogous to the post-Bolotnaya events in Russia and the post-Maidan events in the Russian-controlled territories of the annexed Crimea and separatist areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions[11].

Why Lukashenko, from the Kremlin's point of view, should not repeat the fate of Yanukovych

We have already written many times that before the history with the elections in Belarus began, the Kremlin would have been happy to replace Lukashenko with someone more expedient. We still believe this. However, paradoxically, it was the civic mobilization and protests by a significant part of Belarusians against election fraud and the continuation of Lukashenko's rule that plainly forced the Kremlin to support him and postpone the question of replacing him until a later time.

The first and most obvious reason for the Kremlin's support for Lukashenko is that the change of power in Belarus, which would be the result of a peaceful revolution opposing the permanent rule of Lukashenko and demanding democratic rights and freedoms, sets a very bad example for Russia, where things are not exactly ideal. Zeroing out terms for the eternal Russian president through forced "voting on stumps" during a pandemic; ineffective government actions to the pandemic in terms of a medical response and regarding the issue of financial compensation to victims; a stagnating economy; a drop in living standards'; people's dissatisfaction with poverty and corruption of the ruling groups; increasingly violent suppression of protests – these are the problems that Russia now faces. The analogies between the two countries are fairly obvious. Given this, replacing Lukashenko in response to mass protests is not something the Kremlin is willing to agree to[12].

The second, replacing Lukashenko with one of your own at the peak of the protests would have been practically impossible. The Kremlin cannot control what happens on the Belarusian streets, and the use of force would not help here either. It would be a war against the people of Belarus and a complete and final rupture of Belarusian society with Russia. Kremlin analysts openly said that this would mean "Belarus's withdrawal to the West"[13].

---

[1] We describe the synchronization of propaganda in the Russian and Belarusian media in the corresponding section of the report.

The third was that, on the one hand, of course, the Kremlin sees that Putin's consistent support for Lukashenko has hit the Belarusians' attitude towards Russia very hard[14]. But the Kremlin's long-term calculation can be described here in the framework of the following scenario: Lukashenko himself, with his own hands, must "drown the protest in blood," and falsifications, torture, the use of weapons on people, and repression have already deprived him of the remnants of legitimacy in his own country and made him an outcast in the rest of the world. In a situation where Lukashenko is weakened, hated, and considered illegitimate, the Kremlin can decide his fate much more easily. In the same way, the Kremlin hopes that the repressions applied to the active part of society will make it bleed and quash the protest potential, finally opening the way for pro-Russian leaders[15]. The same logic is followed by the Kremlin's coercion of Lukashenko towards party political reform in that Lukashenko must prepare the country to accelerate the systemic integration of Belarus with Russia without impediment.

The fourth reason is that Lukashenko must himself do all the dirty geopolitical work – ruining relations with the West and its closest neighbors, especially with Ukraine, as much as possible; dragging Belarus into a confrontation with the West and NATO on the side of Russia; and depriving the country of neutrality, even if it is only conditional. The further integration of the two countries in the military sphere is progressing within the framework of the same logic[16].

The fifth is that the Kremlin absolutely does not want to see Lukashenko in Russia – at least for a long time and certainly not alive. Unlike Yanukovych, who, according to reports, is quietly drinking himself into a stupor in the estate allocated to him in Russia, the charismatic Lukashenko, because of his character, will not remain silent in exile. And Lukashenko's popularity is still quite high among the poorly educated part of the Russian population, which is now also the poorest. Lukashenko can still act as a destabilizing factor in Russian society, no matter how ridiculous it sounds. Remember his ambitions in the early 2000s to become the president of Russia or a union state after the integration of the two countries and the work of his lobbyists from the Communist Party of Russia[17].

What demands did Putin put to Lukashenko during the protests and what is happening with their implementation?

Essentially, Lukashenko now is only partially fulfilling the plan imposed on him by Putin last autumn[18], and to a large extent is sabotaging it.

According to our sources, at a meeting in Sochi in September 2020, Putin put forward several demands to Lukashenko.

The minimum package of conditions for support included an agreement on the creation of a unified command of the armed forces in the event of some "escalation." Russia wanted then, and wants now, to gain a unified command over the Armed Forces of Belarus at a moment of "intensification," which is logical for the union state. However, it is important to understand that we are essentially talking about the creation of unified Armed Forces, which you cannot have during a war and then dissolve in peacetime. Most likely we are talking about the creation of a completely uniform and unified army. At first, Lukashenko gave full and unconditional consent to this, including the restructuring of military schools and even the lustration of those Belarusian military who were once trained in third countries. This was in September, and the situation

in Belarus was extremely acute. However, later, when Lukashenko felt more confident, he began to sabotage the practical discussion of this important issue for Russia.

The second package included agreements on economic and logistic standards – the final unification of tariffs, linkage of transport timetables (aircraft / trains / ships), unification of document flow in this area, unification of credit policy through the creation of a single center that regulates lending rates, and other financial issues. Now Lukashenko is hindering the implementation of these agreements. Apparently, he has two interests: possibly he has not yet managed to withdraw some of his assets to third countries and/or is waiting for a hint or signal from some Western structures that relief and obtaining loans from them are possible, or, as with Aliyev, receiving them on a bilateral basis.

And the third package regards the development of the union state. With all the ongoing processes to discuss the reform of Belarusian legislation, Lukashenko carefully ignores all sorts of references to the fact that such a state would come into being in the updated legislation, including the new Constitution. That is, now he is sabotaging any unification process with Russia at the legislative level, even the preliminary agreements that have already been reached in the discussion of road maps.

Now, towards the end of spring 2021, the Kremlin's position is to periodically remind Lukashenko of the Sochi agreements but not to force events, giving Minsk time to completely quash the protests while further having the legitimacy of the ruler weakened and ensuring international isolation and economic collapse. So far, Moscow is slowly choosing the scope of joint actions to which Lukashenko himself agrees, for example on oil transit.

Management of Russian operations of influence on Belarus

The development of the Putin regime in Russia has reached the stage when the special services play a leading and controlling role in the country. At present, representatives of the Russian special services in one form or another coordinate or oversee any official Russian activity outside the Russian Federation.

The Russian presidential administration also largely consists of people from the FSB, GRU, and SVR[19]. Employees of the FSB and SVR, attached to overseeing various economic transactions outside the Russian Federation, simultaneously act as political operators and are engaged in political intelligence[20].

As we wrote in our report "Rebirth of an Empire," the activities of the Kremlin's influence on other countries can roughly be divided into background (carried out by different services) and "projects." A "project" is a kind of special operation approved by Putin personally which is carried out by one of the services or an oligarch close to them (for example, Yevgeny Prigozhin) with the support of or in coordination with those services entrusted with the implementation of the "project." Mega-projects have included the annexation of Crimea, the war in Donbass, Prigozhin's work in Africa, and interference in the U.S. elections. Often such projects in fact harm the systemic activities of the special services, making them visible and not bringing results other than publicity, likely serving to emphasize the indulgence and impunity of the Kremlin, tickling the inflated imperial patriotism of the inner circle[21].

Not much is known about the centers that currently govern Russia's policy towards Belarus. Due to circumstances discussed below, the central "project" for the implementation of the Kremlin's strategy of influence on the situation in Belarus apparently does not currently exist. Rather, several parallel "projects" and the activities of various government agencies can be discussed.

Several Russian departments carry out background activities and routine measures to safeguard Russia's interests in Belarus. The degree of their coordination is not fully understood, but the large number of former employees of the SVR, GRU, and FSB in the Administration of the President of Russia suggests that there is a serious coordination of actions between the Administration and these security services. The attribution of subordination of the centers of operations of influence on Belarus and the media under such departments as the GRU, SVR or Presidential Administration has blurred lines. In any case, it is important to understand that these Kremlin operations centers were either created by one of the special services or created by other (including private) structures which initially also developed at the suggestion of one or another special service and ultimately managed to prove their usefulness to the Kremlin. As an illustration of the second variant of the origin of the center of operations of influence, it is useful to consider the history of the creation and development of the propaganda resource *RuBaltic*[22]. It developed as an initiative of "patriotic" young employees of universities, primarily Moscow State University and the Kant University, who were well aware of the market demand for "patriotic" projects. Of course, personal connections also contributed to this. After several years of working with state support, *RuBaltic* and the Agency for Integration Initiatives (this is, in fact, one group) have become a hub of operations directly supervised by the Administration of the President of Russia, and some employees have moved over to the Presidential Administration directly[23].

In addition, one should not forget the traditional connection with the special services of Russian academic centers such as Moscow State University and MGIMO which participate in operations to influence Belarus. All male students in several key departments of these leading universities register to cooperate with the intelligence services.

Changes in the Kremlin's policy of influencing Belarus after the August 2020 elections

With all the changes in the alignment of forces in the information field in Belarus and its actual giving away by the government in Minsk to Russia in August 2020, we can assert that several fundamental approaches in the Kremlin's policy towards Belarus have remained unchanged. This includes the desire to keep Belarus in its zone of influence and draw it as deeply as possible into its orbit; working on strengthening the confrontation of Belarus with the West and with the countries of the former USSR that did not accept the imperial ambitions of the Kremlin as legitimate interests; and strengthening control over Belarusian society and the information field of Belarus to clean out everything that is disloyal to Russian influence and the Russian political model.

At the same time, we see that because of the experience of 20 years of "brotherly" relations, the Kremlin and Putin do not trust Lukashenko personally and are continually making efforts to weaken him, evident, among other things, in the "driving" him out of his mind through an alternative stream of Kremlin propaganda via Telegram channels and the ostensibly liberal part of the Russian media with the full support of Kremlin media.

The model of social control that the Kremlin began exporting to Belarus after August 2020 combines zombifying propaganda with massive repression of dissent. It is not a Kremlin invention and is characteristic of a certain stage in the development of any authoritarian regime that acquires the features of a dictatorship. The elements of this model are aggressive propaganda that divides society; the formation of an image of an "internal enemy" and a "traitor" in those who criticize[24]; a series of repressions used to establish fear in society, from the adoption of increasingly restrictive and repressive legislation to its targeted and random application escalating to its mass implementation in all key areas of social and informational activity; systemic physical cruelty and violence against critics; measures to physically isolate and eliminate the leaders of the opposing side[25]; and the creation of vigilante groups[26]. All this exists in Russia today and is successfully exported to Belarus.

The model of political reform in Belarus, proposed by the Kremlin as a condition of support until at least April of this year, was aimed at weakening Lukashenko's positions. It consisted of the synchronization of the Belarusian political system with the Russian imitation party model, which would make it possible to strengthen Moscow's influence through pro-Russian parties, built as analogies to Russian models. We know from several sources that back in the fall and winter, Putin personally insisted on political reform in Belarus, which would include the registration and (or) strengthening of the role of Belarusian political parties – partners of Russian parties from among the Kremlin-controlled "systemic opposition" represented in the State Duma. Strengthening the role of political parties and parliament in Belarus and developing its ties with the Russian State Duma were supposed to become, according to the Kremlin, an important element of the political integration of the two states[27].

However, this political and technological tactic of the Kremlin to build imitation party structures in Belarus in the likeness and control of Russian counterparts for carrying out Russian influence, perhaps, has recently (since April) yielded primacy to Moscow's consent to use purely forceful methods of solving problems in Belarus and the transfer to the security services the main role in governing the state. Perhaps this is not just an agreement, but a direct recommendation from the Russian leadership. There are several reasons for this. On the one hand, Moscow's proposals on party reform met with opposition from Lukashenko: seemingly agreeing with them at first, in early April he actually put an end to these plans in his keynote speech on this topic, stating that "we are not ready for this," that it is necessary to approach the development of the party system primarily from the point of view of security issues, and that he will not allow forced party building[28]. The refusal in early May of state registration of the key pro-Russian party "Soyuz"[29] fully confirms this position of Minsk. The Kremlin now has no effective tools to force Lukashenko towards political reform according to its own formulas.

Along with this, a kind of "synchronization" of political processes in the two countries in recent years is quite likely, which hinges on the ever-increasing role of law enforcement structures in governing the state. The relatively more "subtle" political and technological system of building the façade-like structures of artificial democracy and manipulating society with the help of ideologized propaganda is increasingly giving way to repressive methods of government in Russia in recent months. Basically, the *siloviki* in Moscow are gaining the upper hand over the "political strategists" in influencing the "number one" and in controlling political processes. "Information authoritarianism" based on propaganda and ruthless control over the information field is being transformed in Russia into rigid authoritarianism, the main instrument of which is repression.

The sharp increase in the scale of repressions in Belarus following the first weeks of confusion of the authorities in August-October suggests, apparently, that in Belarus, as in Russia, the security forces have received complete carte blanche for the main role in solving political problems, pushing out the political strategists. The repressions that have continued in Belarus since the end of 2020 consist of the systematic prosecution, arrest, and criminal punishment of thousands of members of all active groups of society – members of the Coordination Council and other opposition structures, human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers, leaders and participants of mutual assistance programs, strike participants and members of independent trade unions, security officials that have joined the people, students, teachers, doctors, cultural figures, independent athletes, activists of courtyard committees, coordinators of local Telegram channels and groups in social networks, and ordinary protesters.

Of course, we are not talking about the parity of the two regimes transforming into dictatorships, because Putin will not tolerate Lukashenko as an equal, but probably having learned from its own experience of the effectiveness of repressive methods, the Kremlin is no longer interested in the project of "party building" in Belarus. As we have written, Moscow will be pleased if Lukashenko himself "drowns in blood" the Belarusian protest while simultaneously undermining his legitimacy. How exactly Moscow will continue to exercise its influence on Minsk, in addition to the already tested economic, informational, and foreign policy instruments, forcing Lukashenko to deepen integration and at the same time weakening him, allowing him to "drive" himself ever deeper into the trap of dependence on Russia, depends on Russia itself. It is obvious that the *siloviki* of the two countries are tightly connected, and, apparently, the influence of the Russian special services on their Belarusian counterparts in the Kremlin seems to be no less effective a guarantee of their control than the coercion into politico-technological experiments in party building and constitutional reform according to Russian formulas.

Kremlin foreign policy objectives regarding Belarus

In foreign policy, the Kremlin is resolving several issues in this situation. A necessary condition for their implementation is the creation of a situation of deep dependence of Lukashenko's survival on the Kremlin. Specifically, these tasks are to prevent him from swinging back and forth between the West and Moscow, to ensure Belarus's full support and participation in the deepening conflict between Russia and the West, and to deprive Minsk of its position of declared neutrality relative to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine[30]. It is no coincidence that the entire arsenal of propagandists and media channels, which continue to be used by the Kremlin against Ukraine, have been used for these purposes in Belarus[31].

Essentially, here the Kremlin uses not only available resources and experience, but also merges anti-Ukrainian and anti-democratic narratives in its propaganda in the context of the crisis in Belarus and actively employs the rhetoric of "color revolutions" under the guidance of the West. As a result, Moscow is successfully tying Minsk to its anti-Ukrainian position and policy. For a long time after 2014, Lukashenko maintained relations with Ukraine and used it to his economic advantage[32], and his declared neutrality has long and strongly irritated the Kremlin. It is not surprising that Moscow did not fail to take advantage of the situation when Lukashenko, after the start of the mass protests, began to need it and directed its efforts first at putting an end to Minsk's "neutrality."[33]

According to our sources, it is precisely military control over the situation in the region that has come to the fore for the Kremlin, manifested in Putin's proposal on the transfer of the Armed Forces under a single command under "special circumstances." This request requires the solution of an enormous number of legal problems, but it is highly relevant for Moscow given the escalation of the situation around Ukraine. We can only state that the Kremlin has been preparing this escalation for a long time since this question was raised in Sochi in a minimum package.

The formulation of Russia's foreign policy objectives in its influence on Belarus depends directly on how the Kremlin's view of the role and positioning of Russia in the world is changing.

Potential framework for external positioning of Russia

Our experts see two options for the development of Russia's positioning in the world and the framework of its new confrontation with the West.

The first is the "cold war" with the West based on the Soviet model, with the formation of two opposing military-political blocs and the transition of individual episodes of the current "hybrid" war into a systemic "cold war." However, this requires serious resources and leverage. The resources available to Russia now in a multipolar world are not enough to build a monolithic bloc that seriously challenges NATO. The resources available are only suitable for building ties such as an alliance of an authoritarian-totalitarian-kleptocratic *Internationale*, where a situational partnership with major players such as China (which does not want to see Russia as an equal partner) and blackmail or coercion of smaller players are possible. However, in practice, the Kremlin is losing real control even over the near abroad, which was designated by Primakov Sr. as a "zone of legitimate interests" (the so-called Primakov doctrine).

Given these constraints, the Kremlin is likely[34] to use a model of regional dominance like that of Iran. The Kremlin, according to our experts, is moving itself into a space like Iran's in world politics. It cannot be called a Cold War, and it cannot be compared with the Soviet model.

The so-called Iranian regional model, according to our experts, looks as follows:

- regional hegemony through the financing of paramilitary proxy groups and the non-public use of its own military officers;
- continuous anti-Western rhetoric;
- rhetoric of resentment ("you offended us," "we are clean and pure, you do not understand us");
- measures of repression and self-isolation to suppress and "close off" the disaffected population ("foreign agents," persecution for political activity).

There is a difference between Iran proper and the version of the Iranian model in Russia, but it is not significant from the point of view of final "subjectness." For example, in Iran supporters of methods of management by force are institutionalized and built into the official system of government, while in Russia they are still weakly institutionalized. In Iran, there is a theocratic system of supreme power and Russia is a secular country, with all its ideological movement towards "traditional values" and "spiritual bonds." The

Kremlin has nuclear weapons, but Iran does not. But all this does not affect what form the Kremlin's status as a global political entity takes. This is an analogue of the "Iranian status."

Inside, the Kremlin will feed the population with the "cold war" on an equal footing with the West, while outside this concept of a bipolar world from the last century will not be taken seriously by anyone. The Kremlin's resources in a multipolar world make it possible to implement a completely different model of conflict based on regional domination and ongoing attempts at malicious actions at the global level, including bribery of Western politicians; cyberattacks on infrastructure; attempts at political destabilization using social networks and interference in elections; private armies' participation in various military conflicts; and the use of intelligence agents to carry out murders, bombings, attempted coups, and other provocations.

The Iranian model will not be completely copied by Russia, and when studying propaganda and propaganda nodes, one can clearly see the contour along which Kremlin diplomacy of various types (official diplomacy, "second track" diplomacy, lobbying, corruption of foreign politicians, etc.) will continue to be implemented and the strategy of hybrid operations will develop further.

The list of regions and countries of influence that the Kremlin is interested in is clear from the directions and content of both official Kremlin media and their proxies in propaganda outlets. These are the various *Sputniks* and *RT* and such "combative outposts" looking at Belarus, such as *NewsFront* (already under U.S. sanctions[35]), *RuBaltik*, and others.

Here is a partial list of propaganda resources and areas of their work:

1) Conventional "South" and "West," where Belarus falls – *Newsfront* is published in English, German, Spanish, Georgian, Bulgarian, Slovak, Serbian, French, and Hungarian[36].
2) Belarus certainly falls as a part of the Ukrainian theme. *Ukraine.ru* and *Politnavigator* are working in this direction[37]. The latter works in Russian, but identifies its regional priorities as Belarus, Ukraine, Crimea, Donbass, Moldova, Transnistria, and the Balkans, with an obvious push towards separatism. *Politnavigator* was "squeezed out" of Ukrainian ownership and is now controlled from Russia.
3) Conventional North-West, where Belarus also falls: *RuBaltik*, in addition to Russian, works in Belarusian, Polish, Lithuanian, and Latvian[38].

Except for the territories of the former USSR (where operations will continue to destroy sovereignty and territorial integrity) and the Baltic countries (where the corruption model, propaganda, and attacks on rights and freedoms interpreted alternatively by the Kremlin and criticism at the international level will more likely be used), the Kremlin will most certainly continue operations in Slovakia, Austria, Germany, Bulgaria, the Balkans, France, and in the Francophone space, as well as in the Spanish-speaking world. At the same time, the political mobilization provoked and fueled by Moscow in these countries will take place both along the extreme left and moderate left and along the extreme right flank[39].

At the same time, in many regions, the Kremlin is undoubtedly faced with the domination of China, and their interests do not always coincide. For example, Africa, which fell under the dependence on China, remains a zone of activity for Kremlin proxies (Prigozhin's private armies, political consultants and business

operations), in the shadow of which representatives of the Lukashenko family are also working. Essentially, the Kremlin has found itself in a situation where it cannot even be the first in international authoritarianism because of China, which has managed to increase its presence and influence throughout the world.

Sometimes Russia and China act together. In 2020, we witnessed a joint and at least partly coordinated disinformation campaign between China and Russia regarding the Covid pandemic[40]. However, it was more of a situational interaction, just like their regular coordinated voting in international organizations. In a real strategic partnership with China, the other side can only play the role of a younger brother, which the Kremlin will not accept. Therefore, the Kremlin's statements about strengthening the eastern trajectory of its foreign policy instead of the western one can be perceived merely as a desire to blackmail the West. At the same time, Russian and Belarusian propaganda will continue to create the appearance of the possibility of a new anti-NATO bloc of Russia and Belarus with the support of China.

Involvement of Belarus in the conflict surrounding Crimea and Donbass and the Kremlin's aggressive policy

The government in Minsk has lost its status as a platform for holding meetings of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) at the initiative of the Ukrainian side. The reason for this decision was voiced by Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine and Minister for the Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories Oleksiy Reznikov: "There is no trust in this country." Even earlier, the first president of Ukraine, head of the Ukrainian delegation to the TCG, Leonid Kravchuk, bluntly called Lukashenko's Belarus a Kremlin "lackey".[41]

Kremlin propaganda very clearly links the issue of confrontation with the West with confrontation with Ukraine. For example, the outpost of Kremlin propaganda, *RuBaltic*, unites two themes into one: "Ukraine has blocked Lukashenko's path to reconciliation with the West."[42] The publication *Vzglyad*, de facto belonging to the Administration of the President of the Russian Federation, interprets this as follows: "Kyiv broke with Minsk to please Washington."[43]

Yevgeny Prigozhin's widespread propaganda media system (Patriot Holding) began to put out the topic of strengthening military cooperation between Belarus and Russia against the background of confrontation with NATO and Ukraine, referring to China[44] and linking this situation to the possible involvement of Belarus in hostilities with Ukraine[45].

Against this background, there are very alarming reports from the eastern part of Belarus about the recruitment of unemployed men "for the war with Ukrainians" and their transportation by minibuses to unknown destinations[46].

Given this, the plan for holding the next youth camp in Donuzlav in Crimea this summer looks interesting. This Russian youth camp with participants from neighboring states and separatist regions existing with the support of Russia emerged as an anti-NATO project several years ago and continues this way, receiving continual funding in the form of grants from the President of Russia. This year, its theme is entirely devoted to the situation in Belarus[47] and the recruitment of young people to this camp has already been announced throughout Belarus. In our reports we have already written about the ideological role of the camp in Donuzlav, which works to spread anti-Western concepts, strengthen Russia's influence in the post-Soviet

region, and legitimize Moscow's aggressive actions, including those against Ukraine. However, the following is important here: in the year before last, practically no one from Belarus went to Donuzlav. Perhaps this was an unofficial ban from Minsk, so as not to ruin relations with Ukraine at that time and to reduce the possible Russian ideological influence on Belarus that was undesirable for Lukashenko at the moment. For a visit to the camp in previous years, its participants, including Lushch and Dzermant, were included in the list of "enemies of Ukraine" in the database of the *Peacemaker* website.

It is worth noting the description of the Donuzlav camp program that is planned for the summer of 2021. It clearly links the situation in Belarus with opposition to the West, Russian interests, annexed Crimea, and Russian-controlled separatist regions: "The events of the summer and autumn of 2020 in the Union Republic of Belarus, and the events that followed in January and February 2021 in the Russian Federation clearly demonstrated the presence of aggravating contradictions between attitudes in the youth subculture and national interests existing in the development of Russia and Belarus and in the development of the Russian-Belarusian Union State. Under current international conditions, the struggle for the hearts and minds of Russian and Belarusian youth requires the mobilization of efforts of the entire society to preserve and consolidate among youth the best national traditions associated with ideas about our common historical, political, and cultural heritage and regarding our national, all-Union patriotism...

Representatives (deputies) of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, the State Council of the Republic of Crimea, experts, representatives of the Lugansk and Donetsk People's Republics, etc. will be invited to participate in the official opening of the camp-forum and throughout. A series of interactive round tables and lectures on Russian history, political science, sociology, and journalism has been organized. Developmental trainings, sports, and creative and socially significant events will also be held. Camp participants will meet with prominent Russian public and political figures and will visit the hero city of Sevastopol. Traditionally, the work of the Donuzlav youth camp, whose history begins with the organization of massive anti-NATO demonstrations in Crimea in the summer of 2007 and 2008, is aimed at educating its participants (cadets) in the spirit of patriotism, love, and devotion to our Great Motherland – Russia... Camp participants are representatives of youth associations of hero cities and Russian cities of military glory, constituent entities of the Russian Federation, and representatives of the 'near abroad' states: Belarus, Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Transnistria."[48]

You can read more about the camp in Donuzlav in our first report[49].

