Michał Wojnowski

Presidential elections as a state destabilization tool in the theory and practice of the Russian info-psychological operations in the 20th and 21st century

The shaping of the contemporary model of indirect democracy has resulted with the need to develop mechanisms through which citizens could influence the membership of the Parliament, as well as other institutions representing the people. Elections are such a mechanism, as it is their function to take various state-level positions, from the local level, up to the position of the head of state, as well as to choose those who form collegial bodies, resolution-making bodies in boroughs, up to the legislative ones. The right to participate in duly organized elections belongs to the basic human and civil rights. Elections in a democratic country are cyclic and competitive, which means that they must be organized at constant time intervals and that citizens need to have a guarantee of making a choice from independent political offers. The cyclic nature means that the government is legitimized to execute power for a limited period of time. Then they have to again undergo the verification of voters. The competition is all about providing conditions for the existence of the political opposition (based on the undisputable freedom of organizing for political parties) and the prohibition to eliminate it through the state-level means of coercion.¹

Thus – the elections influence the total external and the internal state policy. Thus, the problems connected to the safeguarding of elections, understood as a political process, meaning a series of events taking place from the moment of decision on the announcement of elections to the announcement of election results, are of key significance from the perspective of national security and the security of military and political alliances, etc.² This is confirmed by the communication of the European Commission of 12th September 2018, according to which:


ensuring the resilience of the Union’s democratic systems is part of the Security Union: attacks against electoral infrastructure and campaign information systems are hybrid threats that the Union needs to address. Politically motivated mass online disinformation campaigns, including by third countries, with the specific aim to discredit and delegitimize elections, have been recognized as growing threats to our democracies. The European Union should take all actions within its powers to defend its democratic processes against manipulation by third countries or private interests. Election periods have proven to be periods which are particularly prone to targeted disinformation. These attacks affect the integrity and fairness of the electoral process and citizens’ trust in elected representatives and as such they challenge democracy itself.3

The contents of the Communication indicate that the European Commission refers to the tools and methods of exerting influence on elections in the United States of America, France and Germany by the Russian Federation. According to the European Commission the main goal of the Russian interference is the undermining of the integrity and reliability of the election process, and – subsequently, of the citizens’ trust in the authorities and democracy. It seems that the diagnosis of the Russian goals made by the European Commission is superficial and imprecise. In this context it is worth recalling the opinions of officers and experts coming from the services of the Russian Federation. According to Syergey Rastorguyev4 the changes in models of governing most countries in the world, and particularly the transformation of mechanisms opening the door to power have resulted with a new form of Russian expansion. Techniques applied in the course of this process allow to perceive the fight for power in this or another country as one of the forms of information warfare. Its concept is all about taking control of countries and nations through the planting of outside supporters among the country leadership through methods of information influence called democratic elections. As Rastorguyev points out, only a naive person can believe that the choice of the head of state or the president of a given country is the result of actions undertaken solely by the inhabitants of this country and has no relations with geo-politics. In the world where different social and political trends are closely related in the context of information and economy, states not only monitor


the process of fight for power on the territories of their neighbors, but also influence this process, using – when necessary, all the accessible tools, not only their secret services.\footnote{C.P. Rastorguev, Философия информационной войны, Москва 2003, p. 340.} This opinion is supported by Andrey Manoylo\footnote{Andrey Manoylo (14 X 1975) – colonel of the FSB, professor of political science on the National Moscow University and the member of the Scientific Committee working with the Security Council of the Russian Federation. In 1998 he began the service in the FSB, one year later he completed the Course of Preparation for the Leadership Level of the FSB (Russian: Факультет подготовки руководящих кадров, ФПРК) in the FSB Academy in Moscow. He studied the ‘operational activity’ specialty. In the period of 1999–2002 he was seconded to work (information and analysis-related area of responsibility) in the Russian embassies in Denmark and Norway. Since 2012, A. Manoylo is a professor of the Faculty of Political in the National Moscow University. His scientific interests include: Russian foreign politics, international relations, information warfare, particularly with regard to civilization and cultural factors, and the issue of psychological operations and ‘colored revolutions’. The title of his doctoral dissertation is: National information Policy in the conditions of psychological warfare. See А.В. Манойло, Биография, http://andreymanoylo.vov.ru/biografia.html [access: 18 III 2019]; Манойло Андрей Викторович, https://psyfactor.org/autors/manoylo.htm [access: 18 III 2019].} according to who the Russian way of operating explicitly shows that from the perspective of information warfare elections are its integral part, including: disinformation, propaganda, lobbying, manipulation, controlled crisis and blackmail – techniques used in every combination. Manoylo points out that using election campaigns for political or other ends has become an element of harsh reality today. He also notices that the mass usage of media and other means of impact in the election process increases their influence on the human conscience and sub-conscience.\footnote{А.В. Манойло, А.И., Петренко, Д.Б. Фролов, Государственная информационная политика в условиях информационно-психологической войны, Москва 2012, p. 326.} The opinions of Russian experts indicate explicitly that the aim of the Russian interference in the election process is not only the undermining of its integrity and discrediting democracy, but primarily the destabilization of the internal situation in given countries and the victory of parties favorable to Kremlin’s politics. This is the reason why political elections are perceived by Russian geo-politicians as a convenient target of information warfare and the tool to deprive countries of their sovereignty.

Thus, it is the aim of this article to present the measures and methods of exerting impact on elections by the Russian Federation, which will be presented mainly on the example of the presidential elections in the United States on 8th November 2016. This study refers also to the presidential elections of 23rd April and 7th May 2017 in France. It should be pointed out that in comparison with the USA, the examples of Russian interference in the French election process are not numerous, which is the result of the limited scope of the Russian intervention. Mainly Russian politicians’ papers have been used for the sake of this study, as well as papers written by people connected to the secret services, particularly working for their educational departments. Their papers are of key importance, as they reflect practical solutions. The Russian studies were confronted with government reports, analyses, studies and documents,
which contain information on methods and means of exerting impact on the elections in France and in the U.S. by the Russian Federation.

