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**NAVAL
POSTGRADUATE
SCHOOL**

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**SOCIAL MEDIA AND STRATEGIC NUCLEAR
WEAPONS: THE RUSSIAN CASE**

by

Trisha E. Wyman

December 2019

Thesis Advisor:

John J. Arquilla

Co-Advisor:

Tristan Volpe

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**SOCIAL MEDIA AND STRATEGIC NUCLEAR WEAPONS: THE RUSSIAN
CASE**

Trisha E. Wyman
Major, United States Army
BA, Methodist College, 2011
MPS, George Washington University, 2016

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF SCIENCE IN INFORMATION STRATEGY AND POLITICAL
WARFARE**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
December 2019**

Approved by: John J. Arquilla
Advisor

Tristan Volpe
Co-Advisor

Kalev I. Sepp
Chair, Department of Defense Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Does Russia's use of social media influence the American public discourse on nuclear weapons? Russia is influencing the American public discourse and is using an active long-term media strategy to complement and support its nuclear policy objectives. However, the discourse is mostly reactive and ranges from positive and negative discourse about Russia's strategic nuclear weapons. This research does not find that Russian media is successfully influencing and persuading U.S. audiences to believe Russian content. However, the discourse does present opportunity for political action and change in U.S. policy. This research is focused on Twitter discourse, while considering the reaction from U.S. media and reactive policy statements of the United States. The lack of Internet and online advertising regulations enables deliberate targeting of audiences on the topic of nuclear weapons, specifically to garner support for the Russian government's narrative. The suspension of the intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty, Russia's development of new strategic weapons, and increased media communications between the United States and Russia are reminiscent of the early 1980s "War Scare" and provide a framework for understanding Russia's methods today. The research is conducted with qualitative and quantitative methods, with primary and secondary research, and provides historical background, framing of media, social network analysis, and application to information strategy.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABM	anti-ballistic missile
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AMWG	Active Measures Working Group
API	Application Programming Interface
APT	Advanced Persistent Threat
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CA	Cambridge Analytica
CORE	Common Operational Research Environment
FAS	Federation of American Scientists
FEDOR	Final Experimental Demonstration Object Research
GRU	Russian Federation’s Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff
INF	Intermediate-range nuclear forces
IRA	Internet Research Agency
KGB	Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti (Committee for State Security)
LLC	limited liability company
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MID	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MOD	Ministry of Defense
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGW	New Generation Warfare
NPR	Nuclear Posture Review
NRA	National Rifle Association
ORA	ORA-Netscenes
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OSN	online social network
PM	Prime Minister
R	R programming language
RBN	Russian Business Network

RF	Russian Federation
RSF	Russian Special Forces
RT	Russia Today
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty
SCL	Strategic Communications Limited
SDI	Strategic Defense Initiative
SEO	search engine optimization
SMMS	social media management services
SMO	social movement organizations
SN	social network
SNA	social network analysis
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
TASS	Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union, Information Telegraph Agency of Russia
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
USIA	United States Information Agency
USSR	United Socialist Soviet Republic
WPC	World Peace Council

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I. INTRODUCTION

These weapons are unique, and a large part of their uniqueness derives from their being perceived as unique.

—Thomas C. Schelling¹

More than 25 years after Dr. John Arquilla and his colleague David Ronfeldt wrote about “netwar,” warning of the need to prepare for the future soon to become a reality,² the Russians are now weaponizing the internet including through the surveillance of U.S. infrastructure, through collecting data, through the targeting of mass audiences while sowing confusion and distrust between government officials and constituents, and through the hacking of election and voting systems.³ Netwar has become a reality.

Unsurprisingly, former-Soviet territories and neighbors are either already dealing with or fear future netwar aggression from Russia in one form or another.⁴ In 2007, oddly the same year *Time* magazine named President Vladimir Putin their “Person of the Year” for bringing “stability and renewed status to his country” and prior to Russia’s invasion of Georgia in 2008, successfully seizing an enclave, Russia-friendly hackers successfully conducted disruptive cyberattacks against Estonia. An Estonian government official stated that the attacks were “orchestrated by the Kremlin, and malicious gangs then seized the opportunity to join in and do their own bit to attack Estonia.”⁵ In 2014, Russia then invaded Ukraine, engaging in a protracted war there that continues today with Russian Special Forces (RSF), colloquially called “little green men,” continually undermining the

¹ Thomas C. Schelling, “An Astonishing Sixty Years: The Legacy of Hiroshima,” (Prize Lecture, Beijersalen, The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, Stockholm, December 8, 2005), <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/economic-sciences/2005/schelling/lecture/>.