Continuation of the war against national history and symbols as a crusade against the "West"

One of the constants of the Kremlin's hybrid aggression, of course, remains the work on the unification of historical narratives and the use of crisis moments in the history of the region not only to promote imperial ideology, but also to introduce confusion and division among neighboring states[50].

An objective representation of the history of World War II and the role of the USSR at its beginning, including cooperation with Nazi Germany and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, has long been called in Russian propaganda the "rehabilitation of fascism" in the West and "Russophobia".

In fact, by publishing his article on World War II in June 2020, Putin endorsed the leading historical ideologeme that is now being used in the Kremlin's aggressive information campaign[51]. Putin became, as it were, the speaker of the Russian Military Historical Society.

For Belarus, which suffered greatly between the wars from repressions and during the Second World War, this topic is especially painful[52].

In our first report "Forced to Integration" we already dealt with the use of the unification of history to promote Russian imperial ideas in Belarus[53].

We also wrote in our second report "Rebirth of the Empire" that the transformation of the history of the Second World War, which includes a negative the role of the Soviet Union, into the cult of the Great Patriotic War, was invented and implemented by the nationalist-imperial wing of the CPSU and began in fact in Belarus[54]. As is known, this direction is supervised by Vladimir Medinsky, a former minister of culture, current adviser to Putin, and chairman of the Military Historical Society known for his imperial conservatism. Medinsky himself visited Minsk[55] and commented on the protests in Belarus as follows: "Histmat [historical materialism] has sunk into oblivion. What is left? A primitive interpretation of some modernization theories remained, not even wanting to say 'liberal.' I do not want to vulgarize this good word with these kinds of 'liber-ites.'" In his opinion, this approach to history superficially interprets it as a movement from lack of personal freedom to freedom, and the events in Ukraine, the Baltic states and "in fraternal Belarus" are connected with this concept of "already as if freedom from 'Russian imperial oppression.'"[56]

The tragic pages of the history of Belarus, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland are skillfully used by Russian and pro-Russian leaders as a tool to influence society and – in relation to each of the countries – to fight "nationalism," including in Belarus, where it is used to fight national symbols and history.

It is worth noting that attacks on national history and symbols, including the use of the marginal Russian diminutive vocabulary of ethnonyms by Belarusian official media, became one of the points of synchronization between the Kremlin and Lukashenko's propaganda.

The detentions of people with national White-Red-White symbols practically reflect the demand of pro-Russian marginal groups to ban the White-Red-White flag as a flag of Nazi collaborators[57].

The radical pro-Russian forces in Belarus, previously held in check by the special services, have received now virtually total carte blanche to work in public, hold mass events, etc. From the marginalized, they turned into support base of the regime. The *yabatki* groups include those who promote the ideas of the "Russian world," "Crimea is ours," the LDNR, and who deny the independence of Belarus – essentially, all the participants in the networks of pro-Russian influence that we described in our two previous reports (see the section of the report "Who are the *yabatki*?").

The red-brown NOD members, Western Russians, pagans, Orthodox radicals, the Cossacks stood up all as one to defend Lukashenko from "outside interference." After August, they have diligently assisted security officials in cleaning up everything Belarusian that was in the country, from signs to decorations. Even the study of the Belarusian language in Belarus is presented as an infringement of the rights of Russians[58].

The use of history as a weapon is far from new, but it was precisely in a systematic and coordinated manner that it began to be used by the Kremlin and Kremlin proxies after 2006, when a department for combating color revolutions was created in the Administration of the President of Russia and the consolidation of the ideology of the "Russian world" and "Eurasianism" began. A whole bunch of specialized organizations emerged in 2007. We consider one such case in a separate publication[59], of the Russian Historical Memory Foundation and its network. It was its creator, Alexander Dyukov, who found himself in the pool of leading commentators on events in Belarus in the Russian media[60], and before that in the vanguard of the defamation campaign against one of the Belarusian national heroes, Kastuś Kalinoŭski.

The stated statutory goal of the foundation is "to promote objective academic research on topical issues of Russian and East European history of the twentieth century to counteract the falsification of history to the detriment of Russia's interests. The organization also carries out work in the field of human and civil rights protection of the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine and the Baltic states." The priority area of the foundation is the post-Soviet space include Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Ukraine, and Estonia. The foundation is financially and publicly supported by Russian state structures.

"Historical memory" has created an extensive network of "controlled" (as they themselves call it) non-governmental organizations and established close contacts with the academic community of the countries mentioned. "Stable partnerships have been established with specialized academic institutions, universities, and non-governmental organizations in post-Soviet and EU countries, including Austria, Germany, and France," the foundation's non-public report says. The report states directly that the information portal IMHOclub.lv, which was investigated by the Latvian security police, as well as the information portal IMHOclub.by, which was repeatedly indicated in a list of sites included in the network of hybrid impact on the Belarusian segment of the internet, as well as in our reports, operate under the control of this organization.

According to a foundation report, work has been conducted in Belarus since 2016 both directly by the foundation and through its subsidiary organization, the Russian-Belarusian Association of Historians "Union Initiative of Memory and Consent," created jointly with the Institute of History of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus. "In 2016-18, under the auspices of the association, 4 international academic conferences and 6 round tables were held, in which 92 historians from Russia, Belarus, Poland, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Israel took part. 4 monographs and 6 collections of documents have been published, the presentations for which took place in Moscow and Minsk," the document says.

The foundation identifies several priority tasks for work in Belarus:

- the forming of ideas on the joint history of the two countries that meet the interests of Russia and are accurate from an academic perspective;
- organization of close interaction with local academic, archival, and museum structures and implementation of joint projects;
- influencing the content of historical and political projects implemented by local academic structures at the initiative of the Administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus;
- systemic opposition and discrediting of the activities of anti-Russian nationalist historians;
- support of Belarusian historians loyal to Russia.

In the report, the Foundation's representatives brag about a successful case of discrediting the idea of establishing a memorial site in Kuropaty: "Our well-established connections in political and expert circles of Belarus (we wonder who they might be – author's note) allowed us to find out that the Administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus had ordered a scientific study of the problematic issue of Kuropaty. "Historical memory" Foundation has managed in a short period of time to undertake a research into a number of the executed in Kuropaty. Based on the results of the study, a series of articles on the real scale of Soviet repressions in Belarus was published in Russian scientific journals. It was shown that not 250,000, but 7-8,000 people were shot in Kurapaty. Through opportunities available, we managed to include the principled assessment published by us in the final collection of works for the Administration of the President of the Republic of Belarus."

As a result, Russian hybrid historians prepared a collection of documents on the end of the Great Terror of 1937-1938, in cooperation with the National Archives of Belarus. in the BSSR. "These publications will allow for the consolidation in the Belarusian academic and media circulation accurate ideas about the scale of Soviet repressions that meet Russian interests," explain representatives of the foundation without hesitation the main task of their historical research.

Another successful case, according to foundation representatives, describes an "active measure" to exert "a certain impact on Belarusian-Ukrainian and Belarusian-Latvian relations" by forcing the topic of crimes, which is painful for neighboring peoples, committed on the territory of Belarus by Baltic and Ukrainian collaborators. For this, the Historical Memory Foundation prepared, published, and presented in Minsk three documentary collections about crimes during the Second World War.

The authors of the report do not hide the fact that Belarus is the easiest country for the "Historical Memory's" work and, obviously, highly value the level of mutual trust and cooperation with the Belarusian authorities.

Discrediting the pages and heroes of Belarusian history that are not associated with or opposed to Russia has become one of the main activities of the foundation in Belarus and attempts by the Belarusian authorities to ban national symbols and defame historical national heroes can be viewed as attempts by Russian authorities and the organizations controlled by them to influence internal politics in Belarus.

One of the fruits of the work of joint Russian and Belarusian groups on the unification of history has just been published. This is the first textbook titled "Russia and Belarus: Essays on a Common History," published in a large-scale series of joint works called "Russia and Belarus: Pages of a Common History." According to the press service of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, "The 850-page study contains many unique documents that are being published for the first time. In preparing the series, materials from the archives of Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Germany, and Poland were used. The text reveals approaches by Russian and Belarusian historians towards the preconditions and reasons for and the nature and course of World War II and the contribution of the peoples of the Soviet Union to the common Victory. An overview of the development of the USSR's policy in the first post-war years is offered. Special attention is paid to the place and role of the Great Patriotic War in the development of culture and art of the peoples of Belarus and Russia from the beginning of the 1940s to the present."[61]

Official mass media report that a working group of historians of the two countries was formed three years ago with the aim of "preventing the rewriting of the history of the Great Victory," and within the framework of the project "the publishing of manuals for institutions of general secondary, vocational, and higher education is planned, aimed at preserving collective historical memory."[62]

It is curious that in fact this publication is a product of the very organization created and controlled by the "Historical Memory" Foundation, the Russian-Belarusian Association of Historians "Union Initiative for Memory and Consent,"[63] but after the publication of our article[64], the Academy of Sciences of Belarus in comments for the media chose not to mention this authorship.

According to information we received, right now a competition is being launched in Minsk for the installation of a memorial plaque in honor of the unification of Belarus in 1939 (after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact). The "justification" for the installation of the plaque reads that the reunification of Western and Eastern Belarus "took place because of the liberation campaign of the Red Army in September 17 - October 5 to protect the life and property of the population of Western Belarus and Western Ukraine."[65] This is a direct quote from Soviet history textbooks.

Western trajectory and an attempt to avoid sanctions: Lukashenko tries to stick his foot in the closing door

The emergence of several publications by experts and expert organizations close to the development and promotion of the "western trajectory" of the Belarusian government[66], repeating and developing the theories of Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei, expressed in an interview with Euronews on April 30[67], makes one think that "the western trajectory" in the Belarusian authorities' policy, despite Lukashenko's anti-Western rhetoric, is not at all closed. This became especially evident during the intensification of discussions on sanctions by the EU and the U.S. against the Lukashenko regime.

We have studied a set of narratives that Minsk offers to the West as alternatives for describing Belarusian reality and which are broadcast, among other places, on the websites of some Western think tanks[68]:

- Lukashenko never planned to surrender Belarusian sovereignty to Russia and will not surrender. But now, of course, the West itself is to blame for supporting the protests. Minsk will have to cooperate more closely with the Kremlin on defense and maybe even establish a military base, especially if Western sanctions are introduced.
- The West cut off its own possibilities of influencing the situation and the prospects for dialogue by supporting the protests.
- Support for democracy in Belarus is a dangerous illusion that harms the geostrategic interests of the West and can lead to the loss of Belarus's sovereignty.
- In Belarus, there was no actual armed seizure of power by the party that lost the elections (it is just that the final figures do not inspire confidence), but a deep social conflict. The society is split into two halves and the division is growing, with a civil war possible because of those who demand democratic changes and not through the fault of those who incite hatred and call for violence against the "opposition."

- State and pro-Russian propagandists are decisively put on par with real journalists and legally recognized as such (and are therefore removed from the threat of sanctions);
- The demand for negotiations by Tikhanovskaya's headquarters is labeled "babble" and "fantasies" and the number of opposition-minded citizens of Belarus is greatly exaggerated.
- In fact, all independent polls regarding Lukashenko's level of support are biased (a list of arguments is given why) and there is much more support than stated.
- The All-Belarusian People's Assembly is a congress of winners and a reasonable opposition recognizes this.
- Sanctions do not work. They will only intensify repression.
- The position of Lithuania and Poland is too radical and does not inspire confidence in anyone.
- The so-called "enrichment" of the family is not news and anti-corruption investigations are just plagiarized from the activities of Navalny and FBK. It is just a fashionable trend.
- The BNR appeared as a fleeting and short-lived product of the German occupation in 1918 and is more of a propaganda device than a significant event for Belarusian statehood. The organizers of the Freedom Day and the celebration of the day of the establishment of the BNR are a bunch of nationalists.
- If a package of Western sanctions on the oil sector is adopted, Ukraine will be left without petroleum products.
- Yes, Lukashenko was forced to introduce his own sanctions against the Baltic countries and transfer part of the export of oil products through the port of Ust Luga in Russia, but this is only until 2023, and then we will see.
- Lukashenko is ready to resume dialogue with the West, but support to the opposition must stop and sanctions should not be imposed because Russia will continue to put pressure on Lukashenko and demand concessions.

Stripped of their manipulative shell down to direct statements, such stories look ugly – no less ugly than Kremlin propaganda. However, these false narratives, skillfully mixed with a wealth of quotes, names, and references, often taken out of context, and submitted with their own conclusions, which do not always follow from the quoted ones, create the appearance of serious Western political expertise. This very expertise is used by Lukashenko's lobbyists in the West to protect the regime from sanctions, and then to legalize the return of the illegitimate ruler of Belarus to dialogue and cooperation with the West.

A seasonal flare-up in Belarus: "Operation Conspiracy", a Security Council decree, and constitutional reform as a "Turkmen model" of retaining and ensuring the continuity of power

According to our experts, the Lukashenko regime continues to develop as a military-personalist sultanistic regime[69]. On the one hand, he keeps the situation under control with the help of the law enforcement agencies that have remained loyal to him and with the support of Moscow. On the other hand, Lukashenko, his family, and inner circle control all state and semi-private businesses from which they make a profit, pumping money out of the state. The family also owns significant property in Belarus and abroad. In addition, Lukashenko and his family, through close businessmen ("regime wallets"), receive dividends from the implementation of gray schemes, such as cigarette smuggling, arms sales abroad and, possibly, money

laundering from criminal schemes (with the help of businessmen and politicians of the near and far abroad), as well as assistance in bypassing the Western sanctions regime for businesses from Russia and other countries. This last channel of illicit enrichment requires further study and investigation.

This report does not offer an in-depth look into the subject of Lukashenko's property and income and that of his inner circle. Our materials on this topic are available upon request. In this report, it is important for us to emphasize that with such a cunning scheme of personal enrichment in the "gray" zone that has developed over 20 plus years, Lukashenko will resist any option for integration with Russia, which will deprive him of at least part of his income. Unlike the fainthearted former criminal Yanukovych (who served sentences in Soviet times for robbery and theft, also faced rape charges), the practical "collective farmer" Lukashenko will hold on to his property to the last, and therefore it is not profitable for him to be strongly attached to Russia but it is profitable to keep a position of Belarus in the "gray zone" between Russia and the West. This alliance is now ad hoc in nature, due to the severe political crisis.

The logic of a sultanistic regime is based on the permanent presence of the current leader in power and ensuring the continuity of power in the event of a serious illness or death, a popular uprising, or a coup.

An important part of the structures inherent in such regimes is the creation of an insurance mechanism against the loss of power by the ruling group during a political crisis by transferring control of the country to a collective body instead of the temporary transfer of presidential duties to the head of government or parliament provided for by democratic constitutions, followed soon by early elections. As a rule, such emergency bodies are dominated by the leader's confidants and the heads of the security forces. One of the goals of creating such a collective transit body is to reduce the risks for the ruling group in the event of a possible transition of the acting president to the "other side" and to prevent even the thought of moving in this direction.

The transfer of power to a body that did not receive a mandate from elections is usually justified by security issues. To be more convincing, it is necessary to demonstrate the existence of acute threats to the existing government and security problems. At the same time, authoritarian leaders often fall into paranoia about the dangers that threaten them, and the line between conspiracies designed by the authorities and what the dictator begins to believe – often at the suggestion of the security services – can be rather arbitrary.

Even though under such political systems elections are completely controlled by the ruling regime and are neither free nor fair and the results of the rigged electoral process are known in advance, these guarantees, given the complete loss of a ruler's legitimacy, are not enough. Public discontent and the risk of mass protest are too great and can lead to the loss of power, despite retaliatory repression. For insurance, a different, extraordinary mechanism for retaining power by the ruling group is needed, not based on an electoral mandate. At the same time, it will help insure against possible troubles from Russia.

It is in this context that the so-called exposure of the "conspiracy" – a provocation by the Belarusian KGB, supported by the Russian FSB, and the simultaneous announcement of a "decree on the Security Council," which Lukashenko presented as a guarantee of ensuring the continuity of power in the event of the death of the president[70] – should be viewed. A logical continuation of this reshaping of the system of power is Lukashenko's plans to reform the constitution, giving power to another virtually unelected body – the All-Belarusian People's Assembly, which is needed to pull the country outside of the crisis.

With all the historical analogies with the Soviet model, where the country was ruled by the unelected Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee, we essentially see in Belarus a transition to the implementation of the current Turkmen model of power. According to our sources, representatives of the Belarusian bureaucracy have been studying the applicability of the Turkmen experience for Belarus for a long time. Remember that at the dawn of its independence, Turkmenistan announced a policy of neutrality "to maintain peace and security in the region," seeking to prevent foreign influence on the unlimited power of its leader and his circle over the people and on its foreign policy. We could periodically observe the same game of neutrality in Belarus, especially in the last few years, right up to the beginning of the current crisis.

In Turkmenistan, through a series of reforms in the system of power, the Khalk Maslakhaty was established – a pseudo-representative body (in fact, appointed by the president) from representatives of different branches of government, headed again by the president. In Belarus, its equivalent is the All-Belarusian People's Assembly, which, because of the adoption of a new constitution, may acquire a much more important role in the power system under the chairmanship of Lukashenko – possibly in the status of the informal "father of the nation". Then it will be possible to prepare the transfer of power to the successor and not depend at all on the elections and not be afraid of the protests associated with them. At the same time, under the slogans of democratization, it is possible to ostentatiously transfer part of the president's powers to the parliament or government, securing the key role of the unelected chairman of the All-Belarusian Assembly.

Interestingly, after the so-called assassination attempt on Turkmen President Niyazov in 2002, staged by the special services and involving misled oppositionists, he issued a special decree on the transfer of power to the Khalk Maslakhaty in the event of his assassination. Subsequently, the current President of Turkmenistan Berdymukhammedov, through a series of institutional reforms, gave the Khalk Maslakhaty a permanent role and headed it, and through the successive appointments of his son Serdar to key posts, he basically ensured the transfer of power to him in the future. Apparently, Lukashenko is now solving the same issue through constitutional reform. We can see similar processes, with certain reservations, in two other authoritarian regimes of the sultanistic type – Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

Let us turn to the analysis of the so-called conspiracy and the questions of why this operation was needed by Lukashenko.

A staged coup attempt in Belarus: Joint mission by the Belarusian KGB and the Russian FSB

Following some analysis, we have developed two main versions of the so-called coup d'état attempt and the alleged attempt on Lukashenko's life by a group of Belarusian opposition members and a fake group of the Belarusian military (disguised KGB officers):

- The whole operation was planned and carried out by the Belarusian KGB with assistance from the Russian FSB at the final stage, with the joint use of "results". If this version is correct, the primary brain and author behind the operation is Ivan Tertel, who was appointed KGB head on September 3, 2020. He was glowing while commenting on the arrest of the "conspirators."

- Alternatively, the operation was a joint venture of the two security services from the very beginning and may have even been inspired by the FSB, whose representatives flew back and forth from Moscow to Belarus starting in August 2020 and continued through most of the autumn.

What makes us think that the whole operation could be the brainchild of the Belarusian KGB? Paradoxically, first and foremost, this would allow Minsk to reduce pressure from the Kremlin that had been put on Lukashenko by Putin immediately after the start of mass protests in exchange for support. According to information we have recently received, the minimum package of demands delivered by Putin at the meeting in Sochi on September 14, 2020, included the unification of the command over the two armies, Russian and Belarusian, first and foremost in emergency situations. Our source claimed that there was a whole set of issues – from legal to infrastructural – to be resolved, and at that meeting Lukashenko agreed to this demand, but later blocked any move to start even discussing practical preparations.

According to our source, this matter has been a primary interest to the Kremlin because of its plans for further escalation in Ukraine. Similarly, a demand for a political reform was delivered then which would open doors to pro-Russian parties to gain more influence and pave the way towards unification of the political structures of the two countries. Another key demand was launching a national dialogue, which would pacify society and bring the opposition under control. According to our source, various Kremlin services and their agents were investigating in autumn and winter a possibility of engaging with Pavel Latushko and even with Svetlana Tikhanovskaya. At a certain point in winter (before the end of February), Kremlin messengers pressed Lukashenko to accept Pavel Latushko and Svetlana Tikhanovskaya's presence in a new parliament, as a way of dealing with the crisis. However, in the end Lukashenko turned down this idea categorically, and by March the Kremlin concluded that both Latushko and Tikhanovskaya were too "pro-Western" and unwilling to acknowledge "legitimate Russian interests" in Belarus.

Now, in the case of successful carrying out of the "coup" operation in full scope as originally planned by the KGB and the FSB, where real leaders of the opposition would become involved and Western governments and Belarusian solidarity funds would provide financial support, it would have the following benefits for Lukashenko:

- Postpone indefinitely the issue of a possible start for further unification of the armies of the two states under the pretext of the need to focus on immediate internal security concerns;
- In case it successfully engaged not only marginal members of the opposition but also Tikhanovskaya, Latushko, and other key figures, it would take the issue of national dialogue off the table once and forever;
- In any event, it postpones indefinitely the issue of political reform promoted by Moscow aimed at strengthening the role of political parties in Belarus; Lukashenko used the argument of alleged threats to the country's sovereignty posed by parties that use dirty methods, manipulate public opinion, and are run by oligarchs[71];
- In the event this operation would have been carried out as planned, with proof of funding for the "coup attempt" from foreign sources, it would allow any kind of manipulation and political attacks Lukashenko wanted towards the West and Russia (to avoid implementation of Russia's demands of political reforms);

- At any rate, it allows for a thorough cleansing of the civic, media, and political space under a pretext of anti-terrorism measures (similar to situations in Turkey in 2016, Uzbekistan in 2005, and Turkmenistan in 2002);
- It is a nice gift from Lukashenko to Putin, allowing the latter to further escalate Russia's relations with the U.S., Poland, and Ukraine.

What makes us think that this may also have been a joint operation by the Russian FSB and Belarusian KGB and even inspired by the FSB:

- Russian security services practice these kinds of operations in neighboring countries to affirm their influence there. They provoke or organize a "conspiracy" and then assist the incumbent power in uncovering and quashing it. To our knowledge, this was practiced in Turkmenistan (2002), several times in Azerbaijan in the last decade, and there have been regular disinformation waves in the past few years about alleged military conspiracies in Belarus against Lukashenko (the latter could also be used by the Belarusian KGB as fertile soil to trick targets among the opposition);
- Such an operation, if successful, would close any relations with the West for Lukashenko for a long time, which is in the Kremlin's interest;
- It would further escalate the situation around Ukraine and aggravate Belarus's conflict with the U.S. and Poland, all three now being primary targets for the Kremlin. This is how the coverage in Russia is being handled now – that the leader of the conspiracy came to Moscow after having consultations in the U.S. and Poland, and that assistance was to have been provided by Ukrainian militants;
- The operation targets the U.S. specifically as a "global puppeteer" and opens multiple propaganda options. It seems that whoever planned this operation in the Belarusian and (or) Russian services, they seriously believed that the U.S. would buy into this FSB-KGB cooked up provocation and even fund this affair. We have found an attempt to promote this plan on the flagship site of the Russian propaganda operations tsar Yevgeniy Prigozhin, articulated by one of his foremost speakers[72]. He had commented extensively on Belarusian events earlier. This publication specifically targets President Joe Biden, going back to the time when he was still President-Elect, claiming that he was already in control of this operation at that time.

In any case, be it primarily an operation of the Belarusian KGB or a joint venture of KGB and FSB, its culmination came in very handy before the Biden-Putin summit. Putin's spokesperson Dmitry Peskov has already confirmed Lukashenko's claim that Putin had asked Biden directly during a call on April 13 why the latter would want to kill Lukashenko and received no answer[73].

What do we know so far about the "coup" operation? If we put the events on a timeline, we would see the following:

August – a revolution begins in Belarus. Lukashenko asks Putin for support and receives it. FSB planes are flying back and forth.

On August 12, the main "suspect" in the "coup attempt," Yuri Zenkovich, announces the creation of some sort of National Unity Committee.

He travelled to Belarus in July and stayed through August. He attracted attention through his reckless behavior. Sometime in August he was recorded by the Belarusian KGB in a conversation with a KGB representative disguised as a high-ranking military officer (if the ONT propaganda documentary "To Kill the President" is to be believed)[74].

On September 3, Ivan Tertel is appointed KGB Chief.

On September 14, Lukashenko is confronted by Putin's conditions at the meeting in Sochi.

In September, the Tikhanovskaya headquarters are formed and start operating. Protests in Belarus continue through the fall.

In October, the establishment of BYPOL is announced. It starts its full-fledged activities in November.

According to our investigation, a number of people in different pro-democracy civil society structures were approached by Zenkovich or someone else on his behalf as early as in the second half of October with the story that there were supposedly some 30 mid-level military officers ready to act against Lukashenko, but they need support and money, around 2.5 mil. USD.