Anatomy of the Russian info-psychological operations in the context of the presidential elections

Attempts to exert impact on the American election process by the services of the Eastern Bloc took place already in the period of the Cold War. This was done through the use of the so-called active measures (Russian – активные мероприятия). According to the authors of the study ‘Political Intelligence from the Territory of the USSR’, recommended by the Main Directorate of the KGB as a manual for the students of the Yuriy Andropov Red Flag Institute in Moscow (currently the Academy of the Foreign Intelligence) providing education in the frames of the special discipline no 1 (foreign intelligence) and the course for the operational officers of the foreign intelligence service, active measures are the following:

(...) measures using agents and operational work, the aim of which is to: provide all kinds of support in the execution of the foreign politics of The Soviet Union’s Communist Party, materialization of Soviet initiatives aiming at improving the international situation, limitation of the armament race, interference with aggressive plans and aspirations of imperialist states, the weakening of political, military, economic and ideological positions of the imperialism, exerting impact on the foreign politics and the internal situation of imperialist states in the way that should be beneficial for the USSR, strengthening or weakening of political parties, other organizations or groups, individual politicians, social activists and other public figures, supporting the global communist movement and national liberation movements, disintegration and compromising anti-Soviet emigration organizations, etc.8

The methods of using active measures differed depending on the character of completed tasks and agent involving/operative potentials of the secret services. Most commonly used were disinformation, exposition, discrediting and the so-called positive impact (inspiration). In practice all those methods were used at the same time, which increased their efficiency.9

9 B.M. Владимиров, Ю.А. Бондаренко, Политическая разведка с территории СССР…, p. 86.
In order to exert impact on the election process the most efficient measure among active ones was discrediting. According to the authors of the study the aim of discrediting was to make the worst possible political and moral damage to the enemy through the questioning of their authority and weakening the status of the government agencies, political, social and religious organizations, the status of certain persons in capitalist countries as well as anti-Soviet emigration centers. This was done through the announcing and providing the interested parties with specially prepared reliable or fake materials and information.\(^{10}\)

A very good example of a discrediting operation is the activity of the Czechoslovak intelligence service supervised by the KGB during presidential elections in 1964 in the USA. As Ladislav Bittman, who was in the service in the period 1954–1968, working in Department I of the Czechoslovak Security Service (Statni bezpecnost, STB) the aim of the operation was to discredit the candidate of the Republican party – the idealistically anti-communist Barry Goldwater, through the distribution of several thousands of copies of a pamphlet containing information on his racist views. Those materials were sent to the station of the Czechoslovak service in the diplomatic mail. The pamphlet contained information from the American press and books, which were supplemented with fake information and then sent via the post office to the government agencies, editorial boards and to public figures.\(^{11}\) The making of Goldwater a racist was only one of the operations run by the KGB against this candidate. Through the publishing house belonging to the members of the Communist Party of the United States – LeRoy Wolins and David S. Canter, a pamphlet devoted to the alleged plot in which B. Goldwater participated was distributed. The plot was allegedly initiated by the candidate of the Republican party and the conservative association John Birch Society, to organize a coup and a bloody uprising, leading to the taking of power in the United States. Lyndon B. Johnson won the November elections with 61% of votes, which was the highest score in the history of American elections. Goldwater won the majority only in six states, including his family state of Arizona. Active measures run by the KGB and other Eastern Bloc services undoubtedly influenced Goldman’s defeat.\(^{12}\)

Reading the studies of Russian experts whose roots were in the secret services indicates that the interest in modern methods of exerting influence on elections was growing along with the development of information technologies. Starting from

\(^{10}\) Ibidem, p. 87.


\(^{12}\) H. Romerstein, S. Levchenko, The KGB Against the “Main Enemy”: How the Soviet Intelligence Service Operates Against the United States, Lexington, Massachusetts, Toronto, pp. 272–273.
1990-ies elections were perceived as an important social and political event that should be a significant target of information warfare. Similar to what happened in the instance of active measures, the aim of info-psychological operations run in the pre-election period and during the election day is control over the candidates and representatives of political parties, as well as destabilizing the state through the influence exerted on different social groups.  

The info-psychological operation is a number of coordinated measures, methods and techniques of psychological influence selected in the context of aim, place and time and used towards strictly selected groups or individual people. The aim of such an operation is shaping attitudes (e.g. creating discontent), opinions (e.g. lack of trust in the government), values and emotions (e.g. unrest, anxiety, fear) in the way which is favorable to the aggressor. The idea is to plant in the conscience of individual people or groups a foreign ideology and attitudes through making false stereotypes and imposing such a model of the reality which implies reactions favored by the enemy, for example – forming opposition groups and anti-government initiatives. This – in turn, enables the destabilization of the society through the decomposition and preparation of conditions enabling political, economic and military ends, favorable for the enemy.  