² John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *Cyberwar Is Coming!*, RP-223 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1993), <https://www.rand.org/pubs/reprints/RP223.html>.

³ John Arquilla, “Cyber War Is Already Upon Us,” *Foreign Policy*, February 27, 2012, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/02/27/cyberwar-is-already-upon-us/>.

⁴ Arquilla.

⁵ Damien McGuinness, “How a Cyber Attack Transformed Estonia,” *BBC*, September 5, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/39655415>.

Ukrainian government.⁶ Thus far, Russia's successes in aggression have apparently been orchestrated in a comprehensive strategy, including using cyber warfare to surveil, disable, falsify, and mask conventional force entry.

In the age of social media and internet, President Putin has created an empire that is challenging political stability and causing fear in the West and throughout Eastern European states. Russia's ability to use every available tool in information warfare suggests a potential for use in nuclear strategy against the West. A possible attempt of Russia's use of nuclear-weapons-related communication deception in social media occurred in 2016; during a coup attempt against President Erdogan, Russia's state-owned *Sputnik* and *RT* falsely reported the existence of a large-scale operation of armed police at Incirlik Air Base in Turkey while also declaring the locations of U.S. nuclear weapons within the same area.⁷ This use of media deception is only one example that suggests a comprehensive Russian strategy. Audiences, particularly active and attentive citizens, are often influenced by media content, which can shape public discourse, cause protests and petitions, and influence voting and national policy toward nuclear reduction.⁸

While disinformation from Russia is not new, the ability with which it can be spread is growing. Throughout the history of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the Russian Federation (RF), regime leaders have used state-owned media as a tool to sow discontent, to spread misinformation, and to boast about their nuclear weapons programs.⁹ However, little research and analysis exists beyond the utility of "nuclear saber-rattling"

⁶ Richard Stengel, "Person of the Year 2007, Choosing Order Over Freedom," *Time*, December 19, 2007, http://content.time.com/time/specials/2007/personoftheyear/article/0,28804,1690753_1690757,00.html.

⁷ Andrew Weisburd, Clint Watts, and JM Berger, "Trolling for Trump: How Russia Is Trying to Destroy Our Democracy," *War on the Rocks*, November 6, 2016, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/11/trolling-for-trump-how-russia-is-trying-to-destroy-our-democracy/>.

⁸ Jeffrey W. Knopf, *Domestic Society and International Cooperation: The Impact of Protest on U.S. Arms Control Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 60.

⁹ Ivan Zasluskiĭ, *Media and Power in Post-Soviet Russia*, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004). A key question during the War Scare is revealed in declassified documents when Ronald Reagan asks, "Do you think Soviet leaders really fear us, or is all the huffing and puffing just part of their propaganda?", quoted in Nate Jones, "The 1983 War Scare: 'The Last Paroxysm' of the Cold War Part I," National Security Archive, May 16, 2013, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB426/>.

and public posturing statements regarding the RF's use of information operations in attempts to shape strategic nuclear weapons policy in the United States. This research provides insight into the Russian regime's efforts to use social media, specifically Twitter, to influence U.S. audiences. Russia actively seeks to influence U.S. audiences through social media content, further dividing already polarized nuclear weapons advocacy groups, and inciting fear of nuclear war. Whether it works is, to some extent, the larger question behind this research.

A. RESEARCH QUESTION

Does Russia's use of social media influence the American public discourse on nuclear weapons?

B. BACKGROUND: UNDERSTANDING STRATEGIC WEAPONS

Why does weapons discourse matter? Strategic weapons and other military technologies are prevalent within the Western news. Specifically, in the context of nuclear weapons, *strategic weapons*¹⁰ are those that can destroy an adversary's strategic assets (economy, national political institutions, military) and are considered a tool in international politics and in maintaining security interests and in use for deterrence or coercion against adversarial nation-states. The RF has various types of strategic weapons, both nuclear and non-nuclear. Russia's state-owned media regularly publishes articles, videos, testimony, and related material about Russia's strategic weapons and new military technologies. Whether Kalashnikov's automated weapons system designed to make shoot/no shoot decisions,¹¹ armed demonstrations of the Final Experimental Demonstration Object Research (FEDOR) robot,¹² intercontinental ballistic missiles, or the Status-6, the Russian

¹⁰ The definition of strategic weapons varies among different political scientists and security strategists, but the scope of use is always in terms as a major weapon within national-level strategy and requiring a decision of use by the president.