A BYPOL member, Andrei Astapovich, was repeatedly approached in November and December through his former colleague. The colleague claimed that he had been contacted by a general from the Ministry of Internal Affairs guard service who asked to be put in contact with Tikhanovskaya and BySol (Belarus Solidarity Fund). The "general" claimed that he had people ready to "do the job" for 1.5 mil. USD.

No one took it seriously, including the teams of Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, Pavel Latushko, and BYPOL. Obviously, it was them, together with the U.S. and Poland, who were the primary targets of the whole operation. Eventually the KGB/FSB had to stick with whom they were able to lure in – people with dubious reputations in Belarus like Yuri Zenkovich[75] and Dzmitry Shchyhelski[76].

Having failed to link Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, Pavel Latushko, and BYPOL to the conspiracy, the KGB had to resort to a plan B to proclaim them terrorists and stage a failed bomb attack in Minsk on March 25.

It is not known yet who from the Belarusian side was talking to Zenkovich and claimed to represent the military ready to rebel. However, shortly before the final stage of the operation there were rumors in Belarusian social networks that 10 KGB officers disappeared and stopped answering calls. Probably these were the people who went to Moscow to impersonate negotiation partners.

To recap: the goal was to involve as many opposition people as possible in the conspiracy, demonstrating high-level connections of the "plotters" afterwards. What is now called a "conspiracy" was then presented by the organizers as an open discussion (and it certainly was not a secret one), including what was recorded at the infamous Zoom meeting released in April by Belarusian state media. Zenkovich recorded these talks and sent them to "military partners" in Belarus, thus – unknowingly – providing full-fledged evidence. Given that, to our knowledge, Zenkovich had left his primary laptop in the U.S., there might be more evidence available of who his contacts in Belarus were and who was the intermediary.

Having failed to involve any of the key opposition leaders, the security services had to be satisfied with getting the leader of the Belarus National Front (BNF) party Ryhor Kastusiou, though no sane individual would believe in his involvement in a coup. Zenkovich also comes from the BNF, so it was easy for him to talk Kastusiou into participating in the meetings and calls.

With another alleged "conspirator," Aleksandr Feduta, it is a more complex story. Feduta was once Lukashenko's press-secretary and joined the opposition later. Therefore, Lukashenko perceives him as a traitor. Feduta, rather, sees himself of a kind of Gleb Pavlovsky and Vladislav Surkov of Belarus. He maintained connections with several previous Administrations of the President of Russia and believed himself a good negotiator for the Kremlin on Belarus.

By the time of the operation's culmination, Feduta had been in Moscow for about a month already. He said to his contacts that he was working as a political manager for someone involved in the Russian elections in the autumn. Our experts say that there should have been someone in Moscow, inside the Presidential Administration or close to it, who would have given Feduta some sort of safety guarantees, and to lure Zenkovich to Moscow. Some way or another, Feduta and Zenkovich might have been assured by someone that the Kremlin in fact might be supportive of this kind of regime change in Belarus.

Indirect indication of the Russian Presidential Administration being aware of the operation was a public warning by Ekho Moskvy Editor in chief Alexei Venediktov to the pro-Kremlin political analyst Dmitry Bolkunets to leave Russia. This was on March 28, and Bolkunets left the next day, on March 29. A criminal case has been opened in Belarus open against Bolkunets on charges of libel against Lukashenko but given his closer connections with some people from the "conspiracy group" he might also have been in danger of abduction.

The detention of Zenkovich and Feduta took place on April 11 and was made public on April 17. We do not know what happened to them during that time – for how long they were handled by the FSB and when they were transferred to Minsk.

What we do know though is that this operation was approved by the Kremlin and that the whole of the Kremlin media ecosystem was ready to act as soon as the detention became public knowledge. As mentioned above, the main targets are the U.S., Poland, and Ukraine. As in many other cases, Kremlin propaganda cites the alleged motives of the "plotters'" as greed and the desire to assassinate children. For example, the RT put up a headline that read that "the conspirators planned to take away Lukashenko's property"[77] while another headline said that the assassination of Lukashenko's children was planned[78]. The newspaper *Vzglyad*, closely associated with the Russian Presidential Administration, wrote that Russia should take retaliatory actions against the United States for the Lukashenko's "death sentence"[79]. This article is also remarkable for the fact that it has generated comments from many people whom the Presidential Administration uses in its propaganda operations. Most of the publications in Russia target the U.S., President Biden personally, and Poland. Recently, FSB Chief Bortnikov confirmed that "the FSB is looking into possible U.S. involvement in the attempt on Lukashenko's life."[80]

However, the Belarusian propaganda product mentioned earlier "To Kill the President" proves that there was no Western involvement whatsoever, even according to state media commentators[81]. Even the

Kremlin-linked Russian Nezavisimaya Gazeta published a detailed account of the operation, explaining why it was solely a plot of the Belarusian KGB[82].

At this point we assume that the operation was the brainchild of the Belarusian KGB, with the FSB involved at the later stages and that now the Kremlin is trying to use this case for its own purposes, including for anti-Western propaganda.

From "Operation Conspiracy" to an emergency decree on retaining power

Essentially, the "conspiracy" and its "disclosure" made it possible for Lukashenko, by adopting an emergency decree on the Security Council, to provide himself and his proxies with cleverly combined insurance for a period at least until the adoption of the new constitution. (The decree is temporary in nature without specifying its term; presumably, until the adoption of a new basic law.) On the one hand, the transfer of power to the Security Council and the introduction of a state of emergency in the event of the physical elimination of the President[83] makes this elimination itself meaningless for a regime change. At the same time, it is also a protection against increased Russian pressure, since between the lines it seems that the Security Council will turn to Russia for help in the event of the death of the President.

Lukashenko announced the adoption of the decree on the "new" Security Council on April 17, but the decree was signed and published only on May 9[84]. An early announcement of the document long before it was signed was important for linking this announcement with the "conspiracy operation" and the arrest of the "conspirators." The date of signing and official publication of the decree has two symbolic meanings: on the one hand, it is World War II's Victory Day, widely celebrated in Belarus, and on the other, Lukashenko and his special services claimed that the "conspirators" allegedly planned to eliminate him on that day.

Lukashenko announced the need to "restructure" the work of the Security Council back on February 25[85], right after his meeting with Putin in Sochi on February 22, possibly as a response to a new attempt at pressure.

Remember that the Security Council now includes the Chairman of the Security Council – the President of Belarus – and eight permanent members, including the Prime Minister (Roman Golovchenko), Chairman of the Council of the Republic (Natalya Kochanova), Chairman of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly (Vladimir Andreichenko), Head of the Presidential Administration (Igor Sergeenko), State Secretary of the Security Council (Alexander Volfovich), Minister of Internal Affairs (Ivan Kubrakov), Minister of Defense (Viktor Khrenin), and Chairman of the State Security Committee (Ivan Tertel).

The new members of the Security Council, according to the decree adopted earlier, are the chairs of the Supreme Court (Valentin Sukalo), the State Control Committee (Vasily Gerasimov), the Board of the National Bank (Pavel Kallaur), the Investigative Committee (Dmitry Gora), the State Military-Industrial Committee (Dmitry Pantus), and the State Border Committee (Anatoly Lappo), Prosecutor General (Andrey Shved), Ministers of Foreign Affairs (Vladimir Makei), Finance (Yuri Seliverstov), Emergency Situations (Vadim Sinyavsky), and Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, First Deputy Minister of Defense (Viktor Gulevich)[86].

The Security Council is composed of Lukashenko's trusted people. The backbone of the Council is made up of the heads of law enforcement bodies. According to the decree, decisions will have to be taken by secret ballot. According to Lukashenko, this was done to avoid external pressure. In practice, this removes personal responsibility and introduces collective responsibility.

It is significant that the May 9 decree does not indicate either the obligation to hold early elections after the introduction of a state of emergency (they are only mentioned as one of the issues that the Security Council may deal with in this situation) or the timing of their conducting. The emergency powers of an unelected body, therefore, can last as long as desired.

"Operation Conspiracy" and the adoption of "the most important [decree] in the entire history" of Lukashenko's rule on the transfer of power to the Security Council in the event of the death of the President are two parts of the same equation. As we have already stated, the work on the implementation of the "conspiracy" began, according to our sources, back in September, shortly after the meeting between Lukashenko and Putin in Sochi. This may additionally indicate the main trajectory of the future decree, justifying the extraordinary nature of ensuring the continuity of power "if something happens." Lukashenko wants to protect himself from any attempts to push him out of power, and he can fear such an attempt from the east no less than because of a popular revolution or a coup. In February, after a regular meeting with Putin, Lukashenko set the task of "polishing" several documents regulating the functioning of the Security Council[87].

Essentially, in February, Lukashenko announced both an emergency decree and the "disclosure" of the "conspiracy": "Fortunately, we found all these centers. We know all these 'zmagars' and fugitives from Belarus. But to know this is not enough. It needs to be confronted," said the President of Belarus, outlining the task. And he emphasized in particular that it is necessary to think over an action plan in case of a worsening in the situation, taking into account the experience that exists both in Belarus itself and in other post-Soviet republics, including Russia, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine."[88] In his detailed announcement on April 24 on preparing the decree, Lukashenko said that the decision to adopt was made by him a long time ago, "when all this was unfolding."[89]

This statement illustrates Lukashenko's strategy to hold on power through political maneuvering between the Belarusian society and the Kremlin. On the one hand, he is trying to regain legitimacy as a guarantor of Belarus's sovereignty, repeating that he will not "surrender the country," but on the other he is "selling" to the Kremlin his new commitment to the anti-Western trajectory of Moscow's foreign policy as the main payment for Russia's support in the crisis.

Specifically, Lukashenko suggested not making mistakes and not to giving opponents reasons for accusing him of betraying national interests and the country's sovereignty: "Therefore, we need to act and not make mistakes. If I went, as they've announced, to sell or rent out Belarus, listen, this would be a gift for them. And we don't need that. I have already said many times that I am the first President of our independent Belarus and we have been lucky to have built the first independent state together. What kind of Lukashenko could go against this and destroy it or hand it over to someone or have it annexed? I am most interested in our independence. [It is] not like I want to give something away or betray something to someone. Guys, this will never happen. I am ready for anything, but only to save my country and yours."[90]

According to Lukashenko, the deployment of a Russian military base in Belarus was not discussed with Putin either. He explained the place of the Belarusian army in the CSTO system and its role in the confrontation with the "collective West": "Our area of responsibility – the Belarusian army – is the west. If there is only aggression against us, we have enough strength to contain it at first while Russia unfolds in the rear. There are two or three armies there to support the Belarusian army. This is our strategy. What have these bases got to do with it? They are simply afraid that, God forbid, we will come to an agreement with the Russians and join our military efforts. But we didn't even discuss it."[91]

Lukashenko believes that even if Belarus and Russia just started discussing this topic, it would "be a gift for opponents": "So that they come out and shout in the streets that Russia has seized Belarus. They call themselves fighters for independence, and see where the hell they are located. And they showed what kind of independence they are for and where they want to lead us. It was not Lukashenko who outlined plans for the surrender of Belarus. They are already betraying it. They handed us over long ago, and all they needed was to come to power here for just a day and declare that they are in power. For what? To ask to send NATO troops into the territory of Belarus and line them up on the eastern border near Smolensk. It was a springboard – I have always said – for an attack on Russia. This was the first step. No matter how they deny it, today we see that this is so. They got what they deserved. They realized that they couldn't take us just like that."[92]

It can be concluded, therefore, that the Kremlin so far, instead of integration, has received reflections about cooperation within the framework of the CSTO and the promise of a joint opposition to NATO and Ukraine, along with requests for new loans and more beneficial trade relations for the Lukashenko regime.

Apparently, the economic part of "integration" has again remained at the level of the previously agreed 26+ roadmaps, and Lukashenko indicated autumn as the time for signing some of them. How everything will take place depends on many factors. Most likely, Lukashenko will try to use the time until the fall for another bargaining and/or regrouping of the property controlled by the family to protect his interests. Access to the set of road maps in question could help clarify the situation more. We have been working on accessing these roadmaps for more than a year, but it has proved to be very difficult yet. Reasons for high secrecy in respect of the road maps is that could be that, on the one hand, Lukashenko wants to prevent any public discussion of what may be seen in the society as ceding sovereignty, and also that he may be changing his position regarding specific agreements as part of his bargaining with Moscow.

We can find confirmation of our assumption of Lukashenko buying time and avoiding giving away control of key assets in the same speech by him regarding recent negotiations with Putin, where he reiterates his vision of integration, which is Moscow's economic assistance in exchange for Minsk's participation in confronting the West: "We have plunged into the details. On a cooperative basis we must breathe new life into many industries. This is the essence of integration – to get down to earth and do what we urgently need to do today. Nobody will ever support us. There is evidence of this now: sanctions against them, sanctions against us. And this is just the beginning. They will choke us, choke us." Continuing to elude real integration of the two states, Lukashenko noted that "the pace of integration and new union programs were also discussed, but more for the record at the beginning of the conversation." He also said, "This is correct, but it is too general. This time we turned to topical issues with Vladimir Putin: prices for hydrocarbon raw materials – gas, oil, and cooperation."[93]

We can predict that, at least until this fall, the same situation in relations with Russia to which everyone is already accustomed will continue – continued pressure from Russia, on the one hand, and Lukashenko's attempts to slip out of its bear hugs once again, on the other. We see fall as a certain turning point because during his meeting with Putin in April, Lukashenko related to 'signing some papers in the fall'. Coming from the previous experience, he will try to evade signing anything that would affect his power or property, therefore we may see certain escalation in the fall. At the same time, Lukashenko is preparing constitutional reform, which should allow him to remain in power forever and, if necessary, transfer power to a trusted successor, and, subsequently, his son.

The issue of a possible trusted successor is more a matter of mythology than knowledge in Belarus because of the closed nature of the personalistic regime. Sources would name several people as possible intermediary successors, including foreign minister Vladimir Makey (because of his close relations with Lukashenko) or the speaker of the upper house of the parliament Natalya Kachanova (because of her loyalty). However, all sources, as well as Lukashenko's behavior confirm that he sees his youngest, third son Nikolay as his ultimate successor. Currently he is too young to assume any post, that is why Lukashenko the elder desperately needs to buy more time to ensure family power succession. In fact, the decree that we discuss below is a temporary solution to ensure that no one from the outside circle would be able to intercept the power.

Lukashenko's scenarios for reforming the Constitution and maintaining power

Lukashenko has so far managed to sabotage Moscow's demands to build a system of political parties symmetrical to the Russian parties ruled from above. Instead of this reform imposed by the Kremlin, Lukashenko embarked on his own scenario of retaining power. Our experts have analyzed the goals and meaning of this reform[94].

Having started the process of reforms, aimed at preservation of his power, Lukashenko, in his traditional style, wants to shift the focus from the really pressing expectations and needs of Belarusian society to issues that are insignificant for Belarusians. Well-crafted formulations about the constitutional process as a means of resolving the political crisis and a cure for public discord are designed to divert attention from the total delegitimization of Lukashenko and the legal default and criminal actions of state bodies.

The expectations of most Belarusians include the resignation of Lukashenko and the holding of free and fair elections to all government bodies, the return of legality in the country, including the release of political prisoners, as well as holding the perpetrators of murders, torture, and beatings of civilians accountable.

The current pretense of a constitutional reform does not in any way address these issues, especially considering that the process is entirely under Lukashenko's control. Belarusian state bodies are creating the appearance of a public discussion, just as they did when the last Soviet constitution of 1977 was adopted. Hundreds of thousands of proposals from Soviet workers' collectives and organizations, organized from the above, resulted in purely formal changes that did not significantly change either the political system of the USSR or the lives of ordinary citizens.

Soviet parallels are not limited to the attributes surrounding the adoption of a new constitution. Lukashenko's intention to revive other elements of the Soviet political system under slightly different names is becoming more and more obvious.

The discussion here regards the potential transformation of the All-Belarusian People's Assembly (APA) into an analogue of the Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) by proposing a change in the Constitution stipulating that the APA becomes a body determining the main directions of domestic and foreign policy. Since the pro-government commentators began actively promoting this idea, such a plan is the most likely scenario.

In this situation, the Presidium of the APA (corresponding to the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee) would become a formal governing state body in the period between congresses, and none other than Alexander Lukashenko would head it. In the event of strong Kremlin pressure or even more powerful protests in Belarus, Lukashenko would try to formally transfer the presidential office with reduced powers to a loyal person in his team, securing the real reins of government for himself through a "new" influential constitutional status. Then Lukashenko would remain the supreme leader of Belarus, despite formally losing his position as president.

As follows from a recent statement made by Lukashenko, it is the APA that will be strengthened, and not the parliament or government: "If we remove some responsibilities from the president, they should be transferred somewhere. These powers are not appropriate for the government and parliament. To where should they be transferred? We must look for such a government body. And we have the All-Belarusian People's Assembly."[95]

Within the framework of a more advantageous scenario, Lukashenko would expect to receive a new position and continue to occupy the presidency to transfer it to a loyal person in the longer term.

Ultimately, if the reform process succeeds, then three main types of changes can be expected in the new Constitution:

- First, the All-Belarusian People's Assembly would assume a constitutional status with important powers and with the Presidium serving as a top governing body with possible formal representation in the regions.
- Second, there may be formally democratic, but trivial, amendments to increase the authority of the legislative branch and regional authorities. Changes might also possibly include the introduction of a jury in the judicial system. As follows from the proposals formulated by the commission of the Novopolotsk City Council of Deputies, the facade of holding free elections of local authorities, in a very distorted version, could be created. Specifically, instead of appointing heads of local executive committees, it is proposed that residents elect a head from candidates proposed by the chairman of the regional executive committee.
- Third, there are other less significant changes that will not affect the political system or the lives of residents in any way (such as the abolishing of village councils).

Furthermore, the implementation of a two-stage special operation cannot be ruled out by the inclusion of the All-Belarusian People's Assembly as a Trojan horse into Article 140 of the Constitution. This could mean

an additional provision, stipulating that the main sections of the Constitution can be changed not only through a national referendum, but also through the All-Belarusian Assembly. In this case, the referendum on the constitution announced (if it takes place at all) could result in less significant, formally democratic, and limited amendments. And then the extraordinary congress of the All-Belarusian People's Assembly or its Presidium could approve more far-reaching and unlawful amendments such as granting Lukashenko the status of the "leader of the nation," as in the Kazakh-Tajik model.

A referendum on a new constitution is tentatively scheduled for January-February 2022[96].

Evolution of Russian propaganda and operations of influence in Belarus after August. Making Belarusian society expect help from Moscow

We analyze the synchronization of the official Kremlin and Lukashenko's propaganda in a separate section in the second part of the report. Here we would like to draw your attention to some features of the information game of groups affiliated with the Kremlin, aimed at various groups of the Belarusian public, since everything is not clear-cut here.

Of course, there are media related to the Kremlin which, immediately after receiving appropriate instructions, begin to "pump out" relevant messages.

Margarita Simonyan, the head of *RT*, was appointed to lead the support operation in August. The *RT* troops, including its leadership, immediately went to Minsk to work. Simonyan personally interviewed Lukashenko. The landing of the "architects" (the name of the RT group that lived at the Renaissance Hotel in Minsk from August to November) was headed by Alexander Luchaninov, the head of the Spanish RT service and Simonyan's trusted associate.

As we wrote earlier, the synchronization of the narratives of Russian and Belarusian propaganda with the help of the RT group took place within about three weeks, and in the following months the official media close to the Kremlin continued this line. The liberal leaning, but still Kremlin dependent, media allowed themselves to "bite into" Lukashenko, while the Telegram channels were playing their own game.

At the beginning of April, when the formula of "exposing the coup attempt and adopting an emergency decree on power" was being implemented, Russian news aggregators and Yandex Zen had dozens of Belarus-related headlines like "Tikhanovskaya has failed completely." According to our information, not long before this, the Administration of the President of Russia put an end to the idea of making Svetlana Tikhanovskaya and Pavel Latushko part of its plan to reform the parliament and the party system. With a high degree of certainty, this information attack is also being carried out under the coordination of Simonyan's people. Our experts believe that their goal is to reach the following headlines by the next stage: "The protest has collapsed. Tikhanovskaya has failed completely. Tikhanovskaya requests negotiations." And this, according to the plan, will secure the complete victory of the Kremlin and Minsk.

In this sense, the informational line of the influential Russian telegram channel *Nezygar*, which some time ago also came under the control of Simonyan, is interesting. Recall that the founders of *Nezygar* have created a reputation for this channel as the main source of insider information from the authorities,

although in fact those who write for *Nezygar* skillfully mix what has already been published with conspiracy theories and interpretations. At the same time, some of this "fantasy" works its way into expert analysis on Russia, which is being prepared for foreign embassies and foreign ministries. Part of the audience, including those in Belarus, continues to partially rely on these "inside information" and "signals."

It is this series of "signals" and "inside information" that continues to appear regularly on *Nezygar*. They say that Lukashenko is about to leave or that he will be made to leave and talk about the Kremlin's tough demand on the timing of his departure and impending negotiations with the opposition – Tikhanovskaya, Latushko, and others. These stories appear on *Nezygar* after almost every event related to Belarus, like meetings or phone calls of top officials, and especially following meetings between Putin and Lukashenko and visits of other officials from Moscow and Minsk. These stories serve several functions.

The first is to keep Lukashenko "in good shape" and in line with the implementation of the Kremlin's program. Recall here that it was *Nezygar* that launched another information war in 2018, informing about Lukashenko's "stroke", and that Lukashenko personally reads printouts from *Nezygar*.

The second is to give false hope to active Belarusians that changes will come from Moscow and that "the good tsar Putin" will restore order and "remove" the bad Lukashenko, even if this would be done according to the Kremlin's plans and ideas. These messages confirm the sovereignty of the Kremlin over Belarus.

The third is to give false "signals" and form false expectations among some of the leaders and supporters of the democratic transition who are beginning to discuss when and how negotiations with the opposition will start and what Russia's role in them will be, rather than implementing its own offensive strategy.

The fourth is to blur the topic and agenda of possible negotiations or attempts thereof through various international platforms, including those within the OSCE, where Russia acts in enduring tandem with the government in Minsk and talks about "constitutional reform" and early elections (which exactly, however, are unclear) in 2022 as the only possible way out of the crisis.

In general, the media "carpet bombing" is aimed, on the one hand, at those Belarusians who are accustomed to reading Russian media, and on the other, at the average Russian reader to neutralize the needless example of Belarusian protests for Russian society, where things are not so simple for Putin either.

Still, Kremlin political strategists have partly learned the lesson of the previous two years and, we understand, have closely followed processes during the first wave of the Covid pandemic in Belarus and during the election campaign. It seems that they realized that they needed to act more subtly and understood that different parts of the Belarusian society require different approaches, including those who are inclined towards reform and oppose Lukashenko's staying in power, meaning essentially all politically active Belarusians. And here we see an interesting phenomenon – the work of the Kremlin-controlled but supposedly liberal media, as well as the continued work of the Kremlin and pro-Kremlin telegram channels.

For example, the editor-in-chief of *Ekho Moskvy*, Aleksey Venediktov, constantly throws out insights about the upcoming negotiations with the opposition and Moscow's readiness to replace Lukashenko, in fact repeating the *Nezygar's* narrative. It should be noted here that in the active part of Belarusian society, even

those who do not believe *Nezygar* tend to listen to "inside information" from Venediktov, given *Ekho Moskvy's* prior reputation for being liberal[97].

Supposedly liberal Russian media readily interviews opposition leaders; however, they structure their presentation in such a way that the audience get a sense of competition between the two main centers of gravity – Svetlana Tikhanovskaya and Pavel Latushko. Moreover, Latushko is almost always presented in a more favorable light as a moderate, compromising, and business-like partner with whom one can "negotiate" (most striking are two interviews in the MK[98]). This is how he is perceived by a segment of the Belarusian elite.

However, we conclude that this does not signal the Kremlin's readiness to engage with Latushko. This is a propaganda technique that allows one to achieve the following goals:

- to introduce (intensify, visualize) competition and split within the new Belarusian opposition – a trick that has been done many times with the old Belarusian opposition;
- to detract possible support from Tikhanovskaya, for whom, according to various sources, the majority of Belarusians voted; it is especially important to cut off possible support from Belarusian elites, who will more confidently "negotiate" with Latushko, who allegedly has Moscow's support;
- to visualize the image of the ideal candidate for Moscow (if such is needed in a couple of years).

This manipulation reduces the entire process associated with elections and voting in Belarus to insignificant and distracts from the fact of expression of the will and mobilization of Belarusians. It gives a falsely encouraging signal to a part of Belarusian society that still has illusions about Russia and about the possible positive intervention by the Kremlin.

It forces different groups to look for ways towards possible dialogue with the Kremlin instead of implementing their own agenda within the country and at the international level according to the situation at hand. It gives the international community the illusion of the possibility of dialogue with the Kremlin on the issue of Belarus (even though the Kremlin has explicitly declared the "unacceptability of external interference") and essentially recognizes the Kremlin's sovereignty over Belarusian affairs. All discussions of possible and necessary reforms in Belarus in these Russian media go along the same lines[99].