The concept of info-psychological operation is identical to active measures. It is vital to remember that when adapting the Western theories and terminology the Russians follow their own presumptions and logic, adapting them to their own needs. This enables the cover-up of methods improved by the Russian secret services for decades, which is confirmed by the opinion of authors of the study prepared under the auspices of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation. They point out that in the period of the Cold War several official terms have been made in order to misinform the intelligence services of countries hostile to the USSR, such as: ‘influence operations’ (Russian: акции влияния), operation of disinformation (Russian: оперативная дезинформация), ‘active measures’ (Russian: активные мероприятия), ‘operational games’(Russian: оперативные игры), ‘resources’(Russian: мероприятия содействия), etc. No matter what the difference between them is, all of them have stood for a set of actions intended to

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mislead real or potential enemy and to obtain the favorable reaction of the target of influence which could not be obtained through overt methods.\textsuperscript{15}

In the most general form info-psychological operations run during the election campaign against a candidate, a group of people running for posts or voters can be divided into positive operations, i.e. the ones aiming at the increasing of the candidate’s assessment level and increasing the number of their voters and negative ones, the aim of which is to decrease the credibility of competitors and thus – reducing the number of their potential voters. Both can be run on the basis of the following:

- ‘White PR’ (white propaganda), coming from an identified sender who does not hide its origin and character. Those are mostly the government mass media (in the instance of the Russian Federation – e.g. Sputnik, RT, etc.) and political, state, religious or other institutions, think tanks and foundations that were officially founded to run such activities and do not cover up their intentions and ideology. Their main task is to build credibility among their audience.

- ‘Grey PR’ (grey propaganda) which we deal with when the mass media multiply information without providing its sources or the source of content, which are or could be incorrectly identified. ‘Grey|’ PR is used to mislead the enemy questioning their truthfulness, credibility, competence, honesty, etc. An excellent example of the tools of the ‘grey PR’ are data resonators in the form of social media and websites.

- ‘Black PR’ (black propaganda) is characterized by the use of a false source of content, behind which the real sender, disseminating fake news, disinformation, rumors, myths, fabricated letters, graffiti and pamphlets presented as the work of ‘underground’ or ‘opposition” organizations’.\textsuperscript{16} Usually those are materials produced by the secret services whose authorship is attributed to fictitious or real organizations and citizens remaining on the territory of the country subject to aggression. An example of such actions, undertaken usually by the secret services, is the establishment of the network of Non-Governmental Organizations, which are established according to the regulations binding in the country of their activity. In fact, however, they deal with the undermining of prestige and credibility of law enforcement agencies and armed forces, purchasing mass-media, designating candidates for elections and infiltration of


selected government and local government agencies, which is done under the cover of the ‘protection of democratic values’.17

According to the Russian experts the discrediting of a candidate takes place in the course of two series of actions, via the so-called front attack and ‘guerilla’ attack, where the above-mentioned techniques are used. Front attacks take place very rarely and they are made when a candidate discloses in the mass-media discrediting facts about their competition. The front attack is most efficient in the period of 4–6 days before the elections. ‘Guerrilla’ attack is much more often preferred, as it utilizes entities seemingly not connected to the center initiating those actions. Usually it is done via a public announcement of discrediting information or information ruining the candidate’s image, which can affect the awareness of the voters. The most efficient form of such activities are information and psychological operations in the Internet.18

Russian analysts provide three types of such operations:

1. Information explosion (Russian: информационный взрыв) is a piece of information or a set of information multiplied in the possible shortest time to the maximum number of communication channels (websites, social media) with the aim to bring about a strong emotional reaction within a selected social group and initiating authorities’ action which is favorable for the aggressor. Information explosions are initiated on the basis of violent situations, i.e. violent deviations from the binding cultural, political, social etc. norms in a given society.19 An excellent example of an information explosion is the leak of documents allegedly obtained from the Russian hackers from the election staff of Emanuel Macron, comprising pornography and information about views which were discrediting hid aides. They were published in the Internet and disseminated on a mass scale on 7th May 2017 in just 3,5 hours, 48 hours before the polling stations were opened. The time of the operation was not accidental. The French electoral regulations prohibit the candidates to speak in public 48 hours before the voting starts. The operation of the Russian services made it impossible for the candidate to address this issue in public.20

20 J.B. Jeangène Vilmer et al., Les Manipulations de l’information: un défi pour nos démocraties, Paris 2018, pp. 91, 109–110; G.F. Treverton, A. Thvedt, A.R. Chen, K. Lee, M. McCue, Addressing Hybrid Threats, Bromma 2018, pp. 41–42. An interesting example if information explosion is the so-called case of Lisa, which went on headline news and influenced the public discussion in Germany for two weeks in January 2016. A thirteen-year-old German girl of Russian descent was missing for 30 hours and – according to the First Channel of the Russian Television, she was raped by immigrants. The story turned out to be disinformation (the German police collected information
2. **Information wave** (Russian: информация волна) is a set of actions aiming at the long-time, gradual increase of intensity, dissemination and elaboration of the desired information. Disinformation, advertising campaigns and PR are used to generate information waves. The efficiency of an information wave is based on the ‘snowball effect’ which stands for avalanche-like distribution of information. Then, it is disseminated, modified, deformed and interpreted in various ways, which is done without the necessary participation of those who shape the message. This makes it difficult to track down its source. In order to initiate such an effect the so-called fake news are used (Russian: информационный вброс) i.e. short, true or false information raising emotions sent to the target of an attack and (or) to its close environment, distributed by websites or social media. Fake news are implemented to the web in specified time spans. The reason for this is the “effect of exposition”. This is the period of “information silence”, i.e. technical break between the publication of individual fake news. This time is necessary for observation and analysis of the reaction of the target by the operator of the information and psychological operation. Additionally the exposition effect enables reflection and internalization of the content by the target, together with its emotions. The exposition effect is necessary so that the target should attain the state of excitement (the so-called border state) and block themselves psychologically. The fear is most efficiently self-initiated, using our own imagination. As a result of negative information, evoking intense emotions, the human mind forms the image of the unwanted future. The human being, connecting true or probable information with the over-interpretation created in their mind, bring themselves into the state of psychological breakdown, making them vulnerable to manipulation. The aim of using this technique is the initiation of the so-called secondary information wave on the level of interpersonal communication. The reason for this is to initiate discussions leading to opinions favorable from the perspective of the aggressor on given events, people, phenomena and to the appearing of rumors. This, in turn, enables the multiplication of impact on the target.
recipients. The control over the initiated message is lost, but it is not the aim of such an action to disseminate a given opinion, view or position, but to disorientate the public through the relativism of one dominant point of view. The aim is to make the society approve certain views, activities undertaken by certain people or discrediting them. According to the Russian experts the most often used techniques of legalizing, i.e. making fake news look probable are the following: controlled leak of information, publication of information indicating ‘anonymous’ government officials, as well as public statements of high ranking dignitaries. An interesting example of using the information wave against a target is the discrediting campaign against Emanuel Macron, the candidate for the French presidency, which was run from January until May 2017. Fake news was disseminated in the form of rumors, slander and conspiracy theories. For example, there was information on the alleged financing of Macron’s campaign by the Saudi Arabia and about his homosexual inclinations. It was also implied that he is an ‘U.S. agent’ sponsored by ‘influential homosexual lobby’ and that he had a company in the Cayman islands used for transfers of immense taxes out of the country. The publication of fake news, besides the Russian media and bots, was made also by the users of websites and social media sympathizing with Marine Le Pen, who was officially supported by the Kremlin. The aim of the fake news rooted in the information from the leaked e-mails is to undermine the credibility of democratic institutions and destroy leaders through attributing them election fraud, falsifying elections and political corruption. A significant aim of this kind of operation is also the undermining of credibility, ability and qualifications of candidates in the eyes of the public. An example of such kind of activity is the dissemination of false information that Hillary Clinton was hiding her health problems, which happened during the presidential campaign in 2016 in the USA.