¹¹ Kyle Mizokami, "Kalashnikov Will Make an A.I.-Powered Killer Robot," *Popular Mechanics*, July 19, 2017, <https://www.popularmechanics.com/military/weapons/news/a27393/kalashnikov-to-make-ai-directed-machine-guns/>.

¹² "Russia May Put Androids in Orbit Next Year, State Media Says," *Defense One*, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://www.defenseone.com/technology/2018/07/russia-may-put-androids-orbit-next-year-state-media-says/149927/>.

government and media is apparently weaponizing media to showcase Russia’s military capabilities and project a technical edge over the West. Also, the Kalibr missile, a different yet important Russian strategic weapon, is a cruise missile that is launchable from ships and submarines.¹³ Both the out-of-compliance 9M729 missile and the Status-6, an autonomous nuclear torpedo bomb also an Ocean Multipurpose System, are regularly included within the narratives of Russian media.¹⁴

Some of today’s strategic nuclear weapons may likely be autonomous, at least to some degree, and Russia’s media representation reflects the state’s dual emphasis of autonomy and nuclear weaponization.¹⁵ Additionally, strategic weapons are a focal topic at the highest international policy levels, specifically at the United Nations, within which the United States, the United Kingdom, the RF, and others are in a tumultuous cycle of tit-for-tat public media strategic communications. The strategic weapons focused on in this research include the Status-6—also named Poseidon and Kanyon and shown in Figure 2—and the 9M729. The 9M729, also known by NATO as the SSC-8, is a Russian cruise missile that U.S. authorities say violates the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.¹⁶

The INF treaty was originally with the USSR, but was extended to Russia after the dissolution.¹⁷ According to the U.S. Department of State, the INF Treaty

¹³ “Russia Upgrades Kalibr Cruise Missiles,” *Jane’s 360*, September 25, 2019, <https://www.janes.com/article/91514/russia-upgrades-kalibr-cruise-missiles>.

¹⁴ “Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD): Status-6 / Kanyon - Ocean Multipurpose System - Russian and Soviet Nuclear Forces,” GlobalSecurity.org, November 21, 2018, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/russia/status-6.htm>.

¹⁵ “Russia Lays Groundwork for Self-Learning Artificial Intelligence Weapons,” *TASS*, June 6, 2018, <https://tass.com/defense/1008270>; “Russia Prepares for a Future of Making Autonomous Weapons,” *c4isrnet*, June 11, 2018, <https://www.c4isrnet.com/electronic-warfare/2018/06/11/russia-prepares-for-a-future-of-making-autonomous-weapons/>; Amy F. Woolf, *Russia’s Nuclear Weapons: Doctrine, Forces, and Modernization*, CRS Report No. R45861 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, August 5, 2019), 41, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/R45861.pdf>.

¹⁶ “Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD): 9M729—SSC-X-8,” GlobalSecurity.org, accessed June 13, 2019, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/russia/ssc-8.htm>.

¹⁷ “Treaty between The United States of America and The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Elimination of their Intermediate-range and Shorter-range Missiles (INF Treaty),” conclusion date: December 8, 1987, U.S. Department of State, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/avc/trty/102360.htm>.

requires destruction of the Parties' ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges of between 500 and 5,500 kilometers, their launchers and associated support structures and support equipment within three years after the Treaty enters into force.¹⁸

The Status-6 is declared in media to be an autonomous 100-to-200 megaton nuclear hydrogen cobalt torpedo bomb that can be released from a submarine.¹⁹ The media reports that this bomb could destroy the entire Eastern coast of the United States or Europe and then cause a tsunami wave, wreaking further destruction. Russian media-released images, supposedly accidentally-released, of the Status-6 first occurred on November 10, 2015.²⁰ Since then, the size and number of torpedoes have increased, and media has shifted from deceptive release to an open dissemination of information about the weapon. Although the most recent U.S. Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) acknowledges the existence of an autonomous nuclear torpedo,²¹ this thesis does not aim to assess the accuracy of reporting or capabilities of the weapon. Instead, this study aims to determine to what extent these weapons and similar weapons being featured in social media represents Russia's attempts to sway strategic policy by influencing audiences such as policymakers, national-level leaders, scholars, European partners, and "useful idiots" who can spread viral content. The former Soviet government and today's Russian government used, and still use, deception and active measures via media platforms to achieve political objectives.²²

¹⁸ U.S. Department of State.

