



Russian modus operandi (operation techniques) of manipulating in the international information space the image of its aggression against Ukraine.

Decomposition of the objective of the operation

The main area of activity of the Russian propaganda apparatus in the international information space invariably remains the continuation of information and psychological operations aimed at distorting the perception of the Russian attack on Ukraine. The Russian propaganda apparatus maintains its activity which is based on an attempt to replace the facts about the Russian attack on Ukraine with a false impression of conducting a proxy war in Ukraine, a defensive one against the "provocative policy" of the West and NATO. Since the beginning of the invasion, social media sites associated with Russian disinformation operations have promoted information materials showing Ukraine as a dependent country (servilistic towards the West), dominated (non-sovereign), taking action "on behalf of" the EU or NATO (tasked against Russia – in the Kremlin's propaganda optics). This is a permanent ploy of Russia. Russia, whether tsarist, Bolshevik, Soviet or contemporary, has always sought a concert of powers, that is, to divide the world into spheres of influence between several of the strongest players, as if the rest of the world did not exist. Poland has experienced this, always being between two powers: Russia and Germany. For centuries, both countries have tried to impose on the world narratives that there is nothing worthy of attention between them, at most some satellite, small countries that need to be shared – nothing else. Similarly, without regard to the will of the inhabitants, they divided the Middle East (including the territories of Iraq), the Ottoman, Persian and later British empires. Stubbornness, will to fight, history, tradition, rejection of foreign domination and attachment to one's own statehood allowed to oppose such an approach. Both if we talk about Poland and Iraq. Ukraine is currently facing the same challenge and imperial cruelty that Poland and Iraq have had to deal with not so long ago. Therefore, nations experiencing the struggle for freedom should understand each other.

Every nation has the right to self-identification and self-determination. The inhabitants of Iraq, both Arabs and Kurds, as well as other ethnic groups, know this perfectly. Many times they have had to shed their blood to defend themselves against tyranny, colonialism of powers and terrorism. Stronger ones often seek to subjugate the weaker neighbours, take advantage of their internal problems, and the great powers instrumentally treat other nations, using them in their game.



The Russian Federation is very well aware of the history of the countries of the Middle East, the efforts and sacrifices that these nations have had to make on the way to their own statehood and in its defence. Therefore, its main propaganda effort in the region is the message aimed at obliterating the Ukrainian fight against Russian imperialism. The Russian propaganda apparatus is trying at all costs to present Ukraine as a failed country, practically non-existent, without history, without its own statehood, without national cohesion, irrelevant. Because when they achieve this, they will be able to go back to their favourite "concert of powers" and tell the world that they have simply taken care of their rebellious province, where a handful of adventurers made a noise, but the matter is over. These are just their temporary "internal affairs". This follows the same pattern as the bloody pacification of the 1920 revolution on the territories of Iraq effected by the British. And Putin himself compared his attack on Ukraine to the US intervention in Iraq in 2003, which he, at the same time, condemned. Turkish and Iranian airstrikes on Iraq, carried out without its consent, are also currently being explained as "internal affairs". Internal affairs end where the borders of other countries begin, and the countries with imperial impulses must understand this.

However, different nations also have different historical experiences. The Middle East has experienced the colonial rivalry of European powers. However, no one today disputes the existence of British or French colonialism, but these times are over. However, the era of Russian imperialism and colonialism has not ended, and the irony is that Russia is trying to present itself as a liberating and anti-imperial force where its knout has not been experienced. Neither tsarist nor Soviet, nor the present, Putinist Russia has never been and is not a liberator, and the nations of Central Europe, such as Poland and Ukraine, know this very well.