And here lies one of the tricks of the Kremlin: official Kremlin media support Lukashenko and the supposedly alternative line is being pursued by the media as if "independent," making him nervous. This "independence" can always be referred to by Putin in the event of new complaints from Lukashenko. We have had similar situations already several times over in the past 20 years, including, more recently, during one of the continual "Telegram wars."[100]

In this regard, the role of the *Ukraina.ru* portal is also interesting. It is the personal project of the head of *MIA Segodnya*, leading Russian propagandist Dmitry Kiselev; however, it is still a part of the system of this leading Russian agency. This portal has always held a sharply imperial position and is distinguished by its aggressive rhetoric towards Belarusian sovereignty and "zmagars." However, since about August-September of last year, stories have regularly appeared on it that promote the idea of the need for political and economic reforms – naturally, in conjunction with integration with Russia – and the need for dialogue between Lukashenko and the pro-Russian constructive opposition. The main figure in these publications is

Sergey Lushch[101] (about whom we have written much) and the authors are well-known supporters of "integration" and the "Russian idea" – Kirill Ozimko, Vsevolod Shimov, Dmitry Bolkunets, among others[102]. Essentially, *Ukraina.Ru* creates informational support for Lukashenko's pro-Russian opposition parliamentary party (see the next section on this). In fact, the same support for the future Lushch's party is provided by Sputnik-Belarus[103].

Pro-Russian Telegram channels in different tones continue to "press" and "bite into" Lukashenko, reminding that there is no trust in him in the Kremlin, especially regarding reforms. While this is still happening in the background, these attacks can quickly be transferred into an active "combat format."

In Russia Telegram has become an instrument of political manipulation by the authorities and pro-government propagandists, and in Belarus, on the contrary, it has become an instrument of self-organization for society[104]. Therefore, in a completely natural way, Kremlin political strategists continue to use Telegram channels to manipulate the Belarusian public space, unnerving Lukashenko, pursuing the Kremlin agenda, and creating the illusion of possible assistance from the Kremlin to eliminate Lukashenko in the near future.

In addition, this network of Telegram channels essentially supports the creation of pro-Russian pseudo-reformist parties that criticize Lukashenko (see below).

Reconfiguring the Russian network of influence in Belarus after August

Part of the Russian online network of influence in Belarus, which was actively developing in 2018-2019 and consisted mainly of pseudo-regional Belarusian sites[105], stopped working beginning in fall 2020. Pro-Russian regional sites in the Mogilev (Podneprovie-info.com), Vitebsk (Vitbich.org), Grodno (Grodnodaily.net), and Brest regions (Berestje-news.org) have disappeared. In addition, another toxic Brest site dranik.org has disappeared. Since November 2020, the Sozh.info website has ceased to be updated with materials on political topics and the websites Vesti24.by and Sobesednik.by have also stalled.

We suggest several potential reasons for their disappearance. First, through our efforts and those of our colleagues, we were able to raise awareness among a significant part of the audience about who really stands behind these sites. Second, during the election campaign and after the elections, all information activity shifted intensely to Telegram channels, and the websites simply did not keep up with events. At the same time, they ran the risk of falling under the hand of the authorities, who were nervous about Russian influence.

Third, the man whom we regard as the main coordinator of the network because of his extensive history of being a leading figure in pro-Kremlin work in Belarus, including ownership of the key websites in the network, and whom we describe in detail in our 2019 report "Coercion to Integration"[106], Sergey Lushch, has openly led the transformation of the Soyuz Civil Initiative, which played an important and growing role in the Russian network of influence in recent years, into a political party[107]. This transformation is taking place under the guise of the Kremlin's demands for political reform, and Zakhar Prilepin's imperial-patriotic party is likely to be the Russian partner of the future Soyuz party (see the section on party building in the second part of the report). It is possible that the decision to terminate the activities of the network of pro-

Russian websites coordinated by Lushch was made in Moscow in order not to irritate Lukashenko once again before registering the newly created party.

When we were finishing work on the report, the registration of the Soyuz party was denied [108]. This proves once again that the issue of party building in Belarus is closed for now, and currently Lukashenko is still resisting the Kremlin's demands for the development of a party system in the interest of Russia.

At the same time, the website *Telescope*, which we also described in our reports as a resource that plays an important role in Russian influence operations, was given a new design in Russian imperial colors and in the style of the key Russian anti-Ukrainian propaganda tool Ukraina.ru, a new domain address, and significantly more content compared to its previous version. From a site with "programmatic" ideological articles about the promotion of "deep integration" of Belarus with Russia, it has turned into an ideological portal of the pro-Russian imperial idea[109].

It is not clear at this point whether the network of propaganda sites will resume its work, will be reconfigured into a new form or will be completely replaced by Telegram channels. Based on the recently acquired information from the Kremlin and our analysis, we offer the following scenario of possible changes.

In the fall of 2020, a large set of correspondence and internal documents from the office of the head of the Department on inter-regional and cultural cooperation with foreign countries of the Administration of the President of Russia and general of the Foreign Intelligence Service Vladimir Chernov was hacked and leaked to Russian pro-democracy investigative publications. A series of articles in these publications based on the so-called "Dossier of General Chernov" exposed massive Russian operations of interference in political processes in the "near abroad" and a vast network of agents, operating in Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Baltic states, and other countries around Russia[110]. There were only a few documents in this "dossier" that concerned Belarus[111], significantly less compared to other countries, but our attention was attracted by a draft note to Chernov of a certain political strategist with proposals for organizing work in Belarus. Importantly, it proposed, among other things, the creation of a network of regional sites, pro-Russian groups, parties, etc.

The document is titled "Strategy of work in the Republic of Belarus" and is dated September 2020. The strategy states, among other things, that "to maintain influence in Belarus," it is necessary to:

1. Gain influence over the maximum number of emerging political forces in Belarus (move into the governing bodies of all opposition structures);
2. Create a resource base for the development of a future social and political movement and a political party... search and prepare up to 1200 candidates for further participation in parliamentary elections;
3. Form an information infrastructure to maintain social and political influence in any situation:
    3.1. Create own information distribution channels (media, social networks, Telegram channel, and YouTube channel network).
    3.2. Work through own community organizations and a network of local opinion leaders.

The leaked document also lists some resources in Belarus that are already controlled by the Kremlin.

The author of the note who proposed himself as a potential contractor maintained that he has been working in Belarus for a long time and has his own resources there. Based on some indications in the document (the author's work experience in 36 countries, etc.), iSANS experts identified the author of the note as a well-known political strategist Alexander Seravin[112]. Seravin is very closely associated with Alexander Malkevich[113] – who is close to Russian "propaganda and disinformation tsar" Yevgeny Prigozhin (already under U.S. sanctions[114]) – as well as with Prigozhin himself, having carried out a number of his assignments, though he denies this[115]. According to our information, Seravin was born in Vitebsk and has Belarusian citizenship.

Our informed analysis suggests that it is very likely that they want to implement this concept now through Sergey Lushch, with his plans to transform Soyuz into a pro-Russian party and his recent role as coordinator of the network of pro-Russian sites. Earlier, we discovered a connection between Lushch's and Prigozhin's structures (see the description of Anna Bogacheva-Trigg's case in our previous report[116]). The paper submitted to Chernov with the political strategist's proposals in fact describes the network of influence and activists that already existed before the elections. We believe that through the work of Seravin and with Prigozhin's private finances, a network was created at that time and can be seen as a prototype that could be scaled up with government support and funding, as requested in the note to Chernov.

Taking into account the involvement of Prigozhin's organization in actions against Ukraine, including the war in Donbass, we can suggest that the role of political strategists in Belarus after the elections could have also been played by Seravin's people, including such episodes as the appearance Lukashenko in military uniform without insignia in the style of Donbass and Luhansk separatists, the organization of a rally in support of Lukashenko using the flags of these separatists, the emergence of provocative narratives splitting Belarusian society (we called it "Donbasization"), and the creation of groups of pro-government vigilantes under the general name *yabatki*. Our experts have found many overlapping audiences supporting Ukrainian separatists and *yabatki*. In terms of values, these are one and the same target group, however an already existing pool of participants may have been used to mobilize support for Lukashenko after the election fiasco in August. The playbook from Russian operations in Ukraine is clearly being used now in Belarus.

The political part of the network of influence is also being reconfigured. Some of the characters active in the past have apparently been pushed away from Russian support (Agafonov, who represents the *Politring* website group), some moved from their structures to Belarusian state television (or strengthened their positions there), including Lazutkin, Dzermant, and Gigin.

Sergei Lushch, who may have once claimed that his Soyuz would become a partner of the government's United Russia party, who forged ties with Russian funds operating abroad and the State Duma and for several years worked on changing his own image as a radical imperial supporter of integration with Russia into something more respectable, was nevertheless relegated to the position of a still more marginal partner. It seems that his party was designated a partner of Prilepin's newly created party "For Truth!". Lushch himself, judging by his activity at the beginning of the Covid pandemic, hoped to reach a serious level of engagement with entrepreneurs, possibly, at instructions from his Russian partners. Quite a few Belarusian entrepreneurs have their business interests in Russia through trade, business partnerships, participation in evasion of Western sanctions and Russian counter-sanctions on food products from the EU. In the case "deeper integration" processes develop according to the Kremlin scenario, this part of Belarusian

business circles may come handy. However, for now he seems to be assigned to something more important for Moscow – linking Belarus to Russia's policy on the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbass.

At the same time, it seems that Lushch has now been "appointed" by the Kremlin to the role of the pro-Russian systemic critic of Lukashenko, as evidenced by the number and tone of his publications and references to him on the Ukraina.ru site[117]. Our experts also note the change of "themes" in Lushch's speeches from a radically pro-imperial and Russian-nationalist rhetoric to a moderately integrative pro-reformist position with criticism of Lukashenko. In fact, now Lushch's rhetoric could be described as moderate populism, with an emphasis on caring for business, especially small and medium-sized businesses. We recorded the first signs of such a transformation with the onset of the Covid pandemic, when Lushch raised concerns about the business situation and offered a program of action for this[118].

The sum amount of the "Russian factor" in the Belarusian crisis in May 2021

The political crisis in Belarus, which began with the August 9 protests, ended with a staged conspiracy case. It should be noted that in 2010, "extremism" (in Lukashenko's interpretation) was manifested immediately during the protests. It was a provocative attack on the house of government, and it allowed Lukashenko and his security apparatus to go straight to repression under the pretext of fighting extremism.

In the political crisis of 2020-2021, it was impossible to incriminate "extremism" immediately, since the protest was not only peaceful, but its leaders constantly emphasized the unacceptability of violent actions. Lukashenko tried to stir up the situation by demonstrating his personal "defense of the presidential building," while the KGB exploited the theme of alleged weapons found[119]. However, there were no convincing facts of "extremism."

Only in April 2021 did the Belarusian KGB, with the support of the Russian FSB, manage to fabricate a case of "conspiracy," taking control of discussions in Zoom that were conducted by a group of irresponsible opposition members from different countries who had no real influence on the situation in Belarus. The capture of Zenkevich and Feduta in Moscow and the arrests in Belarus in this case, according to the authorities' plan, became a symbolic end to the entire period of the political crisis[120].

The role of the Kremlin here was fully demonstrated through support from the FSB, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Presidential Administration in Moscow, but also through the fact that later Moscow began to publicly use this episode for anti-American rhetoric. Peskov said that Putin spoke about the U.S. intervention in the situation in Belarus using the example of this "conspiracy" in a telephone conversation with Biden[121]. Bortnikov confirmed that the FSB was looking into the circumstances of the conspiracy[122].

The main conclusion about the Kremlin's strategy is that in contrast to the Ukrainian crisis of 2014, where the Kremlin was interested in the breakup of Ukraine and, therefore, the strategy was aimed at destabilization, chaos, and proxies and media tools of hybrid war were widely used, with regard to Belarus the Kremlin was interested in splitting society in two, with the "overwhelming majority" "for Lukashenko" vs. "renegade Orangists." This would be achieved according to Russia's "post-Bolotnaya" scheme; that is, the creation of a visible consolidation of the majority around Lukashenko (a rally around the flag, which was visualized at pro-Lukashenko rallies).

This is reflected in a set of specific restrictions:

1) The Kremlin instructed the Russian media not to discuss critical issues of relations between Russia and Belarus, not to criticize Lukashenko, and not to emphasize his anti-Russian position during the election campaign;
2) The Kremlin did not give the command to its proxies to act against Belarus. Therefore, the structures of Zatulin, Glazyev, Kolerov (the extreme imperial flank of politics and propaganda[123]), and others could not play any role in the events in Belarus. The Kremlin did not give the order to support pro-integration structures in Belarus itself and did not support the initiatives of Mazepin or Gontmakher;
3) Despite the fact that some representatives of the Belarusian opposition were waiting for some kind of negotiators from the Kremlin, there was a clear ban on communications that could be interpreted as the Kremlin's official support for this process;
4) Putin gave the command not to speed up any negotiations on the "union state" so as not to give grounds to accuse Moscow of pressure in a difficult situation;
5) Putin did not appoint, as he did during the Ukrainian crisis, personal special envoys – which would act as political coordinators, in whose hands the activity that frightened Lukashenko would be pulled together. All communications with Minsk were conducted institutionally, that is, through the heads of relevant departments.

The main factors of the Kremlin's influence turned out to be several large-scale issues associated with Moscow's already established gravity. It was enough for Putin to express his support for Lukashenko to retain a decisive influence on the outcome of the political crisis. Therefore, the Kremlin virtually did not need to play any operational game.

Four elements in the Kremlin's position fully determined the outcome of the Belarusian protest.

The first component is that *Putin's clear public support for Lukashenko ruled out the possibility of a "split" among the elites*. If Putin had a different position, there would have been attempts on the Belarusian side to negotiate with the West Lukashenko's departure with the support of Moscow. But Putin's position immediately closed the door to any such attempts. Therefore, Putin's position left the Belarusian civil and military leaders of the top and middle level only one opportunity: to stand with Lukashenko to the end.

Looking back at what was happening in Belarus in August-November, we clearly see now that the Western message of support for a peaceful transition and protection of the country's sovereignty from a possible Russian takeover did not reach members of Belarusian elites – not only because there was no clear messaging, but also because of the long-time Soviet style and Russia-oriented background and thinking of many of them. In the future, this communication failure should be taken into account by anyone working on transformation in Belarus.

Second, a clear signal was sent on August 27, when Putin announced that, at Lukashenko's request, he was ready to provide military support if the situation got out of control and gave instructions to prepare a "reserve of law enforcement officers." *This statement radically influenced the behavior of the Belarusian*

security officials, who felt secure in the face of any escalation because they knew that they had de facto an unlimited Russian reserve behind them[124].

Third was Putin's complete refusal to discuss a settlement with any European leaders. Putin doggedly repeated one idea in these communications: external interference is unacceptable. In this way he *closed all opportunities for collective international pressure on Lukashenko* and for strengthening the position of the opposition.

Fourth was Putin's clearly readable position that the suppression of protests is more important than any other Russian interests. This was clearly shown in the situation with Viktor Babariko. Both in Belarus and in Moscow, it has been repeatedly suggested that Moscow should support the release of Viktor Babariko, since he is the head of a bank affiliated with Gazprom. There have also been speculations, allegedly based on insider information, that Putin is putting pressure on Lukashenko over the pace of the so-called "political reform." However, all these assumptions in the end did not matter. *Putin put the suppression of protests,* that is, the fight against "Orangeism," *as a top priority.* This ruled out the possibility of any shaking of Lukashenko's positions.

One of the most extreme episodes of the crisis was Lukashenko's visit to the KGB prison and his meeting with a group of political prisoners[125]. It was very unusual that Lukashenko went for it, given that he always spoke extremely dismissively about all opposition members in Belarus, in particular during the 2010 crisis. We believe that Putin put before Lukashenko the issue of releasing Babariko not as a demand but as a wish. In response, Lukashenko demonstrated to Putin that he took a step forward, but Babariko refused to accept the terms of his release[126]. After that, the Kremlin refused to raise this question altogether. At the same time, the fate of Yuri Voskresensky, the self-proclaimed former coordinator of Babariko's headquarters, who agreed to lead the process of imitation dialogue in exchange for release, was telling[127].

Lukashenko showed not only with Voskresensky as an example, but also – more importantly – with employees of Nikita Mikado's IT company PandaDoc that behind-the-scenes guarantees to stop participating in the protests without any conditions will lead to release. It is clear that representatives of Nikita Mikado negotiated with the Presidential Administration of Belarus and secured the release of the company's employees[128]. Given that the Kremlin endorsed Lukashenko's strategy of harsh repressions, we conclude that it included Moscow's support for the tactic of dealing with arrested political hostages: if there is no renunciation of one's political position, there will be no release from prison.

The most important element of the Kremlin's support was the work to "synchronize the narratives." The actions of the Kremlin propaganda machine are well outlined in iSANS research[129]. It should be emphasized that in many other conflict situations, Kremlin media use a large repertoire of semantic elements. This was the case, for example, during the crisis in Ukraine in 2014: economic themes, the history of language policy, episodes of collaborationism during the war years, conflict themes of a deeper history, themes of "Russophobia," various fake news (the "crucified boy"), personal stories, etc. Regarding Belarus, the main Kremlin media machine left these plots to Lukashenko's media, vigilantes from the *yabatki*, radicals from the NOD, Russian Telegram channels, "patriotic initiatives" and "patriotic" historians from the Russian Historical Memory Foundation, all acting with the support of the authorities.

Russian media focused entirely on three topics:

a) the weakness and senselessness of street protest;

b) defaming Tikhanovskaya; and

c) the subject of Western intervention.

Kremlin media avoided covering in detail the many specific topics related to the crisis: different positions in the Church, the struggle of strike committees, and testimonies of women who were humiliated.

It should be noted that in the first week after the elections, Kremlin media did not yet have clear instructions on how to cover events in Belarus. Therefore, Gazeta.ru, Lenta.ru and other resources directly controlled by the Putin Administration published stories in which the authors wrote that there were grounds for protest sentiments. However, after a group of Russian media workers (about 40 people) arrived in Minsk on August 21 to work, the Kremlin media firmly began to follow a simple and tough line of coverage.

Since the coordinator of this operation was Margarita Simonyan, who is supervised by Alexei Gromov, the powerful first deputy head of the Presidential Administration in charge of working with the media, information and propaganda, the longest serving member of the presidential administration who enjoys unlimited Putin's trust[130], we can conclude that Putin worked out his position and communicated it to Gromov no later than August 18-19. On August 21, a special operation to transfer a large group of Russian media workers to Minsk was carried out with the support of one of the richest Russian oligarchs with strong presence in Belarus Mikhail Gutseriev. His plane was used for bringing the landing of the Russian media workers and that the Renaissance Hotel in Minsk, owned by Gutseriev, became the headquarters of these journalists[131]. By offering his support at a critical moment, Gutseriev provided service both for Lukashenko, with whom he has been associated for many years by partnership and friendship, and to Gromov.

For six months, Kremlin media produced a constant stream of messages and stories that were widely used by leading Russian news portals as the main source of information on the situation in Belarus and picked up by news aggregator teams of Rambler, Yandex, and Mail.ru. All these stories revolved either around the discrediting of Tikhanovskaya or around the scenes of the interference by Poland, Lithuania, the U.S., or reported on the futility of street protests[132].

There were two episodes that stand out in contrast to the straightforward Kremlin's line. First, what was the point of Andrei Kolesnikov's visit to Minsk and his interview with Maria Kolesnikova[133]? Second, what was the point of the meetings between Fedor Lukyanov and Yevgeny Gontmakher and two members of the Belarusian opposition's Coordination Council in Moscow? Both stories sounded like intrigue connected with the presence in Moscow of some forces probing the possibility of a dialogue between the Kremlin and some acceptable part of the opposition. Kolesnikov is the long-term "number one" in Putin's journalist pool, Lukyanov is the most well-known Foreign Ministry expert, and Gontmakher is a former economic adviser to Medvedev. Kolesnikova's goals, as well as those of Rodnenkov and Kravtsov from the Coordination Council, when meeting with Moscow high-profile figures were clear and stemmed from a publicly declared desire to find support in Moscow. But from Moscow's side, the purpose of these meetings was unclear, since neither of them received any follow up, so it is difficult to speak of them as "episodes of influence." We see this more as an element of the "probing" on the part of the Administration of the President of Russia in the

event of an unforeseen development of events, which we were informed about through inside information from the Presidential Administration.

A separate factor of influence is the Russian liberal media. *Novaya Gazeta, Meduza, Ekho Moskvy, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, Dozhd,* and *RTVi*, in addition to *Radio Liberty, Deutsche Welle* and top authors of YouTube programs constantly published materials condemning the violence in Belarus and participated in campaigns in support of political prisoners and others who were persecuted. The Belarusian media supporting the protest – *NEXTA, Tut.by, Onliner*, journalists of *Belsat* and *Euroradio* took into account this support from many Russian public speakers, relied on it, and acted in a single Russian-language media field. A popular commentator on the events in Belarus was the politician Maksim Katz, who covered the Belarusian events in detail on his YouTube channel for three months.

A number of Russian authors engaged in an online polemic on whether the victory of a peaceful protest is possible or a forceful action by the opposition is required. Russian economic and political analyst Andrei Illarionov[134], Belgorod blogger Bychkovsky, and journalist Arkady Babchenko spoke out in favor of using force. This discussion influenced some of the Belarusian opposition members in exile (not a majority, though), who actively criticized Tikhanovskaya and her team for "weakness" and called for her return to Belarus – such as a member of the Coordination Council of the opposition, respected play-writer and theatre director Andrei Kureichik[135]. The Belarusian KGB closely followed this Belarusian-Russian space of supporters of action by force, and based on the dialogues in this environment, constructed the so-called "conspiracy," which locked the anti-protest actions of the Minsk and Moscow security forces into one.

An important factor of direct Moscow influence is the position of the Moscow Patriarchate. Patriarch Kirill, at the request of Lukashenko, on August 25 quickly dismissed Metropolitan Pavel and replaced him with Metropolitan Benjamin, demonstrating that there should be no hesitation in the Church's support of Lukashenko. In Belarus, as Natalia Vasilevich's review[136] showed, there was a circle of church officials who condemned the violence of the authorities and were ready to support the activity of parishes in protecting the persecuted. However, the Moscow Patriarchate decisively stopped this.

This strong move by Moscow at the early stage of protests encouraged Lukashenko to engage in the persecution of several Orthodox priests who took part in protests or condemned police violence and to put a very strong pressure on the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Belarus which emerged in the first weeks of protests as a force which could potentially play a role in providing important moral support to the protests, similar to the role the Catholic Church played in Poland at the time of the democratic revolution in the end of 1980s. Lukashenko, with support from Moscow, prevented this scenario from happening.

Interaction between Putin and Lukashenko during the political crisis resulted in the formation of a new situational alliance of two authoritarian regimes. There has been a merger of practices of suppressing civil liberties, common practices of law enforcement agencies, a single narrative of the "orange threat" and "intervention of the West." Regardless of the format of the "union state," in this political crisis something developed that reminiscent of the position of Germany and Austria after the "Anschluss." Obviously, this entails long-term political consequences for Central Europe and for the European Union as a whole and changes the entire structure of post-Soviet Eurasia[137]. Moscow's "gravitational pull" had forced Lukashenko into a position where maintaining distance is difficult[138], unlike in the case of Kazakhstan or Azerbaijan who

are much less dependent on Moscow's direct economic support, pursue a more nuanced foreign policy and have a more diverse set of influential international partners, including Turkey and China.

During the crisis, Putin showed that he does not yet intend to force integration, a large-scale Russian military presence, privatization in favor of Moscow, or initiate new large-scale joint investment projects. Putin has shown that keeping Lukashenko in power depends entirely on Moscow's political position. According to the Kremlin, Lukashenko has gone so far beyond any "red lines" in suppressing protests that he will not be able to play any independent game on the foreign policy scene in the coming years and will not be able to maintain his image as a "negotiating platform in the post-Soviet space." Given the situation, there is currently no need for the Kremlin to insist on the specific content of constitutional reform. The Kremlin believes that the creation of a party system analogous to the Russian one – that is, with several totally loyal parties that create independent activity in parliament and are symmetrical to the Moscow parties – could make Lukashenko's political regime more manageable from Moscow, as well as a similar regime which follows. Lukashenko resists this, believing that parties will destabilize Belarus[139]. Constitutional reform has been pushed back to early 2022. In a logic of retaining his power, Lukashenko seeks to eliminate the issue of early presidential elections demanded by the opposition and democratic states and hopes that he will be able to hold "quiet elections" in 2025.

There is a simultaneous deterioration of the political situation in Belarus and Russia. The defeat of the protest movement in Belarus basically coincided with the defeat of Navalny's FBK in Russia. A new ring of US and EU personal and economic sanctions is tightening around the Kremlin. The Kremlin is strongly influenced by the emerging process of redefining European policy towards Russia and renewal of North Atlantic solidarity that is being proposed by the U.S. and supported by the United Kingdom and Germany.