¹⁹ Russian media releases on its size and number of torpedoes have varied over the past four years; in early releases it was reported as 100 megatons while more recently as 200 megaton and later with an arsenal of over 30 torpedo missiles.

²⁰ Jeffrey Lewis, "Putin's Doomsday Machine," *Foreign Policy*, November 12, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/11/12/putins-doomsday-machine-nuclear-weapon-us-russia/>; *The National Interest* is often a forum for Russian ideologues, scholars, and politicians that often publish pro-Russian content; Sebastien Roblin, "We Now Know Why Russia Wants a 100-Megaton Nuclear Torpedo," *The National Interest*, March 2, 2018, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/we-now-know-why-russia-wants-100-megaton-nuclear-torpedo-24736>.

²¹ U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review*, February 2018 (Arlington, VA: Department of Defense, February 2018), <https://media.defense.gov/2018/Feb/02/2001872886/-1/-1/1/2018-NUCLEAR-POSTURE-REVIEW-FINAL-REPORT.PDF>.

²² Todd C. Helmus et al., *Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe*, RR-2237-OSD (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2237>.

C. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The thesis uses a mixed-method approach, including qualitative heuristics in consideration of quantitative data supported by social network analysis, to determine the correlation between Russia’s social media content and attempts to influence American nuclear discourse. The thesis considers those findings in the context of historical Russian Federation and Soviet methods of media influence, social movement to explore a potential information strategy including but not limited to deception, influence, and informational deterrence and coercion. Recognizing the value of history to inform present conditions, the thesis begins by examining the “War Scare” between the Soviet Union and the United States during the 1980s for comparison and contrast of strategic dialogue, policy, media, and public opinion.

This thesis then conducts three types of analysis: 1) framing of the Russian Federation’s media and marketing content aimed at understanding the narrative via Twitter during key national-level policy declarations on strategic nuclear weapons; 2) social network analysis of the current top actors engaging in nuclear strategic weapons discussion on Twitter; and 3) theoretical application of information strategy.

The thesis analyzes open source Russian media—especially *RT*, *Sputnik*, and *TASS* and the Twitter dissemination of this media in both English and Russian—focused the observation on nuclear weapons-related hashtags and posts in both Russian and English. Table 1 shows the dates and events of research focus.

Table 1. Events and corresponding dates relative to *Nuclear Security Strategy* actions²³

Date	Event
10 November 2015	RT releases a photograph of the Status-6 nuclear torpedo, yet claims the release was by accident.
01 December 2015	The U.S. announces RF's violation of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty with the 9M729 missile.
27 November 2016	The U.S. declares an intelligence discovery substantiating the existence of Status-6.
10-14 February 2017	The U.S. claims RF has deployed 9M729 battalions.
29 November 2017	The U.S. confirms the existence of the 9M729.
01 December 2017	RF declares Status-6 tests.
08 December 2017	The U.S. Administration released a strategy to counter alleged Russian violations of the INF treaty.
05 February 2018	U.S. publishes NPR.
20 February 2018	Putin announces Russia's hypersonic weapons in a formal defense conference.
20 October 2018	President Trump announces intent to terminate the INF Treaty.
04 December 2018	Secretary Pompeo states that the United States found Russia in "material breach" of the INF Treaty.
01 March 2018	Russia gives major speech on its nuclear arsenal.
04 January 2019	TASS releases info about Status-6's speed.
12 January 2019	RF/TASS announces additional Status-6 torpedoes.
23 January 2019	The RF displays the 9M729 to foreign military attaches for the first time.
01 February 2019	U.S. announces suspension from the INF if Russia does not comply.
02 February 2019	Russia announced the suspension of participation in the agreement.
05 February 2019	RF announces creation of ground version of Kalibr complex.
20 February 2019	Tests of Status-6 are first time shown in media via the <i>Rossiya 24 TV</i> channel.
26 February 2019	U.S. testimony hypersonic RF weapons.
03 March 2019	RF publicizes U.S. nuclear targets.
26 March 2019	US Intelligence insider reports to CNBC of Status-6 concerns.
02 August 2019	The United States formally withdraws from the INF. Russia also announces formal suspension within 24 hours.

²³ The list of dates is derived from various websites and U.S. and Russian media announcements available in an open search. Additional events were retrieved from "Weapons of Mass Destruction," GlobalSecurity.org, and "The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty at a Glance," Arms Control Association, August 2019, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/INFtreaty>.