23 A. Weisburd, C. Watts, J.M. Berger, Trolling for Trump: How Russia Is Trying to Destroy Our Democracy, https://warontherocks.com/2016/11/trolling-for-trump-how-russia-is-trying-to-destroy-our-democracy/ [access: 8 IV 2019]. An excellent example of using the technique of the information wave in the Internet was the Russian info-psychological operation which utilized a Louisiana. The aim of the operation was to initiate panic and chaos, which was even increased by the operation date – the thirteen anniversary of the attack on the WTC. In the morning of
3. **Influence operation** (Russian: *опeração влияния*) aims at long-term effect and its results can be observed only after a long time. The targets of such an operation could be different social groups, centers of government or even a state as a whole. The aim of the operation is to replace the image of the world in the conscience of target groups with an alternative fantasy which is favorable for the manipulator. The contemporary influence operations are based on the methodology of advertising campaigns and PR techniques. They are run in four areas: military, economic, scientific and technical, as well as cultural. Influence operations can be constructive, as well as destructive. In the first instance, the attractiveness of the state’s image and real or virtual images of culture, fashion, religion, moral values etc. are used, in order to gradually introduce them into the mass conscience of societies. In this context culture, history and diplomacy are used as tools to promote geopolitical interests. Constructive influence operations are a less aggressive method in the information warfare. In the Russian literature referring to the matter such operations are called with the following notions: ‘public diplomacy’, ‘soft power’, “national information policy” and ‘ideological state power’.

The aim of the destructive influence operation is a gradual destabilization of the state or unconstitutional change of the ruling authority, that is making irreversible damage in the public order of the state through subversive ideological and political propaganda, as well as the establishment, funding and management of different organizations and illegal opposition groups. The synonyms of this term used at present by the Russian experts are the following: ‘ideological sabotage’, ‘subversive activity’, ‘organizational weapons’, ‘technologies of controlled chaos’, ‘secret non-linear operations’ and ‘colored revolutions’.\(^\text{24}\) An interesting example of using constructive

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\(^{24}\) А.В. Борхсенус, *Операции информационной войны…*, pp. 7–8; Н.Н. Тютюнников, *Военная мысль в терминах и определениях. Т. 2.: Организация Вооруженных Сил*, Москва 2018,
as well as destructive activities in the process of exerting influence over the American elections is the activity of the Russian think-tank – The Institute for Democracy and Cooperation, established in New York in 2008 as an initiative of a Moscow-based lawyer Anatoliy Kucherena. The official aim of the institute was to monitor the American social and system-wide solutions. In practice the activities of the Institute for Democracy and Cooperation focused on permanent criticism of the electoral regulations binding in the USA, of social relations in the USA (e.g. raising the issue of the alleged racially-motivated inequalities), American anti-terror activity as well as of the model of liberal democracy. This served as justification for the Russian interference in the election process in the USA and in the EU. Additionally, the institute dealt with the infiltration of US-based think-tanks and governmental organizations, such as Center for Scholars, Brookings Institution, Heritage Foundation and the Center for the National Interests.\textsuperscript{25}

An attempt to run a constructive influence operation against foreign and internal politics was the preparation of a report \textit{Islamic Extremism in Chechnya. A threat to the USA}. The director if the institute, Andraik Migranian, used this activity to justify the Russian policy towards Chechnya, indicating that the fight with the terrorism from Chechnya is in the interest of both the United States and Russia, which should be the subject of co-operation of those two countries.\textsuperscript{26}

Just like in classic warfare, the info-psychological operation (influence operation) consists of a sequence of actions run according to a strictly defined plan. In spite of a big variety of info-psychological operations used in the current information warfare, planning and the implementation of most of them stands for the use of the same logical scheme which takes place both in times of peace and war, understood in the classic way.\textsuperscript{27} The scheme of planning and implementation of the information and psychology-involving operations is the following:

1. **Political stratification (segmentation) of the society** is the stage of activities the aim of which is to divide the integrated society into segments, fractions and groups. According to the Russian experts in the theory of the information

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warfare, a social segment is a homogenous group of socially and politically active citizens, acting according to strictly defined beliefs and political views, to execute their rights and freedoms independently or together with other participants of the social process. On the stage of political stratification techniques if manipulating social conscience are not used yet. The aim of such stratification is to select the final recipients, forming new or using old communication channels which enable the aggressor reaching to the recipients with his message. According to colonel Vladymir Kryska this is the stage for the so-called investigation of the psychological warfare targets, which is a long-time and complex process of acquisition, processing and collection of information on the enemy’s mentality, habits, norms and values, executed with various methods of the intelligence craft.