Russian influence on the political crisis in Belarus has already been confirmed by the fact that the amended "Belarus Democracy, Human Rights, and Sovereignty Act of 2020", reauthorized by the US Senate on November 30, 2020, for the first time explicitly includes "Russian individuals complicit In the crackdown that occurred after the August 9, 2020, election", including officials "in the so-called 'Union State' between Russia and Belarus (regardless of nationality of the individual)" and "a Russian individual that has significantly participated in the crackdown on independent press or human rights abuses related to political repression in Belarus, including the Russian propagandists sent to replace local employees at Belarusian state media outlets" as potential targets of sanctions[140]. The U.S. Congress is already discussing sanctions not only against Belarusian officials but against Russian figures who actively participated in supporting the defeat of the civil movement in Belarus by Lukashenko's security forces, including the leadership of Russian security agencies and the propaganda team of the RT, including specific names[141].

What the Kremlin has achieved and not yet achieved so far regarding Belarus

As iSANS predicted[142], in the event of prolonged mass protests that would threaten Lukashenko's power, the Kremlin would be happy to watch the cleansing of active elements of Belarusian society and then, under the guise of assistance, would use the crisis to strengthen its influence in Belarus and continue its activities to weaken Lukashenko and subsequently replace him at a convenient moment.

So far, the Kremlin has achieved the following goals:

- Almost complete synchronization of state propaganda on Russian and Belarusian television not only relative to events in Belarus, but also as regards the West and other foreign policy narratives important for the Kremlin[143]. The appointment of the new Minister of Information Vladimir Pertsov, who previously served as director of the representative office in Belarus of the television and radio broadcasting company MTRK *Mir*[144], based in Moscow and broadcasting to all CIS countries, confirms the course towards synchronization.
- Successful export to Belarus of the Russian repressive model of government control over society. A significant part of the active Belarusian society was subjected to severe repression or was forced to leave the country under the threat of persecution.
- Lukashenko cut off his path to resuming normal relations with the West because of the crimes he has committed and is forced to settle with Putin for his support[145]. At the same time, Lukashenko himself, back in August 2020, obediently sang a song about NATO aggression and the "insidious West," which was essential for the Kremlin. Lukashenko's April 6 statement on the reduction of Western embassies is in line with the Kremlin's plans to isolate Belarus[146].
- There was a catastrophic deterioration in relations between Belarus and Ukraine and loss of status as a negotiating neutral platform in the "Minsk process" on Donbass[147].

Currently, Lukashenko is sabotaging Putin's proposed reform process of party building and replacing it with a process of "constitutional reform" aimed at retaining power by transferring authority to two non-elected bodies – the Security Council in an emergency and the All-Belarusian People's Assembly, chaired by Lukashenko, at other times. This design will ensure the continuity of the regime's power and in the future, if necessary, direct the transfer of power to a trusted successor.

Even though Minsk and the Kremlin are trying to sell "constitutional reform" internationally as a way out of political crisis[148], the Kremlin is certainly unhappy with the reform model proposed by Lukashenko with its new role for the All-Belarusian Assembly. According to the Kremlin, there is simply no room left in this reform for the union state. Russian Presidential administration people indicate, according to our source. that all references to the union state have been carefully purged from the bills being considered in Minsk.

It is beneficial for the Kremlin to keep under its control the weak, as they believe, Lukashenko, who has lost his legitimacy and status as a guarantor of sovereignty and as a master of international strategy. In general, the Kremlin now believes that Lukashenko was able to suppress protests and at the same time build up a sufficient degree of animosity from Belarusians, weakening his position in the process, so that he could pursue a policy beneficial to the Kremlin. In the future, he can be replaced by someone else – certainly not someone from among current pro-Belarusian politicians, but from among pro-Russian figures – and on the Kremlin's terms.

On the one hand, Lukashenko's maneuvers can be seen as his usual cunning attempt to shift the Kremlin's attention from demands for internal changes (forcing the surrender of sovereignty) to the outer perimeter (assisting Moscow in opposing NATO). His new aggressive rhetoric towards Ukraine can be regarded in the same vein[149]. On the other hand, one can imagine that for the Kremlin now, considering the new round of confrontation with Ukraine and the West, these changes in Belarus's foreign policy turn out to be a priority over the implementation of plans to accelerate the "deep integration" of the two countries. Moscow will be able to implement these plans later, but for now it can build up its influence, including through the

special services and the continuing of exercising economic control. Lukashenko's belligerent rhetoric towards the West[150] turns out to be more important for Moscow, particularly as part of the creation of a new version of the "Eastern bloc."

In this sense, the posts regularly appearing in pro-Russian propaganda media, such as an article on RuBaltic focusing attention on the confrontation with the West as the basis for the new stage of the Russian-Belarusian union[151], are indicative. It is in this vein that one can also view the story of the so-called detention of Russian "Wagnerites" in Belarus, which ultimately ruined Minsk's relations with Ukraine[152].

Part II. Inside Belarus: Zoom In

Attempts at party building after August: various initiatives and counteraction by Lukashenko

The idea of possible political reform, envisioning a strengthening of the role of political parties, was first announced publicly by Lukashenko in August 2020 at the height of the protests. At that time, Lukashenko's position was very precarious, and he was demonstrating a willingness to make conditional concessions to the demands of change. Lukashenko also confirmed his readiness to carry out reforms in party building during his talks in September in Sochi with Vladimir Putin[153], who included party reform in the package of minimum conditions for providing Russian support. This was in Moscow's interest and was designed to exercise Russian influence in Belarus through ties with Russian party partners.

Now the picture of party building in Belarus is a patchwork quilt because of the varying times of these attempts (some party projects existed long before the elections, whereas others developed in the context of the elections and the post-election crisis, as we discuss in detail below) and the differing nature of these initiatives. Pro-Russian structures were initiated or supported by the Kremlin and pro-Lukashenko associations are a product of local political workings. There is also a number of imitation parties – spoilers designed to take the place of relatively democratic or nationally oriented parties – as well as several authentic party initiatives of the democratic opposition, both old and the new one that emerged on the wave of elections and protests in 2020. This process is also influenced by Lukashenko's temporary concessions to Moscow's demands and his subsequent backsliding, which led in the spring of 2021 to his firm resistance to the idea of developing a party system and when he decided that the severity of the crisis had passed and Moscow should no longer be appeased.

As the forceful suppression of disloyal citizens was growing and semblance of control was being established, the need for a simulated dialogue with society became less and less necessary for the regime. As a result, the process of party building, at first loudly promoted by state propagandists, eventually faded into the background.

Simulacra and spoilers

In the imitated dialogue between the authorities and society, the main role at this stage is played by the Roundtable of Democratic Forces, which is headed by political analyst Yuri Voskresensky. Official media call him the coordinator of Babariko's headquarters, but in fact he only coordinated the collection of signatures in one Minsk district. In August, he was arrested by the KGB on suspicion of organizing riots and almost immediately confessed. In October, he was released, unlike other arrested opposition politicians, and announced the creation of a Roundtable for negotiations between the authorities and the opposition.

Also worthy of note is the fact that before participating in the election campaign, Voskresensky was engaged in the supply of sanctioned dairy products to the Russian market and was accused by the Rosselkhoznadzor (Russian Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance) of "improper transit." This circumstance indicates, if not an affiliation, then at least the existence of his contacts in the Belarusian special services, without which such a business in Belarus would be impossible[154].

As a result, the Roundtable of Democratic Forces appeared, which is positioned as an entry point for "constructive" political forces wishing to take part in the new configuration of the political system. Over time, the Roundtable has become a tool for receiving and processing opposition defectors and their inclusion in state propaganda processes. Meetings of this club are held regularly; loyalist figures, pro-Russian activists, as well as persons against whom the authorities have compromising evidence, or who are creatures of the KGB, take part in it. Representatives of independent civil society and the democratic opposition do not engage with this structure, rightly believing that this will be used to imitate dialogue, internally and externally in the political space.

The regime is shaping Yuri Voskresensky into a figure loyal to Russia, sending Russian journalists from the *Mir* and NTV channels to his events; he himself actively comments to the Russian press and is supported by the local branch of Sputnik. He is in favor of integration and has held events with the participation of representatives of the Russian Embassy. Notably, his event "Prospects for the development of Belarusian-Russian relations within the Union State" was attended by advisers from the Russian Embassy[155].

The main party project of the Roundtable is the organizing committee of the Democratic Union party. The leader is the ex-head of Valery Tsepkalo's electoral headquarters, Andrey Lankin, who is a former employee of MTB Bank and former top manager of the well-known IT company Wargaming[156]. The program is in theory democratic, with an emphasis on decentralization and the development of a digital state and human capital. Among the public members of the organizing committee are mainly programmers, former members of the initiative group of Valery Tsepkalo, as well as former counterintelligence officers[157].

Political analyst Pyotr Petrovsky, a regime propagandist and representative of the conservative wing of the ideological power structures, is playing an active role in the construction of the Democratic Union. He is an adherent of Eurasian integration. According to him, he was one of the ideologues of the Party of National Unity, based on Lukashenko's Belaya Rus (White Russia) Party. He is a regular contributor to the toxic internet resource Imhoklab and other pro-Russian sites.

Representatives of the "dead" Republican Party, for example, Andrei Bozhko, also take part in the work of the Roundtable. In early 2020, he tried to take over the party and now essentially represents only himself, although he uses the name of this structure at the Roundtable[158]. The meetings have also been attended by Vladimir Belozor, the first chairman of the Republican Party, as well as the head of the Minsk city wing of this party Dmitry Karmazin, who participates actively in Russian House of Moscow in Minsk events and is a representative of the Russian Space Society in Belarus.

In general, Voskresensky's Roundtable, despite its declared role as the "organizer of the dialogue from a constructive opposition," has become a point of intersection for pro-government figures who became more active after the election campaign. His party project Democratic Union did not receive wide support, and another party announced by Voskresensky, We are Together, is a spoiler for the Together party created by Viktor Babariko's supporters.

At the same time, the speed of introduction of spoiler parties by this figure, apparently working under the direction of the authorities, is astounding. On May 7, Voskresensky announced the creation of his third party project – the New People party[159] – whose task, apparently, is to represent the moderate democratic opposition in the West and fight Western sanctions. One of the main tasks is to serve as a spoiler for

Babariko's team's Together party. The New People includes little-known former members of Babariko's initiative group. It positions itself as a party assembled from people who have not previously participated in politics, while there is not a single vaguely visible opinion leader, the members are total knockoffs, and this proposed party not meet any public interest[160].

In turn, ex-deputy of the House of Representatives Anna Kanopatskaya, once positioned as almost the only independent deputy, was one of the first to announce preparations for the creation of her party back during the election campaign. The National Democratic Party was announced twice – in July in a statement on the eve of the elections and in early September at the height of the protests. As in many other cases, the issue did not move further than the statements. It is worth noting that registration documents were secretly submitted by Kanopatskaya in the spring of last year, and even in those relatively peaceful times she was denied. It is worth noting that Kanopatskaya has repeatedly claimed in TV interviews and on her social media that Tikhanovskaya and Babariko are "projects" of the Kremlin[161], echoing Voskresensky's position. She has not been active on social networks since March 25, and most likely her party initiative is a sleeping spoiler for an independent Belarusian nationalist party if anyone tries to create one[162].

Also, work is underway to create Our Party – a project proposed by Andrey Dmitriev, chairman of the public organization Tell the Truth and presidential candidate in the 2020 elections. He himself claims that he is not creating a party to fit the reform promised by Lukashenko, because he does not believe in it. Currently, preparations are underway for putting together an initiative group and holding a constituent congress, planned for late May or early June[163]. Of note is the fact that military neutrality is spelled out in the party's draft program[164].

Pro-Russian Soyuz – a stooge of Moscow imperial circles

Pro-Russian electorate is being targeted by the newly formed Soyuz (*Eng. – union*) party, which also took part in activities of Voskresensky's Roundtable. Pro-Russian electorate cannot not be defined by language or region, though Mogilev, Vitebsk and Gomel in the East, bordering Russia, and Brest in the West, bordering Poland, are traditional objects of Russian influence efforts, as described in our previous reports[165]. It is rather age and social status that mater, including people older than 50 years, less educated, and engaged in small and medium-level business activity connected to Russia. Soyuz started several years ago as an openly pro-imperial civic initiative, based on the Slavic Unity idea, as described in our previous two reports, and has shifted now to more business-oriented rhetoric. As our focus groups held in July last year in Belarus showed, the Slavic unity idea did not find much support, while the economic ties with Russia was a rather common interest.[166]

The organizing committee of the party was founded on the basis of the eponymous and very active civic initiative, created several years ago with the participation of Russian and Belarusian politicians who advocate deep integration of Belarus and Russia. It includes leaders of the movement of Russian compatriots and representatives of pro-Russian organizations. Among the party's activists is a team of members of the International Slavic Committee, the Belarusian public association Rus, and other pro-Russian leaders.

The chairman of the organizing committee, Sergei Lushch, has been one of the most prominent figures of Russian influence in Belarus for many years[167]. He is known for his neo-Nazi past – specifically, he was a

member of the neo-pagan sect Skhoron yezh Sloven (Preservation of all Slavs). He was also the organizer of a network of pro-Russian propaganda sites in Belarus that mimicked regional sites[168].

It is significant that from the very beginning the Soyuz party has positioned itself as pro-Russian and in opposition to Lukashenko. Stanislav Byshok, head of the Russian propaganda GONGO[2] called "Commonwealth of Independent States — Election Monitoring Organization" (CIS-EMO) and Lushch's associate, hoped to attract a large audience through the party: "If you are for an alliance with Russia, this does not mean that you are for Lukashenko, and vice versa. And in this sense, it seems to me that it is essential for the Soyuz party to attract a rather large niche of residents of Belarus, who, on the one hand, believe that Russia is a friend and that Belarus is culturally close to Russia, and, on the other hand, are critical of the current government."[169]

Of the Russian political forces that support Soyuz, the newly created A Just Russia – For Truth party stands out. It is the result of a merger of the moderately left Sergei Mironov's A Just Russia and Zakhar Prilepin's nationalist-imperial For Truth. It was representatives of For Truth that came to the founding congress of the Soyuz party in Minsk, including political strategist and member of the presidium of the central council of the united A Just Russia – For Truth party Alexander Kazakov and ex-adviser to the head of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) Alexander Zakharchenko, who worked for four years in the occupied Donbass[170].

Also at the founding congress was the former DPR Minister of Communications Viktor Yatsenko[171], who began his activities under Strelkov-Girkin in 2014 and held the post of DPR "minister" until 2019. Among his "achievements" is the seizure of the infrastructure of Ukrainian mobile operators and the creation of the "republican" operator Phoenix in its place[172]. He is a member of the central council of A Just Russia – For Truth. Another guest of honor was Dmitry Belik, a United Russia deputy from Sevastopol, and one of the participants in preparations for the annexation of Crimea and the organization of the "referendum,"[173] for which he was awarded a medal "For the liberation of Crimea and Sevastopol." And the last member of the Russian delegation was Vladimir Kravtsov, professor at the Institute of Civil Service and Management under the President of the Russian Federation. He specializes in journalism, media, and propaganda. In December last year, he came to a conference in Minsk, where he argued that an information war was being conducted against Russia and Belarus, where "methods that worked under Nazi Germany were used."[174]

It is significant that none of the Kremlin's heavyweight politicians came to the Soyuz congress, including Konstantin Zatulin and Sergei Baburin, the Russian co-chairmen of the Soyuz civil initiative who had previously participated actively in its work. This suggests that Soyuz is viewed by the Kremlin as a second-tier party. Moscow will play the primary political role with developing an analogue of United Russia – the Party of National Unity – which may be created on the basis of the pro-Lukashenko movement "Belaya Rus." Neither Zatulin nor Baburin have supported the creation of the Soyuz party[175].

On the first attempt, the party was denied registration on the formal grounds of a high number of mistakes and inconsistences in personal details of members of the founding group[176], which once again speaks of Lukashenko's resistance to the emergence of pro-Russian parties and virtually complete obstruction of party building on the Kremlin model.

[2] A term for a government-organized and government-controlled quasi NGO.

Republican Party of Labor and Justice (RPTS) – local pro-Kremlin initiative

The second wing of the association A Just Russia – For Truth in the form of A Just Russia maintains relations with the remnants of the long-standing and somewhat marginal Republican Party of Labor and Justice. The peculiarity of the situation in the party is as follows. The RPTS leadership did not support the candidacy of Alexander Lukashenko in the elections, and after the harsh suppression of the protests they even criticized him. As a result, the Ministry of Justice took the party away from its leader Vasily Zadnepryany and re-registered it with functionaries loyal to the authorities. Essentially, a dual power was established in the party with current official leaders of the party having no organizational structure under them and all the levers of control remaining with Zadnepryany. Sputnik continued calling him the head of the party after the raider takeover[177]. What is important is that public showdowns between the new and the old chairman took place on pro-Russian websites[178]. Zadnepryany claims that his adversaries want to transfer the party to the oligarch Topuzidis[179].

In the RPTS, a regional group of party members from Vitebsk and the Vitebsk region who have a long history of active pro-Russian activity stands out. This includes the head of Russian Community Council (KSORS) Andrei Gerashchenko, a former Belarusian official who was dismissed from the civil service for ambiguous statements about Belarusian language and culture in which he equated Belarusianization with de-Russification. He was the head of the Vitebsk regional organization of the RPTS and still actively participates in party activities.

Since 2015, the Vitebsk regional organization has been headed by Alexander Lukashok, a businessman from Novopolotsk. His views are quite eloquently indicated in his interview, where he speaks out against the promotion of the Belarusian language and culture and, in general, actively supports the integration of Russia and Belarus. His activities encompass the full range for a pro-Russian activist. He took an active role in promoting the Immortal Regiment initiative and in fall 2019 he spoke at the Memory of the Victors conference in Belgrade. This event was attended by coordinators of the Immortal Regiment march from 55 countries. Lukashok is a member of the KSORS and founded and heads the Union business club *Avant-garde*, which aims to develop business cooperation with Russia[180]. In 2021, he received a commendation from the Russian Foreign Ministry for his contribution to the development of relations with Russia[181].

In addition, there is information about attempts by the well-known Russian conservative and imperial oligarch-politician Konstantin Malofeev to establish contacts, ultimately unsuccessfully, with the Vitebsk wing of the RPTS party.

It was reported that Zadnepryany had intentions to receive grants from Russia and hoped that RPTS will be in demand in Russia as one of the comrades-in-arms and "promoters" of Russia's interests in Belarus. However, after losing control of the party, Zadnepryany found himself in limbo. Despite this, Sergei Mironov's A Just Russia continues to maintain close contacts with him[182]. This concerns things like the holding of cultural events in the regions, such as the Moscow-Minsk chess tournament dedicated to the 76th anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War[183].

It is doubtful that the party will be returned to Zadnepryany, but the Vitebsk wing and the remnants of the party's structures may be reorganized into a formal or informal structure and will continue their activity. The Kremlin would not allow an asset like this be rendered irrelevant.

The pro-Lukashenko phantom of United Russia: Belaya Rus

Turning to initiatives to create pro-Lukashenko (and at the same time pro-Russian) parties, we note that the idea of creating a political party based on the leading pro-Lukashenko national public association Belaya Rus has been discussed since its founding in 2007. This idea was revisited in 2008 and 2011, and the same rumors were circulated after the 2015 elections. But Lukashenko himself has always opposed this idea: "It is actually the most powerful organization. In fact, it could even become a party tomorrow. Frankly, I am already holding them back, saying do not rush towards it," he said in his message to parliament and the people in 2018[184].

After the outbreak of the crisis in August last year and against the background of Lukashenko's promises to Putin to support party building, the project to create a party was reactivated. As the chairman of Belaya Rus Gennady Davydko said, the working name is already ready – the Party of People's Unity Belaya Rus. Aleksandr Shatko, deputy chairman of Belaya Rus, also said in early March that Belaya Rus could become a party. But from that moment there has been nothing but silence.

The party's ideology has not been defined. At the beginning, a funny idea was voiced about "a center-right party with a good left-wing youth division."[185] However, in March 2021, the organization conducted internal polls about which ideology its members prefer. It is difficult to say what will turn out in practice but given the difficult political situation and Lukashenko's long-standing reluctance to create a party of power that could become a potential opponent, the project may be terminated at any time.

Regarding international cooperation, the main partner of Belaya Rus is the Russian party of power, United Russia. At consultations held in December 2020, Shatko assured United Russia that the main priority for foreign policy of the planned party would be "strengthening cooperation with Russia." The contact person for the Russian partners is Andrei Klimov, Deputy Secretary of the General Council of United Russia and Chairman of the Commission of the Presidium of the General Council of the party on international activities. He stated that "the establishment of inter-party cooperation will contribute to the intensification of integration processes within the framework of the Union State of Russia and Belarus."[186]

At the same time, it was announced that in January 2021 a United Russia delegation would visit Minsk. But there was no information about the meeting. The only message on the topic was published on January 19 in Sputnik Belarus's Telegram channel: "The United Russia party received an invitation to visit Minsk, where "the forming of a new social force" is taking place. A new political party may appear, the deputy secretary of the party's general council, Russian Senator Andrey Klimov, told RIA Novosti. According to him, the Belarusians would like to be in full contact with United Russia at the early stages."[187]

In General Chernov's[188] leaked documents on Belarus, a separate paragraph outlines the need to create pro-Russian parties and political movements and lists promising individuals from the point of view of creating such movements.

One of the informal curators of the project to create pro-Russian movements in Belarus is Yuri Shuvalov, who is an assistant in the Russian presidential administration's office for cross-border cooperation. He was one of the functionaries and ideologists of United Russia, an associate of Boris Gryzlov, and the coordinator of the Center for Social and Conservative Politics, which is one of the discussion clubs of United Russia. His

activity on Belarus was also evidenced by his frequent travels to Belarus – 1-3 times per month since at least 2016, according to the documents we were able to obtain. Flights ceased in March due to the Covid pandemic, but his work continued remotely. Judging by the website of the CSCP, videoconferences have been regularly organized there since October with the participation of people mentioned in General Chernov's lists.

Political strategists of the Presidential Administration of Russia are ready to are trying to take into account in their manipulations a growing public demand for strengthened Belarusian national identity with Belarusian identity. A completely modern project adapted to the needs of Belarusian society has been proposed which ties Belarus to Russia in an easy format through the economy. This kind of framing is not toxic and has a chance of success in Belarusian society[189].

Despite the support for the project of creating parties from Moscow – or, rather, reacting negatively to it – Lukashenko is holding back party building, stating that society is not yet ready for this: "My position on issues of party building has remained unchanged: do not force anything artificially, but without slowing down social and political processes. They must develop themselves, from the bottom. No artificially created pro-government parties... But society had no demand for them either. It is not being expressed even now... The party question excites the minds of only a small part of the politicized public in large cities."[190]

Local post-election initiatives

In the first months after the crisis, the creation of several new parties and movements was announced through which they declared their ambitions to get involved in the political process.

Among such projects is the creation of the Unity party. There has not yet been a public announcement of the creation of the party. Sources report its possible affiliation with former officials. The party does not have a clear ideology and its program has not yet been adopted. Judging by the draft published on the Unity website, the program is based on business development and protection of the national interests of Belarus. In foreign policy, neutrality is assumed. The party is chaired by entrepreneur Vyacheslav Shakh, one of the founders of the Superpack packaging company. After the first publication in the media, the party's website was removed, which also indicates that serious internal players are not ready to take risks and enter the political field under the Lukashenko regime[191].

Another pro-Russian marginal project is the Fatherland Party, created with activists of the National Liberation Movement (NOD). Its leader, Andrei Ivanov, tried to run for president. A professional ideologist, he has repeatedly performed at Russian venues, including the youth camp in Seliger. He is supported by the NOD resource Belrusinform and regularly appears on Sputnik[192].

Another distinctly pro-Russian movement is Rodina, which was initially positioned as a party. It has close ties with the security forces and the Orthodox Church. Despite its emphasized loyalty to the authorities, its leader Pyotr Shapko (a subject of our research[193]) has expressed disapproval of Lukashenko: "Lukashenko has deliberately taken the role of a person in charge of everything. He has not shared his power with almost anyone. And now, in principle, he cannot throw the blame on someone else's shoulders. And as far as I understand, he doesn't. Because he probably realizes that this is virtually impossible in the political system that he created. From this point of view, the blame (for the events taking place) lies with him."[194]

The Rodina movement includes the most conservative, pro-Russian, and pro-government activists; its audience largely overlaps with the audience of pro-government motor rallies and members of the Anti-Vandal and Patriots of Belarus movements. Their main resources are https://zapadrus.by/ and obzor24.by. It is unlikely that this movement will be allowed by the authorities to register as a party because they are too radically pro-Russian and are generally perceived as marginal freaks.

The presence of its activists in other organizations will be a clear marker of their ideological affiliation. Informational support for Shapko is provided by the radical Russian National Liberation Movement. Its leader, the notorious Russian deputy Yevgeny Fedorov, even interviewed Shapko. Videos about Rodina regularly appear on the NOD-related media resource Belrusinfo. Shapko also regularly participates in Yuri Voskresensky's roundtables.