The boundaries imposed on data selection and time frame include Twitter and Russian media data, readily available as open source, during key, related Russian and U.S. government releases of information on the Status-6 and the 9M729 [SSC-8] between the years of 2014 and 2019. The thesis uses a method media analysis to determine the existing themes within the researched Twitter data. After content analysis to determine the diffusion of Russian media content and themes into U.S. media within Twitter, the thesis conducts social network analysis from data pulled during the first half of 2019. The research illuminates the existing actors who are influential in receiving and diffusing key Russian media within Twitter.

Following this introduction, Chapter II explores media use during the 1980s “War Scare.” Chapter III illustrates media content and narrative and IV presents social network analysis while Chapter V delves into Russia’s information strategy, and Chapter VI summarizes findings and offers suggestions for future research.

II. MEDIA, THE FREEZE MOVEMENT, AND THE “WAR SCARE” IN THE 1980S

The idea that the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the Russian Federation (RF) regime leaders would use state-owned media as a tool to sow discontent, spread mistruth, and boast about their nuclear weapons programs is not new to today’s international climate.²⁴ Russia has long used a defensive information warfare posture²⁵ and various forms of globalized media to attempt to strengthen its unique cultural uniformity and to constrict and control its satellite populations.²⁶ In the 1960s, the USSR spent more money on jamming foreign radio signals than it did on radio production.²⁷ Throughout the Cold War, Russia continued to struggle with cultural and social liberalization, evidenced by restricting foreign media, attempting to control narratives, and countering the U.S.-propagated narrative with Soviet state-owned media.²⁸ While the history of the USSR’s propaganda use is far too broad for this thesis, in the early 1980s, the media fight and the negotiations took a different, and highly proliferate media turn. Following Chapter I’s introduction to why Russia’s efforts to weaponize information in today’s media climate matter so much, Chapter II offers a historical snapshot of the “War Scare,” a distinct period, predominantly in the early 1980s, of tit-for-tat media and political actions that targeted various groups within the United States to spread fear, including the deliberate use of national-level media to influence interstate relations between the United

²⁴ Zasurskiĭ, *Media and Power in Post-Soviet Russia*, 3–114.; Cull et al., Nicholas Cull et al., *Soviet Subversion, Disinformation and Propaganda: How the West Fought Against It: An Analytic History, with Lessons for the Present*, London School of Economics and Political Science Institute of Global Affairs, October 2017, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/iga/assets/documents/arena/2018/Jigsaw-Soviet-Subversion-Disinformation-and-Propaganda-Final-Report.pdf>. 1–81.; A key question during the War Scare is revealed in declassified documents when Ronald Reagan asks, “Do you think Soviet leaders really fear us, or is all the huffing and puffing just part of their propaganda?”, quoted in Jones, “The 1983 War Scare.”

²⁵ John Arquilla, *The Reagan Imprint: Ideas in American Foreign Policy from the Collapse of Communism to the War on Terror* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), 149.

²⁶ Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire that Lost the Cultural Cold War*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014).

²⁷ Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 131–133.

²⁸ Alvin A. Snyder, *Warriors of Disinformation: How Lies, Videotape, and the USIA Won the Cold War* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), 17.

States and the Soviet Union, while at the height of war tensions between both countries. Chapter II explores aspects of Russia's "War Scare" strategic communication and strategy, including media and information warfare. It does so, first, by reviewing the Soviet Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti's (KGB) increasing influence in Russia's leadership in the 1970s, then by describing how disinformation influenced world events including the discussion of capitalism versus communism and how the USSR used the freeze movement and, finally, by briefly looking at how non-state media, President Ronald Reagan's communications, and the INF may have influenced today's efforts.

A. BACKGROUND: KGB INFLUENCE ON MEDIA

During the 1970s, the KGB's influence spurred USSR advancement of synchronized and executed information and political warfare, with Yuri Andropov, a former KGB chief wholly admired by President Putin,²⁹ as a critical actor. Not only an USSR intelligence service but also, functionally, a policing security service,³⁰ the KGB likely influenced Andropov's methods of population control, including its media efforts. Andropov became General Secretary of the Communist Party in 1982, the first time a KGB chief became head of the party;³¹ under his political influence, intelligence and information operations, known as *active measures*, became inseparable and highly effective.³² Andropov encouraged propaganda, including attempts to delegitimize the United States³³ and also attempted to hide, with propaganda, his illnesses from the public.³⁴ After Andropov's death, Konstantin Chernenko took over as head of the state and party, but his declining health soon resulted in inactivity of the Kremlin's affairs.³⁵ However, in 1984,

²⁹ Robert W. Pringle, "Putin: The New Andropov?," *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 14, no. 4 (2001): 547, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08850600152617155>.