2. The political polarization of social factions (groups) playing the main role in the operation scenario (the so-called key-importance groups). In order to transform the segments, groups and factions formed as the result of stratification into an obedient tool necessary to fulfill the tasks of info-psychological operation it is necessary to set forth norms of political behavior that are favorable for the aggressor in the conscience of those who execute them. This is called political imperative. The establishment of a system that guarantees such a behavior comes as the result of an impact on a social layer or a group through ideology developed in an info-psychological operation. This case is not about the breaking up of such groups or paralyzing them, which could be implied by the word ‘polarization. On the contrary, the process is about their organization and giving them more dynamics. This, in turn, will make them the targetss of destabilization, the so-called ‘battering ram groups’ or ‘ignitable groups’ (terms used by Roger Mucchielli), which are easy to provoke to subversive actions. A study by colonel Vladimir Krysko

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31 A.B. Манойло, Технологии несилового разрешения современных конфликтов…, p. 288 et. al.

32 Vladimir Krysko (D.O.B. 16 II 1949 г.) – a Soviet/Russian expert in psychological warfare, currently a retired colonel with a PhD in psychology, since 1992 holds the title of professor. In 1972 he graduated from the faculty of the special propaganda in the Military Institute of Foreign Languages. The history of this institute is a spectacular example of the change in attitude of the authorities of the Russian Federation to the analyzed issues. In 1990-ies the special propaganda disappeared from its syllabus and came back in 2000, after the reorganization of the Institute. The former Institute is now a Department of Military information and Foreign Languages of the Russian MOD and it provides education to the Russian MOD specialists in the ‘organization
contains interesting comments on methods of polarization of groups and social factions. According to him the main aim of the info-psychological operation is the following:

(...) the deepening of conflicts between certain groups of people to the critical level, which will allow to lower the military potential of the enemy troops, as well as the ability of the civilian population to resist. The completion of this aim is fulfilled through the differences among the social groups. The most important of those are social and class differences as well as ethnic and religious ones. (...) Radicalization of social and class conflicts are executed by the organs of psychological warfare to deepen natural differences among different social groups of the enemy state to initiate the ‘boiling moment’. The disapproval of the military and political leadership of a given country as well as of the people’s social status are used for this, as well as especially organized persecutions, pressure and provocations. This results with the ‘fifth column’, i.e. the category of people who are hostile to the politics of their own state and potentially ready to assist the enemy (...). The incitement to intensify ethnic and religious conflicts is first of all about using such entities as ethnic and religious minorities living on the territory of the hostile state and their representatives serving in the armed forces.33

3. The initiation of a political activity of factions (social groups), according to the role attributed to them in the operation plan. This is the stage when the information influence is exerted on a given group by the outside center of info-psychological operations. This is when the segment, group or faction reacts according to the political imperative made by the aggressor in their conscience.

4. The controlled chain reaction is the activity demanded by the aggressor undertaken by a given social group, which is stimulated in result of the transmission of subsequent information stimuli by the aggressor.

5. The correction of the initial plan of info-psychological operation is a form of feedback34 in the scenario which involves the evaluation of the efficiency

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33 В.Г. Крысько, Секреты психологической войны..., pp. 82, 101, 106.
34 Feedback appears when one object affects another, and the latter one affects the first one – or, when objects affect each other. This is the source of the reasons of reaction (the reaction of each
of the operation (comparing it to the actual results to the expected ones) and preparing corrections in the initial assumptions.\textsuperscript{35}

The model example of the development and execution of the destructive influence operation on the basis of the above-mentioned assumptions is using racial, religious and economic conflicts in the American society as well as separatist sentiments in the extreme rightist groups in the south of the United States during the presidential elections of 2016. It was Russia’s goal to use those factors to start ethnically, religiously and politically-motivated conflicts, which were intended to result with the internal destabilization of the United States, i.e. to complete something that the Russian experts call *soft (velvet, colorful) revolutionary scenario of the information warfare*.\textsuperscript{36} It should be emphasized that the idea of using all the tensions and conflicts, particularly racially-motivated, for the fulfillment of the Russian geopolitical goals in the USA began in the times of the Cold War.\textsuperscript{37} Currently it has been modified by Alexander Dugin, who presented it in his fundamental work, recommended in Russian military and diplomatic academies, in the following way:

\[ (...) \text{the Euro-Asian project demands the expansion in Central and South America to tear them away from the North American control (here the Spanish factor should be used as a traditional alternative for the Anglo-Saxon factor) as well as provoked of all kinds of instability and separatism within the borders of the USA (here it is possible to lean on the potential of the Afro-American racists).} \]


\textsuperscript{36} Soft (‘velvet’, ‘colored’) scenario of information warfare is about the ‘export of peaceful revolutions’, i.e. the establishment of revolutionary circumstances that will result in the change of power without the necessity of direct, military intervention made by another country and the occupation of the territory of a given country. The strategic aim is the demoralization of the population and persuading the leadership of the country to resign without the necessity of military invasion and then the appointment of obedient government and the president who would act according to the aggressor’s instructions. If the soft (‘velvet’, ‘colored’) scenario of the information warfare cannot be implemented, it is necessary to use force. See В.К. Новиков, С.В. Голубчиков, Современные сценарии ведения информационных войн и их итоги, “Вестник Академии военных наук” 2017, no. 2, p. 65.