The old big players

Among pro-Russian structures, it is worth noting the long-standing Liberal Democratic Party of Oleg Gaidukevich. It is represented throughout the country, regularly accepts new members and is self-financing, with many businessmen among the party members. Our sources claim that there are several dozen large (by Belarusian account) businessmen among LDP supporters. They have strong business ties with Russia and are interested in a pro-Russian course of Belarus.

At least two of them could be considered Gaydukevich's key "wallets": Andrei Nareiko, director general of "Professional Radio Systems" company, former MP and former member of the Public Chamber of the Union State; he has strong links to the Managing Director of Presidential Affairs infamous Viktor Sheiman (under US and EU sanctions), has strong business ties with Russia, has been possibly involved in supplies to the government of equipment for internet blocking and security agencies special communications[195]; and Alexander Kosach, a show-business entrepreneur who ran for a seat in the parliament.

The party's foreign policy orientation is strictly pro-Russian; the party has close contacts both in Moscow, primarily with Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, and with Kremlin satellites in the West[196]. We have already written in detail about the links between the LDP and the ultra-right European parties[197].

Currently, Gaidukevich continues to comment actively on what is happening, supporting the current government, but his international contacts are not publicly reported. For example, foreign participants in the LDP Patriotic Congress were not advertised and only the presence of representatives of the embassies of Russia, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan was reported. Perhaps, this was caused by the quick attack by the authorities on the excessively pro-Russian leader of the RSTP Zadnepryany. Gaidukevich's party has the greatest chances of being re-registered and retaining its niche.

New real opposition

The parties of the old opposition (Belarusian Popular Front, Christian Democracy, United Civil Party, Social Democratic Hramada, Tell the Truth, and European Belarus) have not been registered and will not be registered. They did not play a visible role in the current elections due to an outdated model and generational change.

The main party project that has emerged in the last year because of the actions of the new democratic opposition is the party Together created by supporters of the imprisoned non-registered presidential candidate Viktor Babariko. Plans for its creation were announced during the summer election campaign[198], when Maria Kolesnikova was the main spokesperson for Babariko's headquarters. She was arrested shortly after the start of the protests and the process of party building was suspended. A renewed call for a gathering of supporters took place in March 2021[199].

Ideologically, the party is continuing Babariko's campaign, without obvious tilts to the left or to the right, with an emphasis on the state's fulfillment of its obligations, an independent judiciary, and local self-government. The principles of the party emphasize that there should be two state languages[200].

The main representatives of the party are Maxim Bogretsov, a former vice president of the IT company Epam, who is in Belarus, as well as members of Babariko's campaign headquarters Anton Rodnenkov and Ivan Kravtsov, who are in exile. All of them are members of the Coordination Council – a united opposition structure created after the elections on the wave of protests.

Their primary mission now is to build a network of representative offices in the regions. Essentially, they are the only immigrant groups trying to build infrastructure within Belarus. At the same time, the process has been met with clear resistance from the authorities. Following the first meeting of activists in Minsk, local authorities disrupted a meeting of Babariko's supporters in Molodechno[201]. These directives often do not even come from the center but are owing to local authorities' playing safe. Until the end of May, several more offline meetings in regional centers are scheduled. The party leadership is aware that the authorities will actively prevent this from happening and has stated that it is oriented towards a long-term perspective over several years. Despite repression and pressure, the project enjoys solid trust among its segment of the electorate.

In addition, Bogretsov and Rodnenkov publicly traveled to Moscow, where they held several meetings with unnamed representatives of the Russian elite (although from internal sources we know they were the most well-known Foreign Ministry expert, editor-in-chief of journal "Russia in Global Affairs", Chair of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy Fedor Lukyanov, influential foreign policy expert, Director General of Russian International Affairs Council Andrei Kortunov, and a former economic adviser to Medvedev, Deputy Director of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations Evgeny Gontmakher). The main task, as Belarusian oppositiners called it, was to assuage Russian fears that they were not nationalists and that they could be dealt with instead of Lukashenko, but this was not successful. As they later admitted behind the scenes, such ideas were met with great wariness in Moscow[202].

Soon after the call for the creation of the Together party, Pavel Latushko spoke out about his intention of creating his own party. The name of the party, its ideology, and other attributes were not stated. Latushko himself stressed that this is a project for the future Belarus and that he is not creating a party now[203].

The end of reform that has not even begun

All the old and new party initiatives described in this section, with the exception of those of Babariko and Latushko, are not an authentic expression of democratic protests, but represent three variants – simulation

and spoilers (Voskresensky, Kanopatskaya, Dmitriev), pro-Lukashenko phantoms (Belaya Rus), and tools of Russian influence.

Based on the current data, we conclude that the party reform has ended without even starting. The Soyuz party – which had the most loyal and convenient agenda for the state, was entirely pro-Russian, developed by the "tame" activists, and which was actively promoted through state media – turned out to be out of place. The "Democratic Union" assembled from latent opposition activists with liberal views has even less chances for registration, and its leaders will have to settle for the existing format of an informal roundtable, initiated by Voskresensky.

The most likely scenario by the authorities for overcoming the current impasse lies in the process of re-registration of existing parties after amendments to the law on parties are adopted, and the subsequent formation of new parties. A similar procedure was announced by Lukashenko at a meeting devoted to a party issue: "At the All-Belarusian Assembly, we have defined a clear algorithm: we adopt a law on parties, then, at the end of the year, we will re-register all political parties on the basis of this law."[204]

To formally facilitate the process of creating parties, the number of people required to create a party will likely be reduced in the law from 1000 to 500. At the same time, new limiting factors for registration will be added[205]. Consequently, even if there are certain formal relaxations in the new law, the filter for registration and re-registration will be as strict as possible, and the party groups of the old and new opposition will not pass the threshold. Instead of these, new simulated and top-down-controlled parties, initially "nurtured" with the participation of the Belarusian special services, will enter the political field. At the same time, parties created from Russia stand very little chance for registration, judging by Lukashenko's recent statements.

Even the registration of a party will not provide guarantees for its functioning. Lukashenko opposes a multiparty system because it will cause a "clash of interests." Perhaps new mechanisms will be created for additional government control over parties. For example, Voskresensky's roundtable put forward the idea of creating a Council for Political Parties: "Such a consultative format is needed to develop a common value framework within which political forces will compete, but not go beyond what is permissible, with state patriotism as the common denominator."[206]

As a result, today we have the following picture:

1. The reform is being dragged out as long as possible, running into Lukashenko's (well-founded) fears of using pro-Russian parties as an instrument of Moscow's influence.
2. Even if it happens, it will not lead to a radical change in the political system.
3. The newly created parties will be hung with so many counterweights that they will not be able to carry out activities comprehensively.
4. Old parties will be destroyed.
5. The overall result will not be democratization, but, on the contrary, the creation of an even more centralized and controlled system.

New vigilantes: Who are the *yabatki*?

Our experts first recorded the emergence of the term "Ya – My – Bat'ka" ("I – We – [are the] Father") with the appearance of the eponymous Telegram channel on August 11, 2020, at the peak of public protests against election fraud. The massive launch of this hashtag took place on August 16 at a pro-government rally in Minsk, and then it was artificially promoted by state media and their satellite Telegram channels.

Subsequently, the name was reduced to *yabatka*. Going beyond the hashtag, *yabatki* (pl.) became an attempt to create a pro-Lukashenko vigilante group modeled on Russian pro-government vigilante groups and big enough to position it as a visible counter-weight to the democratic protest movement which gathered several hundred thousand people on the streets at the pick moments in August-October 2020.

The main goals of the government-sponsored new vigilantes are to simulate mass support for Alexander Lukashenko and create "the illusion of the majority," harassment of opposition activists, and the spread of disinformation and hate speech. The main activities of *Yabatki* is participation in street actions organized by the authorities (rallies and car rallies) in support of Lukashenko, attempts to disrupt pro-democratic protest actions, bullying of opposition activists, and propaganda and disinformation activities through the internet.

In spring 2021, the iSANS monitoring team noticed a dangerous development. The groups of Lukashenko's *yabatki* supporters have been more and more frequently taken over by radical pro-Russian activists and their ideological baggage. Many of them deny entirely the independence of Belarus. The members of the radical pro-Russian group NOD (National Liberation Movement) are particularly active both in real life and on the web. Members of radical groups promoting *zapadnorusizm* (from "Northwestern Krai", a name given to the territories of the present-day Belarus and Lithuania during the occupation by the Russian Empire in 1860-1917), Russian paganism, Christian Ultraorthodox radicalism, and "Belarusian Cossacks" join their efforts to "protect Lukashenko from external interference."

After August 9, 2020 radical pro-Russian movements that had been earlier restrained by the state security acquired a complete carte-blanche for the promotion of their anti-Belarusian ideology and work in the public space. Along with the OMON and GUBOPiK special units, members of pro-Russian radical groups now participate in the removal of national symbols in public spaces – from Belarusian-language street signs to national ornaments[207]. Belarus state security and officials pick up the ideas of pro-Russian radicals and implement them as a dominating element of state ideology.

In December 2020 – January 2021, the iSANS monitoring group conducted a study of propaganda Instagram accounts working in Belarus with more than 500 subscribers[208]. Accounts with fewer followers were not considered due to their insignificant influence on social processes in Belarus (this does not mean that small propaganda accounts with a limited number of subscribers are not dangerous).

All these accounts can be roughly divided into two broad categories: "collective propaganda" and "supporters of the regime." We classified top 25 profiles on social networks with more than 500 subscribers in the category of "collective propaganda." Accounts with less than 500 subscribers are usually not cited and do not have influence on the situation in the country. As a rule, influential accounts first began posting publications after August 14, 2020 and are registered in the form of business accounts of organizations (not

private profiles), without positioning themselves as the account of a specific person on whose behalf the posts are made (or are anonymous).

In contrast, the accounts of "supporters of the regime" were in most cases created long before the elections on August 9, 2020, sometimes several years before that. The accounts of "supporters" are maintained on behalf of a specific (but not always real) person. As part of the study, we were able to identify 20 such accounts with more than 500 subscribers.

Often, the creators of such channels are employees of the ideological "vertical" and activists of the semi-official Belarusian Republican Youth Union and other associations created to administratively support the dictatorship.

To increase the views and virality of posts, the creators of pro-Lukashenko accounts often use the hashtags of their ideological rivals: #wrw (#бчб), #zhivebelarus (#жывебеларусь), #tikhanovskaya (#тихановская), #freedombelarus, #tihanovskaya, #yagulayu (#ягуляю), and #radiosvoboda.

Five of the twenty largest Instagram accounts in the category of individual "supporters of the regime" have most of their subscribers outside Belarus. Most often, these people live in Russia. At the same time, the audience of the most popular account of the supposed "supporters of the regime" (@daiqquiri, 244,000 subscribers, belongs to the model and TV presenter Veronika Metelska) is 81.8% Ukrainian residents. Residents of Belarus among its subscribers are negligible – 0.89%.

The second in the rating of "supporters of the regime" (@alexey_talai, 21,900 subscribers, belongs to the Paralympian Aleksey Talai) has its main audience not in Belarus, but in Russia: more than 50% of his account subscribers are Russians. Another active "supporter of the regime" is Stysha Time. This young woman has collected many suspicious (scam) accounts and mass followers among the followers of her Instagram account, who form their own audience through mass mutual subscription and do not interact with each other's content. At the same time, the Belarusian audience among the subscribers of her account does not exceed 1000 people (less than 18%). The situation is similar with the rest of the accounts from the top "supporters of the regime," the number of subscribers of which vary between 600 and 3,000.

The insignificant number of subscribers from Belarus significantly narrows the opportunities for *yabatka* influencers to sway the country's residents through Instagram. Instagram users from Belarus, as a rule, either are not interested in such content, or view it as entertainment. For example, posts by supporters of the dictatorship are popular in the thematic Telegram channel Elekhtarat[209], which collects and ridicules the work of *yabatki*.

The bulk of the political content of personal accounts with a "patriotic" (read: pro-regime) reference point is made up of posts and stories with photographs from events in support of the dictatorship or security forces. Often there are illustrations using the green and red flag, small videos for the social network TikTok, and posters of planned propaganda activities.

In the accounts of "supporters of the regime" the content is usually unique and original. Most often, each post is accompanied by a long text description. Ideas for texts are often drawn from plots and programs of state television. Apparently coming from the same source, they frequently use propaganda themes in the

style of "don't give up your beloved," "protesters rally for money," "the green-red flag is the only real flag of Belarus"," "we must thank the *siloviki* for the peaceful sky overhead," and other popular memes of green-red patriots – Lukashenko's supporters.

In March 2021, the iSANS team studied[210] 30 of the most popular toxic pages (public groups on social networks), which are supposedly administered from Belarus or that publish content aimed exclusively at audiences within the country. By "toxic pages" we refer to pages that include hate speech, harassment of protest participants and opposition members, dehumanization of the opponents, calls against national sovereignty and independence of Belarus, denial of Belarusian national identity, history and symbols. As part of this study, we did not consider pages directly affiliated with state structures or state-owned media from Russia, Belarus, or pro-Russian influence groups in Ukraine.

The total number of subscribers to toxic pages focused exclusively on Belarus in the Odnoklassniki network is no more than 180,000 people. It is important to understand that the total number of Belarusian subscribers to various toxic communities is much higher, primarily due to the Belarusian audience in the Russian media communities, as well as Russian and pro-Russian toxic channels promoting ideas of the "Russian world" in the CIS from outside Belarus.

Seven of the thirty largest toxic communities were founded within six months of the "August events" of 2020. Still, we note that no large (over 300 members) toxic community has been created in 2021. Probable reasons for this include the lack of expected growth in existing groups or the lack of forces and resources to administer new projects. Social networks reflect the mood existing in society and the extremely low level of social support for the Lukashenko regime, which is supported on the shoulders of loyal security officials and the "power vertical."

Two peaks in the creation of pro-Russian groups came in 2017 and in the period after the "August events": 7 and 5 pro-Russian communities were created, respectively. Based on monitoring results, we note the significant activity of the National Liberation Movement in the Belarusian segment of the Odnoklassniki social network: at least 10 of the 30 largest toxic communities are either directly affiliated with the NOD or are often used to promote the publications of this radical imperial Russian movement, which played an important role in fomenting the conflict in the Donbass.

Of the other institutionalized pro-Russian forces, on the Odnoklassniki social network only the Belarusian movement "Civil Accord" is represented (page titled "Politics of Belarus"[211]), among whose active members are activists who are directly related to the structures of influence of Russia in Belarus[212].

As for the format and ideology, toxic pages from Belarus can be approximately (due to frequent intersections of content) divided into two main types.

The pages of the "first" type include communities that promote, foremost, pro-Russian propaganda and disinformation (great-power chauvinism, "the cult of Victory," "Soviet conservatism," Eurasianism, Orthodox radicalism, Russian "Slavic" messianism, ideology of the "Russian world," and conspiracy theories).

We include the communities that promote the aggressive ideology of the Lukashenko regime, the followers of which call themselves *yabatki*, to the pages of the "second" type. These work to discredit and harass the national movement and its members, engage in para-fascism, and the cult of police violence and personality of Lukashenko. Secondary messages include the demand for the establishment of an authoritarian or totalitarian dictatorship, Western Russianism, anti-Semitism, anti-liberalism, anti-globalism, Stalinism, the ideology of the "Russian world," localized "cult of Victory,", "Soviet conservatism," Eurasianism, discrimination against minorities, and conspiracy theories.

An important feature of these communities is that the ideology and value matrix of the *yabatki* pages, as a rule, are derived from pro-Russian ones, but not vice versa. The value orientation of the *yabatki* accounts generally views Belarus as a fragment of the USSR, secondary to Russia.

Pages of Lukashenko's supporters, as a rule, are secondary relative to purely "pro-Russian" communities and make up about a third of the total number of the largest toxic pages, which, as a rule, denigrate both the independence of the Belarusian people ("Belarusians are Russians of Belarusian nationality") and the state. At the same time, among pro-Russian pages, the pages affiliated with the Russian radical movement NOD, which advocates the unconditional entry of Belarus into Russia, are especially active.

Content in all these communities tends to come in two formats: "channel" and "group." The "channel" is wholly or almost wholly made up of content published on behalf of the community administrators, without input from other members. The algorithm of publications in them can be compared to how news is published in Telegram channels. About 70% of toxic communities operate using this format. At the same time, some communities that work in the format of "channels" create their content through reposts from the same private account (for example, the channels "No Maidan in Belarus! No Civil War!" and "Video blogs by Shariy and other well-known media experts").

The second typical format ("group") combines user-generated content (usually moderated) with content posted by the community administration. This format can be compared to posts in communities on Facebook. About 30% of toxic pages are guided by this format. This format does not always justify itself from the point of view of administrators, since users can form an agenda that is different from the one promoted by administrators. For example, user-generated content in the "For a strong and prosperous Belarus!" page filled up with posts against Lukashenko's regime, while administrators were publishing content in support of the regime.

The largest toxic community, *Belarus 365*, operates as a channel (according to iSANS classification) and promotes the values of the so-called *yabatki*. The community positions itself as humorous and its posts (primarily memes) are usually original, but of low quality. With the start of the presidential campaign in Belarus in the spring of 2020, the channel's administrators abruptly changed the tone and theme of their posts from humorous and focused more on discrediting and insulting representatives of the democratic forces. At the same time, as before, there are practically no pro-Russian posts in the channel.

As of early April 2021, the channel's posts have been devoted entirely to discrediting pro-democratic forces (posting disinformation, offensive images, videos, memes, etc.). The frequency of posts has markedly decreased. If in the middle of 2020 at least one post a day appeared in the channel, then in the last two months the number of posts has decreased to one in 3-7 days.

The engagement of the channel's audience in January-February 2020 was extremely low – around 0.1% – while the LR (attraction coefficient or "number of likes per post") was 0.4%. With a significant number of subscribers (51,800), on average only one person reposts and no more than 20 people give a "class" (analogous to "likes") to channel posts. Despite the high number of comments under some individual posts, the overwhelming number of comments under posts are negative towards the group administrators and its content.

All these characteristics point to the indirect conclusion that the number of channel subscribers has been significantly increased (inflated) due to the use of bots (non-existent users).

The second most popular community from the top 30, *Russia and Belarus Invite Friends*, was created some time ago, in October 2013. Unlike *Belarus 365*, this community uses a mixture of group and channel formats. Each day, dozens of messages are posted on the community page, both by users and on behalf of group administrators. In February-March, 2152 posts appeared on the community page.

Typical publications in the group *Russia and Belarus Invite friends*, as a rule, have nothing to do with Belarus and are aggressively pro-Russian in nature. Foremost, administrators and users who post their content in the group promote Russian propaganda messages. A significant portion of the posts is disinformation about the U.S., the EU, NATO, and Ukraine; popularization and support of Russian military operations in Syria and Ukraine; and posts in support of Russian expansion and territorial seizures, including those supporting pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine and pro-Russian movements in Belarus. Posts on Belarus are largely those based on Russian assessments of Belarus as a satellite nation and controlled territory. The group has a wide range of posts in support of "the Victory cult" and "Soviet" conservatism mixed with Russian chauvinism.

Despite the large number of daily posts, user engagement relative to individual posts is low (0.09% per post), and the TR value (*talk rate*, or the number of comments to publications in relation to audience size) is close to zero – 0.0007%. The high figure for daily audience engagement (5.78%) is achieved solely because of the large number of daily posts.

One of the most active users posting content in this group, Vladimir Ryzhenkov, is the head of the Belarusian branch of the Russian radical organization the National Liberation Movement, or NOD (*NOD-Belarus*). Ryzhenkov is a key pro-Russian radical, widely known for his aim of creating a pro-Russian party and for his extensive contacts with militants of the so-called DPR and LPR and the Russian Embassy in Minsk. Ryzhenkov is looking to restore the USSR to its 1945 borders and calls for the refusal to recognize Belarus as an independent state. Currently, NOD actively uses Odnoklassniki to promote its ideas and original content.

The oldest of the toxic groups that we were able to identify during the monitoring, *I Love Belarus*, was founded in January 2012. It is now the third most popular toxic group with 17,000 followers. The focus is on content posted by administrators. Posts from individual users are rare. The language of administrator posts is formal with a lot of bureaucratic language often used by officials (frequently among employees of the state ideology system and media controlled by Lukashenko).

The group's content is mainly represented by short videos (usually television spots up to three minutes long) from the state television channels ONT, Belarus-1, and STV, as well as reposts from individual channels of the Lukashenko regime propagandists, state media (*Belarus Segodnya*) and pro-Russian groups. There is

no original content in the community. As a rule, posts on behalf of administrators are a copy-paste of other people's posts or mass media materials controlled by the Lukashenko regime. The quantity of state media content and the promotion model are similar to the Telegram channels affiliated with the special services and the ideological "vertical" of the Lukashenko regime, which may indirectly confirm administrators' connection to these structures. Similar conclusions can be drawn with respect to posts in some other communities from the top 30 (*Made in Belarus - Zroblena ў Belarusi*, *Belarus and the World Today*, *News of the Union State*, and *For a Strong and Prosperous Belarus*).

In two months, 1219 messages were published in the *I Love Belarus* group, while the level of audience engagement for publication (as in the case with the *Russia and Belarus Invite Friends* community) was very low and did not exceed 0.05% and with a talk rate of 0.004%.

The model of "bombing" with stories is also used by several other toxic pages – *Video blogs by Shariy and other famous media experts* (1654 publications for February-March), *Belarus and the World Today* (1983 publications), *We are Belarusians for A.G. Lukashenko and for Belarus!!!!* (1439), *Union of Slavic Values* (2065), *As It Is* (1145), *No Maidan in Belarus! No civil war!* (1285), and *Unity of Fraternal Nations* (1577). All these groups are characterized by the same low audience engagement. While they typically have a fairly high level of audience engagement per day, the engagement for each individual post is extremely low.

These figures suggest that these are well-paid troll farms operating without an active audience, but potentially delivering their disinformation and propaganda to thousands of readers.

Against the background of active promotion of pro-Russian public pages, we note the weak ability of Lukashenko's supporters to formulate their own or an original constructive agenda. (The primary source of material is television propaganda put out by the Lukashenko regime or pro-Russian pages.) The only thing that the *yobatki* pages offer for the political future of Belarus is the preserving of the existing regime, reprisals against ideological rivals inside the country, and total militarization of society under the principles of Stalinism and the cult of war with the outside world.

State-owned media, propaganda and a disinformation "think-tank"

Role of "state-owned media" in Belarus: important context

To understand the role and format of "state media" in modern Belarus is, first and foremost, to forget about Western definitions and standards of media market, journalistic standards, and ownership of media outlets. This step should be followed by mapping a matrix of relationships between "state media" (as an integral part of state apparatus) and Alexander Lukashenko as an individual who maintains control over the territory of the Republic of Belarus – and is a de-facto sole owner of so-called "state media" or "state-owned media".

Although state property (including "state-owned media") in Belarus is formally owned by the government, all state property in its entirety is fully controlled by Lukashenko and is being treated as solely his private belongings. The de-facto ownership relationship between Lukashenko and all "state property" (including"state media", "state organizations", "state institutions","state security", etc.) provides grounds to consider all state-owned property as de-facto privatized by Lukashenko since no other entity or individual

has legal powers to decide on the status and destiny of any material resources, organizations, and institutions that have "government-owned" status despite all formal limitations of national and international legal nature.

This observation, based on our knowledge of Belarusian context and three decades of personal and professional interactions with civil population and official representatives of the Republic of Belarus, is crucial to setting up the "ground zero" that helps understand the actual situation in Belarus to external observers and policymakers.

Over three decades, the regime in Minsk has built an informal supra-legal construction of absolute synonymity of Alexander Lukashenko and the state of the Republic of Belarus (where "state" means an institute of governance). Famous formula of French monarch Louis XIV, "L'etat c'est moi" ('I am the state') is, perhaps, the best description of Lukashenko's factual self-representation that is imposed on the population through state propaganda.

By the early 2000s, Lukashenko has removed all constitutional checks and balances that limited his power. Since then, the state of the Republic of Belarus has been privatized in its entirety by its first president and has become a private super-corporation incorporated in a form of mafia state[3]. Lukashenko has a de-facto immunity from national legislation and owns an exclusive role in defining, formulating, changing, and interpreting legislation of the Republic of Belarus and international laws concerning the obligations of Belarus both internally and abroad.

From the standpoint of officials and state security employees, "state-owned" ethically and philosophically means "Lukashenko-owned". Thus, their loyalty to "state" is, foremost, personal loyalty to a particular private individual, Alexander Lukashenko, as the sole and uncontested *owner* of title to the territory and property within the Republic of Belarus in its entirety (including humans within its borders) with no legal limitations whatsoever. Understanding this paramount principle of governance in authoritarian Belarus will help build effective policy towards this country.