³⁰ Cull et al., *Soviet Subversion, Disinformation and Propaganda*.

³¹ Cull et al.

³² Cull et al.

³³ Cull et al.

³⁴ Don Oberdorfer, *From the Cold War to a New Era: The United States and the Soviet Union, 1983–1991*, Updated ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 79.

³⁵ Oberdorfer, 84.

the Kremlin publicized upcoming talks with President Ronald Reagan, describing their purpose as aimed at preventing “the militarization of outer space,” highlighting a deliberate use of media in the Soviets’ nuclear strategy for thwarting President Reagan’s “Star Wars” defensive strategy, also known as the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI).³⁶

B. THE “WAR SCARE”

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, political tensions escalated, challenging Soviet political leaders in negotiations and in efforts to leverage media. Parallel to the USSR’s media and influence efforts during these two decades, U.S. leaders conducted negotiations with USSR leaders regarding nonproliferation, limitation of nuclear weapons, and building and challenging global geopolitical ties and other relationships. Negotiations found some success. In the 1970s, the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) marked major areas of cooperation. Hostilities between opposing alliances of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War created major new tensions, but these eventually abated, and the United States and USSR renewed overt cooperation by signing SALT II in 1979. Inadequacies of the SALT treaties eventually led to the U.S.-Soviet Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) I during the 1990s.³⁷

Also during the 1970s and 1980s, however, other events including the end of the Vietnam War;³⁸ the Angola Crisis;³⁹ the political revolution and hostage crisis in Iran;⁴⁰ the USSR’s invasion of Afghanistan;⁴¹ and hostilities in the Horn of Africa and South

³⁶ Oberdorfer, 84.

³⁷ “Treaty between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on Strategic Offensive Reductions (START I),” conclusion date: July 31, 1991, Nuclear Threat Initiative, <https://www.nti.org/learn/treaties-and-regimes/treaties-between-united-states-america-and-union-soviet-socialist-republics-strategic-offensive-reductions-start-i-start-ii/>.

³⁸ “Ending the Vietnam War, 1969–1973,” U.S. Department of State, accessed April 20, 2019, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/ending-vietnam>.

³⁹ “The Angola Crisis 1974–75,” U.S. Department of State, accessed April 20, 2019, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/angola>.

⁴⁰ Suzanne Maloney and Keian Razipour, “The Iranian Revolution—A Timeline of Events,” Brookings, January 24, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/01/24/the-iranian-revolution-a-timeline-of-events/>.

⁴¹ “U.S.-Russia Nuclear Arms Control,” Council On Foreign Relations, accessed April 16, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-russia-nuclear-arms-control>.

America created other tensions.⁴² The tensions became enough that the countries actually each boycotted the Olympics once in the early 1980s, first the United States then the Soviet Union.⁴³

In the early 1980s, to reduce the risk posed by Soviet influence, the “Active Measures Working Group” (AMWG), a group of U.S. interagency volunteers, exposed Soviet disinformation in the media⁴⁴ while the United States Information Agency (USIA) actively planned and executed disinformation against the Soviets.⁴⁵ Some well-known examples of the Soviets’ focused media and active measures included falsehoods about biological warfare. One of the false stories leaked by the Soviets, addressed by the AMWG, regarded the United States’ supposed attempt to commit mass ethnocide using pathogens.⁴⁶ The KGB⁴⁷ also used media releases in India’s *Patriot* newspaper to accuse the United States of waging biological warfare, specifically of intentionally spreading acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) to innocent U.S. populations, specifically to people of African ethnicities. This misinformation circulated throughout India, Cameroon, Portugal, Cuba, and other locations and was ultimately shared by U.S. news anchor Dan Rather.⁴⁸

⁴² “‘Buried in the Sands of the Ogaden’: The Horn of Africa and SALT II, 1977–1979,” Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State, accessed April 20, 2019, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1977-1980/horn-of-africa>.

⁴³ Council On Foreign Relations, “U.S.-Russia Nuclear Arms Control.”