Returning to Russian optics. The authorities in the Kremlin were firmly convinced that this would be the case. That they would drive in as if to their own place, a moment of turmoil and would present to the world the end of "their internal affairs". Hence, they propagandistically called the war a "special operation", after all, only operations, not wars, are carried out inside "one's" country. However, Russia was the biggest victim of its own propaganda. The authorities in the Kremlin believed that despite one of the world's largest rates of corruption, the mafia-oligarchic and feudal way of managing the state, they really are the power they have created themselves to be. And Ukraine is the country as they forged it to be, that is, practically non-existent. A side effect of decades of self-creation and propaganda is the failure of their power and the brutal exposure of all weaknesses, because the country and the Ukrainian nation did not disintegrate in the face of aggression, as the Kremlin's propaganda



suggested and expected. Ukraine has put up and still does fierce resistance. Resistance that probably none of the big "players" had expected, starting with America through China and ending with Russia itself. The great ones probably still lived under the Cold War assumptions that only they could challenge each other. A truly united half of the world, with the largest economic powers at the forefront, was needed to end the Cold War and bring (break-up) the USSR to its knees. Meanwhile, slightly more than 3 decades later, the geographically largest country in the world, predestining to the top of the top, with global ambitions, threatening all around to "overturn the table" (international order) - the Russian Federation - led by chauvinism and pride knocked its teeth out, broke its hands and is barely able to stay on its feet in a clash with the country it has considered to be fallen. History once again shows us that, firstly, pride reigns before a fall, and secondly, the strength and will to self-determination elude all tables in the analyses. The Iraqis have the right to a similar assessment of the actions of the British or Americans, but they should remember that the Russians or Chinese have shown in other parts of the world that they do not have good intentions. The Iraqi residents should also agree that it is fair for a tyrant and an imperial aggressor to break their teeth when attacking a weaker opponent.

Of course, the Ukrainians have Western support (a coalition of the willing from Ramstein): in military equipment, and humanitarian or financial. Under no circumstances can it be omitted or hidden. However, it must not be forgotten that this support has been very heterogeneous and sometimes, especially at the beginning, downright symbolic. It was similar in the case of foreign aid when the war with Daesh was fought in Iraq. However, this did not make the war a conflict of Islam, allegedly represented by Daesh, with the "unfaithful" from the West or the Iranian "apostates". Daesh had nothing to do with defending Islam, just as Russia has nothing to do with freedom and anti-imperialism. And Daesh waged war against Iraqis, with Shiites as well as Sunnis, Kurds, Arabs and Turkmens, Muslims, Christians and Yazidis. Russia wages war against both Ukrainian-speaking and Russian-speaking Ukrainians.

In the case of Ukraine, however, there was unprecedented aid coming from Poland, humanitarian as well as military (Poles, without building special camps, accepted the biggest number of refugees and were the first to hand over heavy military equipment (tanks, artillery, etc.) to Ukraine in bulk quantities). Unfortunately, the Ukrainians had to somehow earn and work for the support of others, even give a blood sacrifice, which unfortunately in many cases ended in genocide, as in Bucha, Irpin, Hostomel, Motyzin or Mariupol. Only the defence of the capital and independence began to activate greater support because Western societies and



politicians fooled by Russian propaganda also thought that it would be over quickly. Fortunately, Russian practice very quickly showed how much it differs from theory. And the Russian weaponry looks like in practice, not on advertising leaflets.

Russian propaganda in a nutshell

Since 2014, i.e. since Russia invaded Ukraine for the first and second time (Crimea, eastern Ukraine), in the Russian message Ukraine is: a fallen, artificial state, increasingly poorly managed from year to year, "a rebellious region of great Russia". In turn, according to propaganda, Ukrainians are lacking their own uniqueness, identity or culture "fascists", or subhumans managed by the "Kiev junta" (at best, such "slightly inferior Russians").

The message, meticulously constructed by Russian propaganda centers, was supposed to evoke a sense of Russian superiority over Ukrainians. Building a sense of superiority/national pride in exchange for a deteriorating standard of living is the canon of Russian social management. The canon, which in the years before the war of 2022 had taken an extreme form – building a variety of Russian racism and xenophobia.

Of course, the reality cannot be imposed on such a meticulously built message: "the worse ones are not doing badly with us, the better ones by far, and the whole civilized world is still cheering for them". One of the main features of Russian propagandists is the continuity of the message. In order to ensure it in an inadequate reality, additional enemies and threats are created (sense of security management). Among other things, this is the source of the much inflated Russian war statistics. Their task is to show their own society that – according to the original assumptions – the Russian army has long ago destroyed the Ukrainian armed forces, and now they are fighting against the entire NATO and Polish mercenaries. In the Russian propaganda message – addressed to its own society – it is permissible to lose when half of the world colludes against "heroic Russia" but never, ever with the Ukrainians.