Lukashenko is (in a very Machiavellian way) a de-facto owner of all state property and state institutions, including "state media". Briefly speaking, the relationship between "the authorities" and state-owned property in modern Belarus is closer to medieval feudal governance rather than modern nation-state. State propaganda is using all international contacts of the regime (especially, large international sports events held in Belarus[213]) to represent Lukashenko as one of the world's most authoritative and influential politicians and to promote him as an uncontested lifelong supreme leader of Belarus.

State propagandists in Belarus deny the mere idea of internal dissatisfaction with Lukashenko and create the illusion of external military threats to Belarus. Among the most radical ideas promoted by the state television right now is a (non-existent) threat of joint Polish-Lithuanian military invasion in August 2020. According to state propaganda, external invasion was stopped... by OMON during dispersal of protests

[3] In that sense, the state as an institution in the Republic of Belarus performs functions similar to administrative powers in the so-called Transnistria in Moldova and within separatist areas in Eastern Ukraine (so-called "DNR" and "LNR").

within Belarus. State media deny all violence and crimes perpetrated by the employees of the Ministry of Interior and the army during and after August 2020.

In the last 9 months, state media promote an artificial division of the population into "enemies of the nation" and those who support Lukashenko[214] (who are themselves clearly a minority among the population). These tactics were previously used by the Kremlin in Ukraine prior to the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas. Current activity of state media in Belarus creates an immediate danger of a large-scale civil armed conflict in the Republic of Belarus, should state media under Lukashenko's command continue incitement to political violence. In the worst case scenario, armed civil conflict in Belarus may further spill to eastern parts of Poland, Lithuania, South of Latvia, and Northern Ukraine.

Main characteristics of Belarus-based "state media"

As of May 2021, iSANS defines three core characteristics of "state media" in Belarus:

1. All "state media" are funded through public money, but are de-facto privatized by Alexander Lukashenko, are fully subordinate to Lukashenko personally, and serve as an extension of his personal PR office. As a result, they do not serve the public good, but individual interests of Lukashenko.
2. "State media" are joined into a de-facto integrated super-holding, coordinated via ideological unit of the "presidential administration" that serves a single ultimate purpose – the political survival of Lukashenko *at any cost*.
3. Monopolized state television has long remained the most influential element of generally unpopular "state media"[4]. Since August 2020, all political broadcasting on Belarusian state television was restructured to promote more narratives of Kremlin-affiliated media, and replicate Russian formats of political broadcasting and propaganda.

For at least two decades, "state media" (foremost, state television) remain an integral and the most important part of pro-Lukashenko ideological indoctrination of society within Belarus. "State media" play key role in spreading of disinformation, mobilization of officials and general public at all levels, as well as demotivation and demonization of pro-democratic movement. These institutions are subordinate in relation to state security and "presidential administration". State security organizations provides politically-charged compromising materials targeting political opponents of current regime. The presidential administration defines all editorial policy and provides guidelines for the framework of publications and broadcasts.

In 2020, independent journalists were abducted by Belarus police forces or were the targets of arbitrary arrests in at least 481 episode, according to the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ)[215]. At least three media workers were intentionally shot at in a broad daylight by special operations units and suffered severe injuries. At least 15 journalists have faced criminal charges. At least 50 news websites were banned and shut down since August 2020.

[4] State television and radio often have no or little alternatives in rural areas, while subscription to state-controlled print press is enforced on individuals, organizations and businesses, often under threat of punishment.

The critics of Lukashenko are denied access to publicly-funded or state-owned media platforms. On top of that, if their public statements are used, their statements are removed out of context to make the impression that the opposition supports "Lukashenko's course". TV programs with participation of opposition leaders have been often edited to reverse the meaning of their words or to ridicule pro-democratic groups. Since 1990s, neutral political term "opposition" is being used by Lukashenko to label his critics or anyone with alternative views despite their political status or relation to politics (including lawyers, human rights activists, independent journalists, etc.). The term "opposition" was picked by state propaganda and is since then widely being used as a derogatory propagandistic marker to label anyone with pro-democratic views. Since early 2000s word "opposition" became *culturally* synonymous to "enemies", "spies", "enemies of state" or "betrayers". For this reason, we do not recommend using word "opposition" when mentioning pro-democratic groups from Belarus in official public communications (also because Lukashenko's supporters are clearly a minority).

State television after August 2020 events

State television has been widely criticized for many years for its indisputable failure to operate in public interest after Lukashenko's rise to power. A dramatic change in the work of Belarus "state TV" took place in the first days after the 2020 elections after a large group of workers was replaced with Russia's RT personnel.

Following August 2020 events, the rhetoric of Belarusian state television has turned deliberately violent and aggressive. Since then, state television is being used to incite punitive operations and coordinate attacks of Lukashenko's supporters on internal "enemies". After August 2020, Belarus state television has been focused on dehumanization of civil population engaged in pro-democratic activism. It deliberately calls for violence against political, national, ethnic, and linguistic groups of "traitors" (foremost – Poles and Lithuanians), as well as all critics of Lukashenko[216]. State media, and foremost three major television companies, BTRC (and its subdivision ATN), CTV, and ONT, deliberately demand political repressions against civilians[217], incite politically-motivated violence[218], target ethnolinguistic[219] and religious[220] minorities, promote psychiatric isolation of political opponents[221] and extrajudicial reprisals[222] (including illegal public hanging of pro-democratic activists[223]). State television threatens Lukashenko's political opponents with inevitable violent death[224], and demands the establishment of formal dictatorial rule[225].

According to the victims of political repressions and findings[226] of the National Anti-Crisis Management (a political organization led by Pavel Latushka, a member of the Presidium of the Coordination Council), state TV channels and workers of state television are the main business consumers of video recordings of torture filmed in detention centers. Certain state media workers including top management of BTRC (ATN), ONT, and CTV channels, as well as their "correspondents" (foremost – Lyudmila Hladkaya[227], Kseniya Lebiedzeva[228] (Lebedeva), and Ryhor (Grigori) Azaryonak[229]) are directly involved in commissioning of torture-related video content[230] (including violent and illegal interrogations of political prisoners).

As of April 2021, we observe the following core functions of state TV in Belarus based on their work:

- personal promotion of Alexander Lukashenko;
- dissemination of fake news and disinformation for propagandistic purposes;
- promotion of Lukashenko's security units (i.e. OMON);

- intimidation of civilians;
- justification of political violence and repressions against civilians;
- military propaganda and creation of illusion of immediate military danger from the West;
- creation of illusion that Lukashenko has major public support (which in reality is limited to nomenclature and mercenaries) and enjoys legitimacy both internally and internationally;
- creating the atmosphere of total control and surveillance (state media promote an impossible narrative of the ministry of interior that each person who participates in "protest activity" is already identified);
- discreditation of pro-democratic activists and politicians and publication of compromising materials (in collaboration with state security agencies)[231];
- mobilization of paramilitary and hate groups among Lukashenko's followers to engage them in repressions and intimidation attacks on pro-democracy activists.

The examples of fake news distributed by state television are available at FAKEBY[232] platform created by iSANS to monitor misinformation and propaganda in Belarus.

Russian interference in Belarusian media sphere

The agenda of state media in relation to civil movement in Belarus was synchronized with Russia's Kremlin-affiliated channels within three weeks after the elections. By September 2020, national information infrastructure of Belarus was reshaped to ensure Lukashenko's immediate political survival and provide space for greater influence of Russian media. As a result, the Kremlin has directly interfered into internal affairs of Belarus immediately after 2020 elections to sustain the political survival of the Kremlin's proxy Alexander Lukashenko[233].

Until August 2020, the system of Belarus state propaganda (which includes all state-owned media as its integral part) was a perfectly working mechanism. In two decades, there has been no known cases of dissident opinions expressed publicly by either employees or management of "state media". However, much of this has changed in the first week of brutal disperse of peaceful protests in August 2020. State media across the country ignored horrifying facts of mass torture and arbitrary killings of civilians by Belarus state security and either provided misleading information (such as fakes published by the Ministry of the Interior[234]) or remained mute on that matter.

In response, many employees of "state media" quit their jobs to express their disagreement with the act of censorship (below in this chapter we discuss their roles and numbers). This step was unprecedented in almost three decades, but was met with traditional response. Those who went on a strike were fired, forced to resign, or faced criminal prosecution and became political prisoners (for instance, former BTRC journalist Kseniya Lutskina[235] who planned to create "alternative television" on YouTube is now facing seven years in jail).

In the first days of protests, a group of television employees discussed an idea of going on a strike. As hundreds of protesters gathered in front of BTRC head office in Minsk[236], high-level representatives of Lukashenko arranged an emergency meeting with BTRC team. On Saturday August 15, BTRC director Ivan

Eismant, his wife Natallia Eismant (Lukashenko's press secretary) and the head of the parliament (former head of the Presidential Administration and one of the most trusted Lukashenko's subordinates) Natallia Kachanava met with around 40 BTRC employees to force them into running business as usual. After it became clear that Lukashenko's representatives will not make any compromises, the dissenting employees announced their plans to begin a strike on August 17, 2020.

On August 17, around 55 people (out of total 1500 BTRC employees across Belarus), mostly technical professionals working on that day, began a strike[237]. Another group of 40 workers of CTV and ONT (out of total 600) joined them as protesters gathered in front of CTV and ONT offices located in central Minsk, just a few miles away from BTRC[238]. Due to long-lasting state monopoly on television, there simply was not enough people in the local market to substitute those who left their jobs or went on strike. The situation within state television (specifically, at BTRC managed by Ivan Eismant) was becoming even more critical as crowds of peaceful protesters gathered around the building urging to show real news.

On Monday August 17, close to a hundred workers of BTRC gathered in front of its head office. They expressed[239] support to 55 employees who signed a letter against censorship after the protests began. On August 19, the workers of state TV who openly expressed their disagreement with political violence, were denied entry to the premises of Belteleradiocompany. It was the first time when the employees of Belarus state TV acknowledged[240] that propagandists from the Kremlin's "Russia Today" channel took over Belarus state television in the aftermath of mass exodus of local editors, cameramen, and technical specialists.

In the same afternoon, RT chief editor of Margarita Simonyan denied[241] any engagement of RT in the work of Belarusian television. But just two days later, Lukashenko publicly acknowledged[242] that RT personnel was there. In August-September 2020, iSANS and its partners published a joint investigation on changes related to Russia's influence[243].

Synchronization of propaganda

Most of television propaganda in Belarus is being produced by BTRC, CTV, and ONT teams located in Minsk. Regional subdivisions of state television usually repack and localize content to broadcast top-down narratives recommended by central offices of each channel.

A particular role in media support of political violence and justification of crimes against civilians belongs to the Television News Agency (ATN) – a subdivision of BTRC counting around 250 individuals. This unit holds direct responsibility for day-to-day promotion and justification of political violence and should be considered a criminal organization in its entirety[244]. The personnel of ATN shall be held accountable internationally for its role in incitement to political violence and media support of armed seizure of power in Belarus on August 9-13, 2020.

Along with transformation of the Lukashenko regime into personalistic military junta since August 2020[245], all TV channels have undergone a change of editorial policy. Following August 2020 events and subsequent Russia's interference, the narratives of Belarus state media (foremost, television) were synchronized with Kremlin-controlled Russian TV channels. While the rhetoric and strategic narratives of Belarus state television were synchronized with Russia's mainstream media, certain media projects (foremost, at CTV channel[246]) were synchronized with pro-Kremlin media located across Eastern Europe and Russia[247].

The latter include a group of pro-Russian websites that consistently construct a negative image of civil activism in Belarus along with a network of toxic Telegram channels. These media link the protests with Ukraine, the Baltic countries, and Poland while at the same time addressing audiences in these countries. Such websites include state-sponsored Russia Today network, the websites of Russia's state-owned TV (Pervyi, Rossiya, NTV), and a wide range of pro-Russian proxies, including web versions of TV channels owned by Kremlin-related oligarch Viktor Medvedchuk in Ukraine.

Disinformation is published on sites that use a signifying term "Belomaidan" in relation to the Belarusian protests (thus referring to it as "Belarusian Maidan")[248]. These media come from three categories of resource groups, such as Regnum, Baltnews, and Ukraina.ru in Russia; Strana.ua in Ukraine; and the so-called "Novorossiya" resources, which are localized in several countries and promote pro-Kremlin separatist regimes in Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, all controlled by Russia.

In November 2020, iSANS monitoring unit analyzed these findings and named twenty-five basic narratives of the pro-Kremlin propaganda targeting Belarus[249]. We have identified four groups based on the object of the narrative: Belarus, Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic countries, and the collective West as a whole. Most of these narratives are now being regularly used by the state television in Belarus. This is a very dangerous indication of coordination of media policy between the Kremlin and Belarus state media.

The coordination began in August 2020 when at least two groups of high-profile military and civil advisors were sent to Belarus from Russia. Media technologists, correspondents, cameramen, and equipment belonging to RT were delivered to Minsk to pick jobs released by Belarus state media workers who went on strike or were fired on political grounds.

According to iSANS intelligence unit, most of the group was comprised of technical media workers who were sent to ensure uninterrupted work of Belarus state television. iSANS has a complete list of group members who shall be held accountable internationally for their role in armed seizure of power in Belarus. The delivery of propagandists was organized upon Vladimir Putin's direct order and was coordinated with Alexander Lukashenko. Most members of the group were affiliated with mediagroup MIA Rossiya Segodnya (Russia Today / RT), RIA Novosti and Sputnik.

Russian-British oligarch Mikhail Gutseriyev was personally responsible for delivery and accommodation of RT fill-ins, and thus should be immediately arrested where possible and be held accountable for participation in armed seizure of power in Belarus. His role in crimes against humanity conducted by Lukashenko regime shall additionally be evaluated by a court.

Immediately after the arrival of Russian media technologists, the narratives of Belarus state TV became almost indistinguishable from Russian state television entirely controlled by the Kremlin[250]. The propagandistic messages became radical. Democratic activists were depicted as mercenaries of the West who are hired to destroy Belarus. Propagandistic messages on television were simplified to slideshows of conflicts in the Middle East with brief propagandistic slogans implying that anyone who seeks any changes in Belarus aims to impose chaos and war on Belarusian soil[251].

On August 21, Lukashenko publicly acknowledged that he had requested "two-three groups of media workers" from Russia and claimed that six to nine people were sent to Minsk from Russia' "most prodigal

television"[252]. Three weeks later, RT acknowledged having 32 employees of RT and Ruptly (RT's video-on-demand news agency) working in Belarus[253].

So far, iSANS intelligence unit has identified at least 53 media workers from Russia who resided and worked in Minsk as an organized group between August and December 2020, and served as fill-in of Belarus state television personnel. All of them were delivered to Minsk by the same planes and lived in the same location (the Renaissance Minsk Hotel owned by Lukashenko's close friend, the above mentioned tycoon Mikhail Gutseriev.

Russia's visible presence on Belarus state media started with reposts from RT Telegram channel into official channels of Belarus state television, BTRC. Since mid-August, the Russians packed Belarusian state news broadcasts with pro-Kremlin commentators from Ukraine, "experts" from Russia (often related to media empire of Yevgeni Prigozhyn, a Russian oligarch better known for his relations with Vladimir Putin and alleged ownership of the private army "Wagner." RT, in turn, had similar coverage of protest movement and political events in Belarus[254].

Immediately after the arrival of RT workers, the use of term «Белоруссия» ("Byelorussia"), used by the Russians instead of "Belarus" used by the Belarusians, was widely used for a few days in geotags of state news packages. "Byelorussia" is often considered in Belarus a derogatory label with roots in the USSR and is widely used by Russian journalists and politicians in a way similar to derogatory term "Malorossiya" used in relation to Ukraine, often in the context of claiming Russia's historical ownership over these territories.

In mid-August, RT correspondent Kanstantsin Prydybayla (a citizen of Belarus, but a full-time employee of RT in Russia) was added to Lukashenko's media pool – a measure unprecedented in years since the pool was made up of state-hired journalists only since mid-2000s. The pool is extremely limited for security reasons and no journalists from outside of Belarus state media have appeared there on a regular basis. Russian media workers were invited to join the pool on rare occasions when Lukashenko or his press office wanted to send a certain message to audiences in Russia.

Since August 2020, state television in Belarus has acquired features of a television studio in one of Russian provinces rather than a TV of an independent country. One of the new features – obsession with Orthodox Christianity (of the Moscow Patriarchy). In September 2020, ONT has introduced Sunday preachings of Lukashenko's "spiritual guide", archpriest Fyodar Pouny, on Sunday morning rundown. No other religious groups have similar access to state media although Belarus is a secular country and Orthodox Church has no privileged status within national legislation.

As of April 2021, we observe convergence of formats and messages of Belarus state television with Russia's Kremlin-affiliated media. For instance, Belarus state TV is replicating Russian formats of talk-shows on political topics as well as types and public images of popular Russian anchors and propagandists. This feature is particularly notable within CTV programs (ctv.by).

Since 2020, CTV produces deliberately aggressive "monologue" projects that can be compared to Orwell's "Two Minutes Hate" sessions. These sessions that target political enemies and critics of Lukashenko are integrated into evening prime time news on a daily basis. CTV positions these pieces as 'interpretational' or 'editorial' journalism («авторская журналистика»[255]), but these projects do not match even basic

standards of journalism (such as lack of the balance of opinions, urge for political violence, manipulations, explicitly subjective views, etc.). It is used to sustain the morale of Lukashenko's supporters and to suppress all forms of resistance – including popular expectation to take over what propagandists call "the invincible government" that they promote[256] as a notion undetachable from the Lukashenko regime.

While ONT uses employees with journalist qualifications to host their "Two Minutes Hate" shows (such as Ihar Tur[257]), CTV "monologue" projects are performed by a group of mid-age bloggers who have no relation to journalism. Typical content incites violence[258], promotes the establishment of a full-fledged dictatorship[259], and calls for immediate Stalinist-style repressions (including lethal violence)[260] against pro-democratic civil population. Civilians are labelled as "traitors"[261] based on their political views that do not comply with the ideology of Lukashenko supporters. The content is created to threaten civilians with death[262], announce punitive operations of the ministry of interior in and outside Belarus[263], bully particular individuals among opposition activists (Alexandra Herasimenia[264], Volha Hizhynkova[265]), and is heavily charged with hate speech and dehumanizing narratives[266]. Similar narratives are promoted by the same people through governmental print press[267].

The splice of political discourses promoted by Minsk and Moscow is more narrative-based in its nature, rather than imposed through state or interstate institutions (in an "administrative" way). This means Russia is using its propagandistic soft power to promote interests inside Belarus by exporting propagandistic technologies and narratives to Belarus state media.

Belarus-based propagandists have already replicated the narratives that Russia's state media apply to Ukraine and Ukrainians, "localized" them, and now target Belarus civil population based on political, ethnic, and linguistic differences of Lukashenko's critics to initiate a "hot" civil conflict. State television in Belarus has entirely replicated the matrix of Russia's criticism of the West, and uses it to demoralize the protesters in its own territory for the benefit of the Kremlin and its broader strategic goals. Although state media remain generally unpopular in Belarus after August 2020, television plays important role in "mapping the land" under control of Lukashenko and his subordinates, and creates a single media space with Russia. By doing so, state TV intellectually and metaphysically "dissolves" the physical border between Belarus and Russia when targeting those groups inside Belarus that still follow state television.

Since 26 August 2020 (the time of the arrival of RT personnel to Minsk), there has been an influx of pro-Russian "experts" from Ukraine on Belarus state TV (including former comrades of Yanukovich)[268]. As a rule, they promoted strong anti-Western and anti-democratic agenda. In August-October 2020, MediaIQ (a Minsk-based fact-checking group) identified[269] at least 15 individuals who were presented by Belarus state TV as "experts from Ukraine", "Ukrainian political scientists", etc.[270]

According to "Media Detector" («Детектор медіа»), a media watchdog that monitors Ukrainian media space, some of the people who were presented as "Ukrainian experts" have never appeared in Ukraine's media at all. Other "experts" previously represented anti-Ukrainian positions on Russian state TV. Some of the so-called "experts" had no proven expertise or knowledge on topics of discussion or are widely recognized as pro-Russian activists (such as Anatoli Sharij). Some of the figures are related to a media empire of Viktor Medvedchuk[271]. Medvedchuk is a key pro-Russian oligarch and politician in Ukraine who is now under investigation for treason in favor of Russia.

Medvedchuk is particularly known for his personal relation to Vladimir Putin as Russia's president is named the godfather of Medvedchuk's daughter. The Ukrainian oligarch, who owns oil business in Russia, reportedly has full-scale support of Kremlin to represent Russia's informal interests in post-Maidan Ukraine.

Within 45 weekly news programs broadcasted on state-owned TV channels Belarus 1, ONT and CTV (Glavnyi Efir, Kontury, and Nedelya, respectively) in early August – late November 2020, iSANS team identified a list of the Russians and Ukrainians who commented on political events in Belarus are well-known pro-Kremlin propagandists, radio and TV presenters (Armen Gasparyan, Alexander Sosnovsky, Vladimir Solovyov, Vladimir Kornilov, etc.). These people have been commenting on events in Russia, Ukraine and other post-Soviet (and not only) countries for years. Following the 9 August 2020 elections in Belarus, they immediately re-qualified as "experts" on Belarus. We provide broad analysis of this particular issue in a recent report[272].

Telegram satellites of the state prapaganda: imported technology from RT

As a part of propaganda synchronization in Belarus, pro-Lukashenko opinion makers are being promoted in a way earlier used by RT team to promote their own opinion leaders. An active "expert" loyal to Lukashenko creates a telegram-channel. To grow the subscriptions, a private channel is being promoted by publicly-funded state media through cross-posting on their social media accounts. This scheme is also used by a pro-Lukashenko telegram-channel "Yellow Plums"[273] and – less often – by the "Pool of the First Man"[274] to promote pro-Russian and pro-Lukashenko "experts" Shapkouski, Dzermant, Hihin, Hladkaya, Pridybayla, Vaskrasenski, Holikau and others.

We also observe coordination of efforts by the "internal circle" of core propagandists. On April 11, a group of 35 propaganda and media workers gathered at the central office of the main pro-Lukashenko movement "Belaya Rus" to participate in a "forum of bloggers and opinion leaders" named "Information security on social media"[275]. The only person from outside of Belarusian team of propagandists was the RT employee Kanstantsin Prydybaila (who was mentioned above as an RT worker who was given full access to Lukashenko's press pool).

We conclude that at the current time the coordination of pro-Lukashenko propagandists is either made locally (solely by the Lukashenko regime) or that instructors from Russia did participate in the event, but preferred to keep a low profile and not appear on publicly available images. The format of the event confirms systemic coordination between the administrators of Belarus-based pro-Kremlin channels and Belarus state media who cross-promote each other. The role of toxic pro-Kremlin channels in this scheme is to provide wider audiences with even more radical anti-Belarusian interpretations of state media content. However, strong sentiments of this group towards Kremlin and Russia may create additional risks for Lukashenko.

Since we do not notice emergence or growth of anti-Belarusian telegram-channels managed from Russia or Ukraine, we are in a position to say that now most pro-Kremlin (anti-Belarusian, anti-Ukrainian, and anti-Western) telegram-channels targeting Belarus are run by local pro-Russian bloggers and propagandists who are entirely endorsed by Lukashenko's office and state security agencies. This makes the situation more complicated since it is now easier for them to coordinate their work locally and mobilize real-life supporters, including the "siloviki".

Nevertheless, there is still certain degree of cooperation between pro-Kremlin channels from Belarus and pro-Kremlin channels managed from Russia. For instance, "Yellow Plums" promote RT's opinion leaders (Sosnovski, Gasparian, etc.) while pro-Kremlin channels like Sputnik promote Belarusian figures playing in the interest of Lukashenko, like Yuri Vaskresenski[276].

With this in mind, we forecast that Lukashenko's office will be more likely to invest new funding into a network of local and regional online bloggers instead of extending support to local print press that in the past was used to promote Lukashenko outside of big cities (so-called "rayonka" newspapers run by propagandists in every district, "rayon", since the Soviet era).

Old New Media Policies

On April 2, 2021, Lukashenko and Putin again discussed the coordination of what they called the "central media" while the Kremlin continues its advisory services to "state media" in Belarus. Three days later, Lukashenko announced that a former head of MTRK "Mir" Uladzimir Piartsou (Vladimir Pertsov) will become the head of the Ministry of Information that controls mass media in Belarus. Piartsou promised to "tighten the screws of information" and immediately embarked on this mission.

On April 16, the parliament signed a new strict version of Belarus Media Law that was initiated by the Ministry of Information. While the amendments had been introduced weeks before Piartsou acquired his ministerial position, he was promoting for harsh measures claiming that Belarus legislation is "the most democratic in the world"[277]. In the first days of his work, Piartsou stopped the broadcasting of EU channel Euronews on the territory of Belarus and signed permission to broadcast Russia's Pobeda ("Victory") military channel instead[278].

MTRK "Mir" that Piartsou chaired[279] for 11 years before joining the Ministry of Information, is the state TV company of the so-called "Commonwealth of Independent States" which is predominantly made of Russian content. Notably, Piartsou is the son-in-law[280] of Lukashenko's close ally, the former head of public association "Belaya Rus"[281] Alexander Radzkou.