The ancient Roman formula ‘And besides, in my opinion, Cartagena must be destroyed’ will become the main slogan of the Euro-Asian Empire, as it is the embodiment of the whole geopolitical planetary strategy, providing the Euro-Asian continent the energy to fulfill its mission (...). So, currently the geopolitical problem of the planetary West in the broader sense for Russia is divided into two components – the West as America, and the West as Europe. From the geopolitical point of view those two realities have different meanings. The West, as America, is an absolute geopolitical opponent of Russia, the pole opposite to the Euro-Asian tendency, the center of Atlanticism. The positional geopolitical warfare with America was and is the essence of the whole Euro-Asian politics, from the middle of 20th century then the role of the USA became obvious. In this context the position of the heartland is obvious. It is necessary to counteract the American, Atlantic geo-politics on all levels and all regions of the earth, through the attempts of weakening, demoralization, deception and finally – conquering the enemy. It is particularly important to initiate geopolitical instability in American internal relations through the support of various separatist movements, different ethnic, social and racial conflicts, all the dissident movements – extremist, racist and sect groups which destabilize the internal political processes in the United States. Besides, it is necessary to support isolationist tendencies in the American politics, theses of groups (often rightist-Republican) that believe that the United States should limit its political activity to the internal problems only. Maintaining such a state is favorable for Russia, even when the isolationist policy should be realized only in the frames of the original version of the Monroe doctrine, which assumes that the USA will limit its influence to both Americas. It does not mean that Eurasia should at the same time stop destabilizing the Latin American world, trying to deprive the USA of the control over some regions. All the levels of the political pressure over the United States should be used at the same time, just like the Euro-Asian politics of Atlanticism ‘sponsored’ the processes of the fall of the Warsaw Pact, the national unity of the USSR and the further ethnic and territorial disintegration of Russia, under the pretext of its regionalization to its complete destruction. Heartland is forced to pay back to the Civilization of the Sea with the same currency. This symmetry is logical and reasonable. All this is the main task of the ‘foreign geo-politics’ of Russia towards the USA, so a more detailed analysis would go beyond the scope of this study.38

When preparing information-involving and psychological operations the Russians stratified the American society according to the set of beliefs, ethnical and racial criteria. First of all, a segment comprising African Americans (including Black Nationalists) and a segment comprising WASP39, divided into liberals and conservative people were selected. Latin Americans and Muslims, as well as LGBT communities

were intended to be separate target groups. Then, the Russian experts from the Internet Research Agency\textsuperscript{40} polarized the selected social groups using two strategies. The first one was about referring to the narrative that is common in a specific group, such as supporting veterans and the police (in the instance of conservative and rightist voters), or racial and heritage pride (white supremacists, extreme rightist groups). Then, the members of those groups were turned to the \textit{Facebook} and \textit{Instagram} location settings targeted by the IRA using the clickbait tactics.\textsuperscript{41} According to the analysis of posts it should be stated that the IRA provided on those sites contents drawing the users’ attention through advertisements. Then, the websites administered by the IRA personnel published the content which was intended to outrage and heat up emotions of the groups’ members. Conservative voters were actively encouraged to support Donald Trump. Others – to boycott the elections, to refrain from voting for Hillary Clinton or to spread the cynicism on the participation in the elections generally.\textsuperscript{42} The contents sent to individual segments were the following:

- \textbf{The African Americans.} The Russian narrative’s goal was to undermine the trust of this group to the government agencies and to democracy. First of all, the anger and frustration of African Americans resulting from structural and economic inequalities they are faced with were exploited. The problems of police violence, poverty, unemployment and the lack of access to education were emphasized. Those campaigns have resulted with the view that the best

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{40} The Internet Research Agency (Агентство интернет-исследований), also known as ‘Olgino Trolls’, is a Russian company based in St. Petersburg and dealing with influence operations in the Internet. According to the report prepared by the U.S. Intelligence Community, the main investor of the company is connected with the Russian foreign intelligence and the IRA already since 2015 has been actively interfering in the American presidential elections. The Agency uses fake social media accounts, main discussion platforms, newspaper and hosting services websites. It has been involved in the information warfare, promoting geopolitical interests of the Kremlin in Ukraine and in the Middle East. It also tried to exert influence on the results of the presidential elections in 2016. See \textit{US Senate. Open Hearing on the Intelligence Community Assessment of Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent U.S. Elections. Hearing before the Select Committee on Intelligence of the United States Senate, One Hundred Fifteenth Congress, first session, Tuesday, January 10, 2017}, Washington 2018, p. 20.

  \item \textsuperscript{41} Clickbait is an Internet phenomenon, which is about intentional drawing the readers’ attention through titles or miniatures which overemphasize the actual contents and significance of a given article. The direct and/or the primary aim of the clickbait is to generate profits from Internet advertisements ‘popping up’ at the same time when readers click a headline. This is done at the cost of the reliability of information. Clickbait usually has a sensational headline and/or a miniature that draws attention, which encourages the click in the material tagged in his way and forwarding it in the social media. Clickbait, as a phenomenon, is based usually on natural curiosity, providing short and catchy slogan that raises the reader’s interest. The slogan, though, although emotional, is generally loosely connected with the content of the article itself (sometimes it is not connected with the article at all). The characteristic of the clickbait is the necessity to click on the article to reach the target content. See K. Thiel, \textit{Avoiding Clickbait}, New York 2019.

  \item \textsuperscript{42} P.N. Howard, B. Ganesh, D. Loitsiou, \textit{The IRA and Political Polarization in the United States}, Oxford 2018, pp. 17–18.
\end{itemize}
way to improve the situation of African Americans is to boycott the elections and focus on other issues.