⁴⁴ United States Information Agency, “Soviet Active Measures in the Era of Glasnost: A Report to Congress by the United States Information Agency” (Washington, DC: United States Information Agency, March 1988), <http://insidethecoldwar.org/sites/default/files/documents/Soviet%20Active%20Measures%20in%20the%20Era%20of%20Glasnot%20March%201988.pdf>, 10.

⁴⁵ Snyder, *Warriors of Disinformation*, 120; Lawrence S. Wittner, “The Nuclear Freeze and Its Impact,” Arms Control Association, accessed January 6, 2019, https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2010_12/LookingBack; Arquilla, The Reagan Imprint.

⁴⁶ United States Information Agency, “Soviet Active Measures,” 10.

⁴⁷ Mark M. Lowenthal, *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy* (New York: SAGE Publications, 2006), Kindle, loc. 10270 of 14255.

⁴⁸ United States Information Agency, “Soviet Active Measures.”

C. CAPITALISM VERSUS COMMUNISM: PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN AND PRESIDENT MIKHAIL GORBACHEV

Unsurprisingly, in the 1980s, the United States and the USSR placed the most emphasis in the media on political ideology in the frame of democratic capitalism versus communism.⁴⁹ In 1981, President Ronald Reagan commenced his presidency with a strong address and negative moral labeling of the Soviet Union, so as to garner domestic and international support. Known as the “great communicator,”⁵⁰ President Reagan took a hard stance and implemented numerous initiatives against the Soviet Union, increasing media content and press conferences in response to Soviet disinformation attempts meant to undermine the United States’ desired narrative. The United States also spent an enormous amount of money to portray the Soviet Union as a threat.

1. The Freeze Movement

While far less funded than the defense establishments of the United States and Soviet Union and pro-weapons lobby in the United States, the grassroots Freeze movement still managed to accomplish significant benchmarks in disarmament. These efforts influenced policy leading to the arms reduction agreements started under President Reagan. The three most significant media periods for peace and anti-nuclear mobilization were (a) 1945–1949, in which the scientists’ movement established *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*; (b) 1957–1963, for organization against atmospheric nuclear testing; and, (c), 1980–1984, during which the nuclear freeze movement arose.⁵¹ In the 1980s, Randall Forsberg of SIPRI was a leading voice for the anti-nuclear weapon movement, which ultimately led to the largest display of opposition to the arms race by nearly one million Americans in New York City.⁵² The theme, “Freeze the Arms Race-Fund Human Needs” resulted in petitions with signatures from over 2.3 million Americans.⁵³ This resulted in a

⁴⁹ Cull et al., *Soviet Subversion, Disinformation and Propaganda*.

⁵⁰ U.S. Department of State. “1981–1988: The Presidency of Ronald W. Reagan.”

⁵¹ Gamson and Stuart, “Media Discourse as a Symbolic Contest,” 58–59.

⁵² Wittner, “The Nuclear Freeze and Its Impact.”

⁵³ Wittner.

referendum in the fall of 1982 by over one-third of the U.S. electorate.⁵⁴ The majority of anti-nuclear weapon groups were mainly religious groups, pro-women groups, and student organizations, and, in 1984, some of the issues they raised were incorporated into the Democratic Party's platform. Twenty-five national labor unions also backed this movement.⁵⁵ The Freeze activists used information dissemination and media, developing and distributing various documents that informed of perceived risks and sought to educate about how to make change and connect with related events and people.

During the same time, Soviet authorities also encouraged anti-nuclear war letters from the Soviet population, including academic institutions and their personnel, to be directed toward President Reagan and sent to the White House.⁵⁶ While the USSR's influence on the Freeze movement did not represent all of the movement, the Soviets did use the movement's desire to stop nuclear weapons to their advantage. One of the Communist Party's chief ideologues, Mikhail Suslov, said that

particular attention must be given to bringing into the peace movement trade unions and women's, youth, co-operative, sports, cultural, and educational, religious and other organizations as well as scientists, writers, journalists, cultural workers, members of parliament and other political and public men and women who come forward in defense of peace and against war... Wide application should be made of the new and effective forms of mass struggles for peace which have fully justified themselves, such as peace committees in town and country, petitions and protests, popular referendums- such as are widely practiced in France and Italy. Publication and distribution of literature exposing war preparations; collection of funds for the struggle for peace; organization of boycotts of films, newspapers, books, magazines,

⁵⁴ Wittner; Voters approved the freeze referendum in Wisconsin in September 1982 and, in November, passed it in eight out of another nine states where it was on the ballot, Robert Kleidman, *Organizing for Peace: Neutrality, the Test Ban, and the Freeze* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 154; John Herbers, "Widespread Vote Urges Nuclear Freeze," *New York Times*, November 4, 1982, <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/11/04/us/widespread-vote-urges-nuclear-freeze.html>.