Considering the steps taken by Piartsou in the first weeks of his work as the minister of information, his work will be focused on further synchronization of state media in Belarus with Russian analogues and a crackdown on independent social network outlets, including telegram-channels (the Ministry of Information is in charge of blocking access to online media and maintaining the list of "extremist materials").

State-affiliated Telegram-channels

Belarus state television works in nexus with a network of pro-Lukashenko telegram-channels. The largest of these channels are managed directly by Lukashenko's press office, full-time employees of "state media", hate-speech bloggers related to political leadership of Lukashenko regime, as well as the ministry of interior, KGB, and other state security organizations.

Compared to pro-democratic Telegram community, the network of channels affiliated with Lukashenko and his subordinates shows very poor results despite enforced subscription of state officials and security workers. With monopoly on television, radio and print media, propagandists fail to achieve reasonable

results on social media where they have to engage in real-life competition. Although the number of toxic social media accounts and publications grows overall, individual results or propagandistic channels are fast decreasing. The majority of propagandistic pro-Lukashenko channels has 100 to 4,000 subscribers with just a few of them having bigger audiences. To imitate growth, they are sometimes forced to buy bots.

iSANS monitoring team has identified that the telegram-channel of the main state-owned news agency BelTA is buying bot subscription on a regular basis. BelTA purchases fake subscribers to create visibility of popularity since September 2020. In the last week of every month, the team purchases around 2,000 subscribers. In September-November the quota was limited to 1,300 subscribers. But in the new fiscal year of 2021, the administrator of BelTA's official Telegram-channel regularly buys close to 2,300 bots which is easy to trace through unusually biased influx of new subscribers without related publications at the period of each month[282].

Another unusual activity we noticed within the latest publications of BelTA's telegram-channel, is that 30 to 50 percent of all posts with links to other channels redirect[283] readers to Russian media – mostly, RIA Novosti, TASS, and RT.

Two largest propagandistic channels, "Pool of the First Man" («Пул Первого») and "Yellow Plums" («Жёлтые сливы») have slightly more than 170,000 subscribers combined. Essentially, these two channels form the core of state-owned pro-Lukashenko ecosystem. For that reason, they are often being used for the promotion of new or marginal channels.

The "Pool of the First Man" is curated by Lukashenko's press-secretary Natallia Eismant. "Yellow Plums" are managed by "state journalist" Alexander Bianko who is officially employed by "Belarus Today", the newspaper of the Presidential Administration. The channel is curated by the Presidential Administration unit located in Karl Marx Street, 38 in central Minsk.

Other people related to this project are Yuri Prakopau[284] and Aliaksei Audonin[285]. Both are affiliated with state-run Belarusian Institute of Strategic Research (BISR), a think-tank created to promote Lukashenko (it is discussed in a separate section below). Prakopau spent 19 years within ATN[286], an organization in charge of the most hardcore propaganda products, and was a vice-director of this subdivision of Belteleradiocompany.

"Yellow Plums" are often used by state officials for illegal leaks (such as sensitive personal data) and publishing illegal surveillance footage produced by state security in violation of laws. After publication at "Yellow Plums", state media often use such materials to "legalize" them in the public realm (although state television itself has no limitations for use of materials of illegal surveillance or private data, and often publishes both by itself). The name of the telegram-channel is cynically telling: it uses the wordplay, "yellow" hints at "yellow press" while the word "plums" in Russian ("slivy") is a homonym for "drains", a slang word for "leaks".

"Yellow Plums" use dehumanizing language and labels when targeting individuals and groups who oppose Lukashenko. The publications are misleading, aggressive, and often fall under the definition of hate speech. They also attack foreign diplomats and politicians (for instance, in a recent publication Dr. Michael Carpenter, former foreign policy advisor to Joe Biden, during his Vice President cadency, is labelled a

"bloodthirsty", "enemy", "theorist murderer" and "a carpenter who sculpted a gang of conspirators"[287]). On December 2, 2020 the founder of "Yellow Plums" registered a domain slivy.news (currently inactive after their American domain was blocked upon requests of activists). The website was used as a web-version of the telegram-channel.

Since recently, the channel runs a website with similar content and spreads propagandistic paper leaflets. Although the turnout of leaflets remains unknown, we assume the number of each issue does not exceed a few hundred copies. A possible reason for the launch of leaflets is to imitate "real-life" control and territory-marking (the same regards state flags used to "mark" the territory of protest areas and troll the opponents).

Pro-Lukashenko channels are mainly used to promote propagandistic messages of the Presidential Administration, Lukashenko's public speeches, or narratives from state television. It is important to highlight that many pro-Lukashenko accounts on Telegram and other social media seek their inspiration from state television and do not produce original content (unless their publications are created exclusively for vulgar bullying targeting particular individuals).

Another important focus of such channels is the demotivation of protesters through cyberbullying or mocking publications featuring the victims of arrests. The case of anarchist Mikola Dziadok[288] is one of the most shocking for Belarusian audience as Dziadok was recorded pleading guilty immediately after police torture and heavy beatings.

Such videos are usually filmed in detention centers or police stations, sometimes with the use of hidden cameras, often immediately after detention or following the use of torture (including severe tear gas poisoning)[289]. Civilians are often filmed in disgraceful positions or immediately after the use of tear gas to show them in intentionally humiliating way with body liquids dripping heavily from their eyes, mouth, and nose. Such videos are widely distributed and promoted by the Ministry of the Interior (foremost by GUBOPiK units that since August 2020 work exclusively as political police and punitive squads[290]) and state television, and are often accompanied by humiliating comments that the victims[291] are forced to announce[292] to avoid new beatings.

The videos are often staged with the green-red flag on the background used by the Lukashenko regime to underline the position of captured civilians as "military trophies". The publication of such footage at the pre-trial stage is illegal, but the victims have no legal remedies to protect their rights to fair justice. Humiliating videos are only created with the participation of "political enemies". Along with politically-motivated violence against people in detention, such practice violates basic international standards applicable to civilians in times of peace, including the presumption of innocence and falls under the definition of inhuman treatment. All responsible officials under Lukashenko's command should be made accountable for recording and publishing these videos and using them for political purposes.

"Yellow Plums" channel has around 72,000 subscribers, but an average post is seen by close to 15,000 to 20,000 users. In January–May 2021 it lost 25% of its audience. "Pool of the First Man" steadily loses subscribers since February (-7.4% in February-May 2021) and reaches 60,000 to 70,000 readers on average.

BISR: a disinformotion factory under the imoge of a state "think-tank"

Until 2014, Lukashenko's propaganda was dominated by the narrative of "brotherly integration" with Russia, and Lukashenko himself was the key pro-Russian politician in Belarus. Things changed after the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014. Following these events, there was a distinctive emergence of a "sovereignty" narrative in Lukashenko's ideology (which, after all, was about him keeping personal power over Belarus, rather than overall "independence" sentiment about the importance of sovereignty as such). Formally speaking, a "multi-vector" foreign policy required some institutional packaging.

On February 12, 2019, Lukashenko established[293] the Belarusian Institute of Strategic Research (BISR)[294]. This institution is presented by the regime as a key state-run public-funded "think tank" that prepares analytical publications for the government, but in practice foremost for the Presidential Administration. Brief reports with limited information about public work of BISR are available in its telegram-channel[295].

BISR monitors media (including foreign press[296]), the work of external think tanks, Telegram and web-publications related to certain topics and names (a combination of monitoring and situational analysis using Infometrix monitoring system). BISR has specific interest in all publications mentioning the word "Lukashenko" in all languages (and its variations) and tracks them on a regular basis.

Analytical reports and policy papers from BISR are also delivered directly to Lukashenko. The reports and data from BISR are being used for the preparation of his decisions and often serve as a source of information for Lukashenko's public speeches. Usually, they are reviewed, edited and packaged by Lukashenko's press service, although sometimes original quotes from BISR reports remain in the final text of the speeches.

BISR plays key role in disinformation campaigns and is used to legitimize propagandistic statements about alleged broad public support of Lukashenko. For instance, BISR is presented as the author of "analysis" in manipulative 2020 pre-election polls with data presented[297] by state propagandists. BISR claims[298] to have no sociological service of its own to conduct research and acknowledges using "data" from other state-run institutions that are fully controlled by Lukashenko and provide fake data[299] (or no data at all) on politically and socially sensitive matters.

Establishment of the BISR was a response to poor results provided by two other analytical institutions on state security matters – the Information and Analytical Centre under the Presidential Administration (IAC) and the Operations and Analysis Center under the President of the Republic of Belarus (OAC)[300].

The OAC still exists and is one of the most influential analytical groups on state security in Belarus. The IAC, however, was disintegrated for the benefit of the BISR, reportedly due to poor analytical work and commitment of its team to writing texts that please Lukashenko's expectations instead of providing analysis on the factual situation. The OAC, the BISR, and the Ministry of Defense are attributed to the activity of "bot factories"[301] used to demotivate the population through social media and to promote disinformation.

BISR was created to generate new "multi-vector" analysis in addition to the "Minsk Dialogue" initiative that is known for promoting Lukashenko's image internationally (and is unofficially affiliated to the MFA of Belarus, according to our sources in Minsk).

Aleh Makarau, who chairs the BISR, is a former KGB official with moderate "Soviet-conservative" views. He worked at academic position for the Institute of State Security[302], an educational facility for KGB personnel in Belarus. In personal communication, he leaves an impression of a person with weak personality who is dependent on the opinions of people in higher positions and adjusts to given reality. Immediately before his transfer to the BISR, Makarau worked for Belarus Security Council and is one of the authors[303] of the Doctrine ("Concept") of Information Security[304]. Against popular expectation that it will protect Belarus from Russia's propaganda[305], the doctrine was created to target[306] political opponents[307] and independent media[308] inside the country.

The charter goal of BISR is to provide information and analytical support to government agencies and officials "in strategic areas of foreign and domestic policies". However, given the peculiarities of the political system in Belarus, BISR does not really play the same role as regular "think tanks" in the West. This statement requires contextual explanation.

As we already mentioned, there is a consensus that state officials in Belarus do not work for the country or an abstract "President". There is a clear relationship between public service and personal loyalty to Lukashenko as the state was de-facto transformed into a super-corporation with his sole ownership.

Our expert knowledge of the Belarusian context shows that the rationale of political decision-making within the Lukashenko regime is essentially grounded on three ultimate considerations: systemic timeserving of individual decision-makers (the decision are predominantly made with consideration of short-run perspective), political survival of the current system as a whole, and ideological evaluation of political decisions.

Along with that, visible expression of selfless ideological commitment is beyond exaggeration extremely rational for people inside the system but may look irrational (and often insignificant) for an external observer. However, the expression of commitment to ideological dogmas does not necessarily mean the existence of such commitment, especially among state security officials – foremost, the Ministry of the interior. The ideology of the political system established by Alexander Lukashenko in Belarus is essentially grounded on three values:

1. Lukashenko's character, perspective on life, and Soviet experience before entering the presidential position;
2. The continuity of "Soviet conservatism" among officials appointed by Lukashenko;
3. The impact of neo-Stalinism / nineteenth-century Slavophilia imposed through state ideology created by in late 1990s by deceased odious Russian chauvinist and Lukashenko's political teammate Vladimir Zametalin[309].

The relationship between Lukashenko and his subordinates inevitably causes a logical dilemma. Since the information provided to him by BISR is biased, the final product does not give Lukashenko an objective image of the circumstances he is in. More than that, much of the writings are impacted by Kremlin-launched narratives that go against the national interests of Belarus and are being used by BISR personnel to promote their own affiliations and political preferences.

The value of a "think tank" that works to meet a demand for ideologically-painted information and conspiracy theories is at the very least questionable and is in fact dangerous for Belarus and the region. As the crisis in Belarus continues, inaccurate information and evaluation of biased facts provided by BISR, including the matter of nuclear security in relation to the Astravets nuclear power station, may lead to irreversible consequences causing numerous casualties among civilians.

It is important to understand foreign connections of the think-tank. On the one hand, BISR is engaged in cooperation[310] with Chinese administration and analysts since at least December 2019. Chinese technologies and experience were widely used for the internet blockade in August 2020[311]. Authorities in Minsk suggested introducing "the great firewall of Belarus" and fill the internet with "patriotic content" based on the Chinese experience[312]. BISR may play a key role in developing the framework of this policy.

Despite their close ties with the Chinese, BISR workers are even more closely related to the Kremlin. Most of the BISR team is made up of former KGB officers, bureaucrats, state media employees, and propaganda workers who are often pro-Russian and related to the Kremlin-funded media projects located in Belarus. Greatly impacted by Soviet conservatism and anti-Western sentiments of its team, the work of BISR is barely "analytical" in Western understanding of this term and serves propagandistic purposes. But more than this: political preferences of BISR team and similar institutions[313] lead to political decisions of Lukashenko and his administration. BISR internal-use materials that were leaked to iSANS team from trusted sources show that the work of BISR is a mix of "Soviet conservatism, the mythology of "Russian world" and anti-Western conspiracy theories.

For instance, in early February 2020, BISR organized a roundtable "Coronavirus. The economy of fear". There, one of the key BISR experts, a former KGB official Aliaksei Audonin (Alexei Avdonin)[314] said that COVID-19 coronavirus is a "simulacrum". In Avdonin's opinion, COVID-19 is nothing but a media simulation initiated to hit the yuan and the Chinese stock market after the PRC signed a 'phase one' trade deal to stop economic conflict with the United States. In his article on the BISR website, Avdonin explained that COVID is an Anglo-saxon effort to "hack China and devaluate its status of a global superpower"[315]. The article published by Audonin repeated Russian disinformation narratives about COVID-19 that were launched around January 20. Russian state media legitimized the concept that COVID-19 was a biological weapon generated by the United States to weaken China[316].

Audonin, a former KGB officer, is widely known for his openly pro-Russian opinions. Prior to his work at BISR, he worked as a columnist[317] at Kremlin-affiliated media Sputnik (where he still appears at least once a week[318] as an "economist") and was affiliated with radical pro-Kremlin media outlets SONAR2050[319] and IMHOclub[320] where he still publishes his articles as of end of April, 2021.

Between spring 2019 and August 2020, the Kremlin pumped social media (mostly, Telegram) with anti-Lukashenko publications[321] in times of tensions between Lukashenko and Putin. Then, BISR played a notable role in the activation of pro-Lukashenko groups and state organizations on social networks. Audonin became a mastermind behind state-run toxic telegram-channels created in collaboration with state security to attack political opponents, including the hate speech channel "Yellow Plums".

While Audonin himself is the administrator of at least one "anonymous" Telegram channel, he publicly joins Lukashenko's crackdown on independent Telegram community and promotes severe restrictions of Telegram use[322] during his appearances on state television.

According to our findings, at least a third of BISR employees who are publicly presented on BISR website, have been engaged in pro-Russian activities or publications, have regularly appeared on pro-Kremlin media in Belarus or have been engaged in the creation of content for pro-Kremlin platforms, including Sputnik, SONAR / SONAR2050, and IMHOclub.

In 2021, BISR was engaged in the creation of materials for the so-called "All Belarusian People's Assembly" (Всебелорусское народное собрание) suggesting state policy for the next year[323]. Measures suggested by BISR show it has no understanding that the country is in a deep political crisis. Most suggested measures (except for a proposal to ban death penalty) suggest the conservation of the current system – which would clearly lead to the worsening of the crisis and make Belarus far more dependent on personal relations between Belarusian bureaucracy and the Kremlin.

As we discussed, BISR was originally created as a part of Lukashenko's efforts to decrease the impact of Russian narratives in his favor by creating "sovereign" narratives. Despite initial efforts to build relations with Western[324] and Ukrainian think-tanks, after August 2020 BISR team has fast rebuilt ties with pro-Russian groups, media, and politically-exposed individuals. Following the arrival of Russia's propagandists and advisors to Belarus in August-September 2020, BISR quickly transformed[325] its policy recommendations, and Lukashenko changed the focus of his criticism from unnamed "Russian puppeteers" whom he blamed for pre-election problems, to the collective West.

Just like any other "governmental" (read: entirely controlled by Lukashenko) institution, BISR was engaged in whitewashing of crimes conducted after August 2020. For instance, on 18 January 2021, BISR analyst Katsiaryna Rechyts (Ekaterina Rechits) said[326] that by that time "we had flipped the page"[327], meaning there will be no accountability for any crime conducted by state security and there will be no new elections. Rechyts made her statement when civilians who had been tortured by state security were facing lengthy detention terms.

Conclusion

The unprecedented (in scale and duration) protests in Belarus began almost a year ago. The crisis in relations between society and the authorities, beginning with the Covid pandemic in the spring of 2020, soon escalated into the largest political crisis in the history of independent Belarus which put the question of Lukashenko's departure and a change of the political system on top of the agenda. Lukashenko made numerous mistakes during this crisis, soon escalating to crimes. In a short time, Belarusian society underwent a powerful transformation, becoming truly civil and offering impressive examples of self-organization, solidarity, and courage.

This crisis has implications for the entire region. It is not finished but continues at a new stage in a different form. Now the situation has arrived at a conditional stalemate, not only regarding the irreconcilable confrontation between society and the government, but also in terms of the relationship of the authoritarian regime with its no-less-authoritarian eastern neighbor, which has a significant impact on events in Belarus. Inside the country, despite the apparent decline in protests suppressed by brutal repressions, a complete repudiation of Lukashenko as the ruler of Belarus continues and a regrouping of civil society is underway.

Lukashenko is openly seeking to regain the relative status quo that he had before the crisis, as defender of the country's sovereignty and heir to the "glorious Soviet past" in which Belarus played a leading role[328]. Now, however, he simply does not have enough resources to achieve his former status as guarantor of social protection. The crimes he committed against Belarusians in the process of retaining power and the ongoing large-scale repressions led to a complete loss of his legitimacy. In response, the system was forced to re-configure itself, including an emergency decree on the Security Council and so-called constitutional reform. They are aimed at retaining power and preserving its continuity in the hands of Lukashenko and his confidants. Essentially, the government is protecting itself from dependence on elections and the risk of mass protests that would accompany them.

In an effort to please the Kremlin through anti-Western rhetoric, Lukashenko is making mistakes and wrongly assesses international reality on the basis of tailored information from his close associates. For example, in making false claims about the lack of Western assistance to Belarus in the fight against Covid (which he did not previously acknowledge), he called Europeans and Americans "scoundrels"[329], and soon called Germany "the heir to the Nazis"[330].

At the same time, it is beneficial for Lukashenko to keep the country in a "gray zone" without entering too close an alliance with Russia, not only to avoid becoming a purely nominal ruler, but also to preserve the personal and family enrichment schemes created over the past 20 years. In this sense, the loss of good relations with Ukraine, as well as the intensification of the EU's fight against cigarette smuggling at the borders, have already dealt a serious blow to the pocket of the "director" of Belarus. In this regard, we can expect an optimization of the regime's income-generating schemes, with the aim of evading EU and U.S. sanctions and protecting against possible Russian encroachments in the event of further economic integration.

For its part, the Kremlin is confident that it managed to bind Lukashenko to itself even more through the unification of propaganda narratives (although the Kremlin was probably counting more on the unification

of propaganda systems, which has not yet materialized), the delegitimization of Lukashenko in the country, and damaged relations between Minsk and the West and Ukraine. As Russia seems to be going through its own reconfiguration towards establishing full control by the special services in the country, all these factors in its relations with Belarus gave hope to the Kremlin for creating a monstrous dictatorial ideological and power alliance of the two countries with Russia making use of Belarusian territory and resources. This could be useful, among other things, for the continuation of aggression in Ukraine, possible operations in Moldova, and for putting pressure on the eastern flank of NATO and the EU.

However, the Kremlin has also learned the lessons of previous years and perhaps for some time, at least until the fall, will avoid open pressure on Lukashenko to move towards further integration, focusing now on the use of forceful suppression of the "orange threat"[5] through Lukashenko and pulling him into the orbit of its new "cold war" with the West.

Unlike Lukashenko, the Kremlin sees that protest sentiments are much broader than just a handful of "Orangists" and that the situation is far from stable. Moreover, Kremlin ideologists admit that open support for Lukashenko has led to the souring of Belarusians' attitudes towards the Kremlin. Judging by the leaks and directions of some stories in the Russian media, the Kremlin ideologues will likely test new approaches towards Belarusian society. This also includes recent reports that the structures controlled by Dmitry Medvedev have requested a very serious sociological study be conducted in Belarus.

We believe that some kind of balance between the Kremlin and Lukashenko will hold until the fall. During his last meeting with Putin, Lukashenko suggested that the signing of agreements related to the road maps would take place then. If these agreements directly affect the interests of his family, then most likely the signing will again be postponed, in turn resulting in a new round of resumed pressure from Moscow and resistance from Lukashenko.

It also depends on the situation in Russia, which is entering a relatively difficult period related to the Duma elections in September and the restructuring of the governing of the puppet party system. Reports show that up to a third of the United Russia list will be revised in the fall elections. This means that the Kremlin is likely attempting to avoid too sudden movements in the near abroad region. It is also possible that the temporary pause in the Kremlin's pressure on Lukashenko demanding the creation of a party system symmetrical to Russia's is also linked to the reconfiguration of the Russian party system. If our assumption is correct, then we will see a new round of pressure in bilateral relations after the elections in Russia.

The transfer of control over to the special services in Russia may also change the Kremlin's approach to Belarus. Given that under any circumstances the Kremlin will regard Belarus as its own protectorate and a "zone of legitimate interests," the Russian special services may also benefit from the nominal independence of Belarus and the use of its territory as a "gray zone" for some of its own operations.

In any of these circumstances, the longer Lukashenko and his inner circle stay in power, the more likely Russia's influence will grow and the greater the security threat to the transatlantic community.

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[5] Translator's note: a reference to the regime change through mass protests, originating from the Orange Revolution in Ukraine.

Democratic nations should not shy away from applying much stronger pressure on the Lukashenko regime out of concern that such pressure may eventually force the authoritarian ruler to cede the country's sovereignty to full economic, political and military control of Russia, after benefits of trade and other relations with the West disappear. Almost three decades of Lukashenko's rule and especially the last few months have shown that he perceives Belarus as his personal domain, a "beloved" he is married to, and that he would never agree to be anyone but "number one" on this territory. He skillfully uses various ways to make many promises to Russia, but even in the most difficult times he has been able to yield something of lesser importance to Moscow, such as foreign policy, but not his absolute power over Belarus. The best way to effectively mitigate the risk of growing Russia's influence on the Belarusian dictator and associated security risks is to deprive him of any sources of income, bring his accomplices to justice, provide more consistent support to pro-democracy forces and victims of repression, and provide solid guarantees of assistance to Belarus during and after a democratic transition.

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[273] Yellow Plums («Жёлтые сливы») is a hate speech channel that targets members of pro-democratic movement. The content is created by BISR team in cooperation with KGB, the Ministry of the Interior, and other state security

institutions. The channel is curated by the Presidential Administration and is created in coordination with Lukashenko's press service (foremost, Lukashenko's press secretary Natalia Eismont). The workers of state security agencies were ordered to sign up for updates from this channel in late August 2020. For details about the channel, see below.

[274] "Pool of the First Man" («Пул первого») is a Telegram channel used by Lukashenko's press service to provide immediate updates on his life and praise Lukashenko's wisdom and leadership. The channel is curated by Lukashenko's press secretary Natalia Eismont.

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[276] Yuri Vaskresenski is a key KGB-controlled figure engaged in imitation of dialogue between the regime and civil society for foreign audiences. In 2014-2015, a similar role was played by "Minsk Dialogue" initiative (led by Yauheni Preiherman and Dzianis Melyantsou) that facilitated the imitation of dialogue of the Lukashenko regime with the West – in favor of Lukashenko's image of regional "donor of stability", lifting of sanctions, and reestablishment of access to the EU markets.

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[281] The association was created by Lukashenko in 2007 as a prototype of a future "party of power". State workers are often forced to join "Belaya Rus" so that state propaganda can claim nationwide membership of the organization that may be compared to a weaker version of the Soviet-time CPSU. More on party-building process can be found here: Yan Auseyushkin, Party building: the process is more dead than alive, 14.12.2020, iSANS – International Strategic Action Network for Security, https://isans.org/articles-en/party-building-the-process-is-more-dead-than-alive.html

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[284] Yuriy Prokopov, БИСИ https://bisr.gov.by/o-bisi/rukovodctvo/yuriy-prokopov

[285] Aliaksei Audonin, БИСИ https://bisr.gov.by/en/o-bisi/eksperty/aleksey-avdonin

[286] About TV News Agency https://www.tvr.by/eng/events/ob-agentstve/

[287] Врага надо знать! Ху из Майкл Карпентер – плотник, сколотивший банду заговорщиков? 28.04.2021, «Желтые сливы», https://slivy.news/vraga-nado-znat-tak-hu-jiz-majkl-karpenter-plotnik-skolotivshij-bandu-zagovorshikov/ (the page is currently unavailable; see a re-post at https://cont.ws/@dyadzka/1978481)

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