- **Conservative and rightist voters.** The goal of the info-psychological operation run towards this audience was primarily to encourage them to vote for Donald Trump and initiate outrage through the publication of posts referring to the negative assessment of foreigners whose situation was improving at the cost of the US citizens. The narrative prepared by the Russians was based on the criticism and stigmatizing national minorities, especially Muslims and African Americans (for example, the statements about the *burka: who is hiding behind the mask? A man? A woman? A terrorist?*, the dissemination of the images of Muslims as terrorists and sexual deviants). Additionally, it referred to the supporters of free access to firearms and reached to the nationalists, particularly Texan secessionists and Southern identity supporters. Also the information on the bad treatment of veterans and policemen by Barrack Obama’s administration was disseminated, indicating at the same time that the same administration was much more friendly to the refugees.

- **LGBT communities and liberal voters.** The main aim of the narrative transmitted to the target group was to deepen the conflict with the communities presenting negative attitude towards the political activity of homosexual communities (e.g. some religious groups, the segment of conservative and rightist voters). Similarly as in the case of presented as intolerant and oppressive, was being undermined. The Russians, using the LGBT communities as the so-called battering ram group, were intensifying conflicts between liberal and conservative voters through emphasizing political powers of sexual minorities.

- **Voters of Mexican origin.** In the same way as in the case of African Americans as well as representatives of the LGBT communities, Russians primarily tried to undermine their trust in the institutions of the American political system by emphasizing issues referring to discrimination, deportation and public health care. They also tried to initiate nationalist attitudes, which would allow for an easier antagonizing of voters of Mexican origin with other national and ethnic minorities.

- **Voters of Muslim origin.** The main website addressing this community and prepared by the IRA had the tendency to promote a positive narrative on Islam and Muslims. On one side, the Muslim history, their attachment to tradition were admired, their compassion towards the victims of terrorist attack was emphasized, and on the other hand – information was spread on the suspicions of this community towards the intentions of the American government and its foreign politics. This narrative should be interpreted as an attempt to show Muslims as an unstable minority that hides its true intentions.43

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The analysis of contents transmitted to individual target groups shows unequivocally that the aim of the Russian operation in the information and psychological sphere was to antagonize those communities through the escalation of conflicts among them, which could result with physical violence and riots. A great occasion for that were the presidential elections, because – as colonel Manoylo stated, the mass use of media and other impact measures in the election process make their influence on the human conscience and sub-conscious grow.44

The thesis about the escalation of conflicts motivated by race, ethnicity, religion and the destabilization of the internal situation in the USA through bloody riots is confirmed by the fact that the IRA organized – in the period of June-November 2016, several political rallies in the country. Both the supporters and the opponents of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton participated in demonstrations organized by Russians, which should be interpreted as an attempt to confront the already conflicted political groups.45

In this context the activity of a Facebook group called the Heart of Texas is significant, as it addressed the supporters of separatist and extreme rightist movements in the USA. Beginning from 2000 close relations with the Kremlin were primarily initiated by secessionist groups from California and Texas, among others Marcus Ruiz Evans and Louis Marinelli, the leader of the campaign ‘Yes California Independence’ connected to the Anti-globalist Movement of Russia (Антиглобалистское движение России), as well as the leader of the Texas Nationalist Movement, Nathan Smith, regularly participating in Moscow conferences devoted to separatisms and is financially and medially supported by Sputnik and RT.46 Close relations with Alexander Dugin, a pro-Kremlin politician, maintains David Duke, the leader of white supremacists, ex-member of Ku Klux Klan and the leader of the American alternative rightist movement Richard Spencer, whose ex wife Nina Kuprianova translated Dugin’s books into English.47

The group Heart of Texas was established in 2015. It was probably established by people working for the IRA. The website has gained the status of the most popular web pages among the supporters of the secession in the USA. It was probably established by people working for the IRA. Until September 2017, when the Facebook decided to close down this website, the

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44 A.В. Манойло, А.И., Петренко, Д.Б. Фролов, Государственная информационная политика…, p. 326.


number of its followers raised up to 225,000. The Heart of Texas presented xenophobic contents, contents hostile to emigrants, refugees, Muslims, liberals, LGBT communities, vegetarians and Hillary Clinton. The group Heart of Texas used the unflattering, fake image of Hillary Clinton with the hashtag #PureEvil, which contained a fake photo of this candidate in a hug with Osama bin Laden and Adolf Hitler, as the supporter of the idea to control the firearms remaining in the hands of the U.S. citizens. Additionally, this website promoted the worldview characteristic for the extreme rightist American communities through the dissemination of contents and memes on the conspiracy theories of Alex Jones, particularly referring to the military maneuvers Jade Helm, encouraged to another secession of the state of Texas, supported the military uprising in Malheur and encouraged white supremacists to the return to America’s past. In May and November 2016 the users of the profile Heart of Texas decided to transfer their virtual activity to the real world. Through making up events, like flashmobs, they inspired the organization of several demonstrations and addresses in the whole state. They maintained that (…) the time has come to say a firm no to the robbers of establishment, however the electoral victory of Hillary Clinton would result in the increase of taxes which she would plan to use to feed illegal migrants. Additionally, as the organizers were writing, Clinton’s victory would mean the increase in the number of refugees, mosques, terrorist attacks and a ban of the right to firearms. Some administrators of the website posed as Americans and not exposing their Russian origin contacted volunteers participating in Trump’s campaign, who did not suspect anything, as well as other activists to coordinate political actions. Additionally, the Russians contacted a person connected with one of the bottom-up organization from Texas. He advised them to focus on such states as Colorado, Virginia and Florida. The group Heart of Texas succeeded with the provoking of a rally in Houston, organized on 21st May 2016, under the slogan ‘Stop the Islamization of Texas’, which resulted with a massive Muslim reaction. The Muslims, came to the site, after they had been instructed by another Russian Facebook group named ‘United Muslims of America’. The near-to-dozen people who came to participate in the event had rifles, Southern Cross flags and banners with the inscription “White Life”. It should be emphasized that the administrators of the group Heart of Texas encouraged the users to bring firearms to the site. When they reached the place they were confronted with a much more numerous counter-demonstration group. It was only the firm police reaction that prevented the bloodshed. Moreover, the administrators of the website, when organizing the demonstrations and obtaining online support acquired also the identities of the potential supporters of the secession of Texas, who declared the that they would join the Texas Nationalist Movement – the organization financed by the Kremlin. Although the Russians officially never confirmed their involvement in running this website, there are a lot of presumptive evidence indicating that it was a tool for the influence operation the aim of which was to use the elections campaign to destabilize the internal situation of the USA through the initiation of nationally, racially and economically-motivated conflicts. The presumptive evidence indicating the involvement of Russians in the establishment and using the website are the following:
orthographical errors and the grammatical structures of posts appearing on the website, tactic aims of the website, connecting it with Kremlin’s interests (rhetoric similar to other active websites disseminating the narrative favorable for Russians), the fact that it was closed down in the same period of time as hundreds of other fake websites connected to Russia, and the co-operation of the website with the Moscow-financed Texas separatist organization.48