Poland has always been the leading country in the region, uniting smaller countries and warning the West against Russia's aggressive and neo-imperialist policies. So far, the Russian Federation has tried to neutralize Polish warnings, generating countless information campaigns aimed at Western societies, based on the message that this is nothing but Polish prejudice and Russophobia.

In the Russian propaganda apparatus, Russophobia ceased to be an occupation used solely to determine xenophobic phenomena, and became a tool for building a propaganda message.



Attributing Russophobia to critics of the policy of the Russian Federation imposes a cognitive context on the recipient, undermining the credibility of the thesis proclaimed by the critic. So far, the use of the concept of Russophobia has allowed propaganda facilities to undermine the legitimacy of the actions of countries, politicians or institutions, attributing them a lack of objectivity in their action. It must be admitted that the farther to the West from Russia, the greater the impact of these campaigns.

Currently, due to the fact that the soundness of Polish actions and the accuracy of the assessment is emphasized everywhere, Russian planners of information activities have had to adapt the narratives to the social discourse. The latest unveiling and continuation of the above activities (i.e. the depreciation of trust in the Polish assessment) in the international public opinion is the creation of Poland as an aggressive and offensive country that sends tens of thousands of mercenaries to fight against Russia in Ukraine.

In addition, one of the permanent main tasks of the Russian propaganda apparatus was to maintain the cult of the leader. This leader for more than 20 years is, of course, Vladimir Putin. Russian propaganda ensures that he is adored and recognized in the world as a rock star, and all failures are attributed to someone else (a known trick since the time of Tsarist Russia: good-car, bad-boyars). Let's check the performance of this leader of all time. Putin – the father of Russia's providence, the all strategist, the genius of planning a few steps ahead has achieved so much, in such a short time:

- he has united Ukrainian society.
- He has united the West.
- He caused even moderately pro-Russian groups in Ukraine to take up arms against Russian imperialism and also in fear of another Bucha or Irpien.
- He expanded NATO to include pacifist Sweden.
- He expanded NATO to include Finland, a 1,340-kilometer additional border with NATO,
- He disposed of Russian land and missile troops.
- He got rid of the best military pilots and officer cadres.
- He sent 600-700 thousand Russians (they fled forced conscription) on compulsory holiday.



- He strongly contributed to the first rebellion in the history of Russia since the end of World War II (the so-called Prigozhin and Wagner rebellion).
- He has reduced gas exports by 25% - a drop in exports forces the Russians to reduce production in the country to a level not seen since 1978.
- He cut himself off from western products, markets, capital, and companies.
- He became dependent on China, Iran and North Korea.
- He took away the savings of average Russians. He destroyed the currency and the stock exchange. He has been emptying the National Wealth Fund (e.g. drops in oil and gas revenues are replenished from NWF funds). Funds for improving infrastructure (roads, railways, bridges), social care, health care, helping the poorest are spent on senseless war. He took the present from the current generation of Russians and the future from two (at least) future generations.
- He inflicted PTSD on several hundred thousand men (mainly conscripts), trained and released violent prisoners (ex-Wagnerites) ahead of time, raising national statistics on firearms crime from 30% to 720% (depending on the region).
- And many many many other successes.

For his numerous "contributions to the country", he received a prestigious arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court in The Hague (ICC). And all this to fulfil a sick, detached from reality ambition. We wish all chauvinistic, neo-colonial regimes such "great leaders"!

On the other hand, the Russian "dreams" of fighting NATO are perfectly illustrated by a popular joke:

"Two Russian Jews met. One says to the other:

- How's it going? How are you?
- How have you been... They say there's a war.
- What war? Not a special operation?
- War I say! Us (Russia) vs NATO.
- Like, for real?
- Yes, a war. Russia is fighting NATO.
- What are the results?



- More than 100,000 Russian soldiers have already been killed. The rockets are running out. Much of military equipment of the Russian Federation has been destroyed and blown up.
- And what about NATO?
- About NATO? **NATO has not arrived yet.**"

Public task financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland within the grant competition "Public Diplomacy 2023"

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not reflect the views of the official positions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland.



Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Republic of Poland