In spite of tracking down and broadcasting the information about Kremlin’s attempted interference in the presidential elections in the USA the information-involving and psychological operation run at Kremlin’s orders was not completed. In 2018 materials collected by the FBI special agent David Hilt were revealed and they were used for the indictment of one of the Russian women. The contents of the document indicate that in 2017 – just after the presidential elections, the info-psychological operation was still going on. It went into the phase of correction and feedback. This is confirmed, inter alia, by fragments of instructions for Russian trolls active in the web, which refer to observations and nuances perceived in the first phase of the operation. They were taken into consideration to increase the efficiency of the Russian activity. To provide an example, it is worth quoting some of them:

Colored LGBT are less sophisticated than white; therefore, complicated phrases and messages do not work. Be careful dealing with racial content. Just like ordinary Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans, colored LGBT people are very sensitive towards #whiteprivilege and they react to posts and pictures that favor white people.... Unlike with conservatives, info graphics works well among LGBT and their liberal allies, and it does work very well. However, the content must be simple to understand consisting of short text in large font and a colorful picture. Posting can be problematic due to time difference but if you make your re-posts in the morning St. Petersburg time, it works well with liberals LGBT groups are often active at night. Also, the conservative can view your re-post when they wake up in the morning if you post it before you leave in the evening St. Petersburg time. In the California voter registration rolls, there are more registrants than there are residents. This is the time for American conservatives to sound the alarm before the elections turn the Constitution into a mockery and a celebration of lawlessness. Emphasize that previous falsifications during the U.S. elections with a threatening force and are perceived accordingly. Emphasize that all illegal voters must be kept away from the ballot boxes at distances “beyond artillery firing range.”

is an urgent need to introduce voter IDs for all the states, above all in the blue (liberal and undecided) states. Remind that the majority of the “blue states” have no VOTER IDs, which suggests that large-scale falsifications are bound to be happening there. State in the end that the Democrats in the coming election will surely attempt to falsify the results.

Citing an online news article titled “Maryland City Mulling Over Idea to Let Illegal Immigrants Vote” from on or about August 7, 2017, a member of the Conspiracy directed that the article be messaged in the following way: Stress that the leadership in sanctuary cities has lost all connection with reality and is trying to provide criminals who illegally crossed the U.S. borders with voting rights that are available only to the citizens of the United States. Summarize in a statement that the leaders of sanctuary cities are people without conscience and without any respect for the American Constitution.49

It should be emphasized that in Russian theory and practice of information warfare the info- psychological operations are long-time and are run both in times of peace as well as in times of war. In the Russian interpretation those measures belong to the politics understood as a permanent process of competition, confrontation and fight. This process is diachronic, i.e. it consists of subsequent, interconnected and interdependent phases, which reflects the rule of dialectic comprehension of the reality.50 Thus it should be indicated that the target of this operation could be different groups of the American society in the context of the next elections.

Conclusions and recommendations

The aim of the Russian interference in the American presidential elections was not only to undermine the citizens’ trust in democracy, but first of all, the destabilization of the country through violent, racially, ethnically religiously and nationally-motivated conflicts, and finally – chaos and the decrease of the USA’s international status. Succeeding in the accomplishment of this goal would enable the completion of the Russian geo-political aims – inter alia, pushing the American influences out of Europe, undermining the integrity and efficiency of the NATO as well as the weakening of the coherence of the European Union which means the neutralizing the region of the Central and Eastern Europe.


Considering the individual features of the Polish information environment, as well as the experiences of the French and America partners, is seems necessary to initiate preventive actions. The implementation of the following initiatives seems worth considering:

- Organization of training seminars for political parties, members of campaign staffs as well as electoral commissions and volunteers on the national and local level, and later – social groups which are most vulnerable to the effects of the info-psychological operation.

- Including institutions and organizations responsible for the preparation and execution of the elections to the group of critical infrastructure entities. Special attention should be paid to threats connected with selecting the providers of software and hardware that is necessary for the election process.

- Preparation of constant analysis of the Polish and foreign information environment.

- Developing cooperation between the government, the services and the media, encouraging journalists to introduce mechanisms and procedures enabling a thorough and reliable verification of the collected information, which could decrease the effects of potential info-psychological operations and disinformation.

- Increasing amendments to the binding regulations that would address threats connected with the information warfare, development of doctrine of information security for the Republic of Poland.

- Initiating actions that should neutralize all unrest and provocation, that would probably take place due to the political polarization of the Polish society and easiness to generate historically, nationally and religiously-motivated conflicts.