⁵⁵ Wittner.

⁵⁶ Don Oberdorfer, *From the Cold War to a New Era: The United States and the Soviet Union, 1983-1991*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 68.

broadcasting companies, institutions, and individuals that preach a new war- all these are vital duties of the Communist and Workers' parties.⁵⁷

The Freeze movement eventually organized into established anti-war organizations in the United States, including those that were partially Soviet-influenced and -funded. The World Peace Council (WPC) was the main tool for Soviet access and influence with origins as far back the 1940s.⁵⁸ However, historically and in modern times, the World Peace Council was and is “an anti-imperialist, democratic, independent and non-aligned international movement of mass action,” including for the elimination of nuclear weapons.⁵⁹ Later in the 1980s, this organization created the U.S. Peace Council (USPC). Importantly, the Freeze movement was not centered around the WPC or USPC, nor did those organizations represent more than a small portion of the movement to ban nuclear weapons, but this thesis closely considered both organizations for the purposes of understanding Soviet influence attempts. The main target of the Soviet effort to propagandize the Freeze movement was the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).⁶⁰ The WPC, also funded by the KGB in multiple key locations around the world, used the slogan of “Say No to Star Wars.”⁶¹ This campaign was directly engaged against the United States, the U.K., and France. The WPC continued the pressure in the late 1970s, calling for protests against the neutron bomb and publishing a newsletter, “Peace Courier,” that highlighted the protests.⁶² In 1982, the USPC urged its members in a formal letter to support disarmament and made the following demands: “1. Stop and Reverse the Arms Race, and 2. Cut the Military Budget; Transfer Funds to Human Needs.”⁶³

⁵⁷ Herbert Romerstein, *The World Peace Council and Soviet “Active Measures,”* The Hale Foundation, CIA-RDP90-00806R0002007200005-5 (unpublished part of a larger study to be accomplished by the National Strategy Information Center in 1983, marked as approved for release June 15, 2010), <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90-00806R000200720005-5.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Romerstein, *The World Peace Council and Soviet “Active Measures,”* 1–12.

⁵⁹ “Who We Are,” The World Peace Council, <https://www.wpc-in.org/about-wpc>.

⁶⁰ Romerstein, *The World Peace Council and Soviet “Active Measures,”* 7–12, 15–24.

⁶¹ Snyder, *Warriors of Disinformation*, 120.

⁶² Romerstein, *The World Peace Council and Soviet “Active Measures,”* 16–17.

⁶³ Wittner, “The Nuclear Freeze and Its Impact.”

The public advocacy and messaging on nuclear weapons and war, regardless of political position, relied heavily on attempts to influence media and social discourse. This occurred in various forms, including rallies, protests, townhall meetings, pamphlets, newspaper articles, news broadcasts, and political cartoons.⁶⁴ The activists were caricatured in a wave of cartoons that freely publicized the ongoing Cold War and nuclear war threat as shown in Figure 1.⁶⁵



Figure 1. Example of a historical cartoon that satirizes and utterly misconstrues the Freeze movement and the arms verification process⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Wittner.

⁶⁵ Gamson and Stuart, "Media Discourse as a Symbolic Contest," 82.

⁶⁶ "Political Cartoons: Ronald Reagan," *Orlando Sentinel*, accessed April 20, 2019, <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/politics/os-reagan-editorial-cartoons-dana-summers-20120911-photogallery.html>.

The Freeze movement era also created an academic interest in the effects of nuclear war that documented the psychological impacts, media dissemination flow, and collective action of anti-nuclear groups. In 1998, for example, American scholar Jeffrey Knopf's mixed-methods research concluded that there was a significant impact of societal activism on arms control and disarmament within the United States.⁶⁷

Gamson and Stuart describe this Cold War media, specifically cartoons, by its framing, in which they describe a package with internal structure surrounding a central concept or frame of concern. Each package offers its own set of symbols, which suggest the core concept and enables the use of metaphors, catch phrase, or similar imaging.⁶⁸ U.S. media core themes throughout the Cold War included Soviet expansion, protracted conflict [unlimited world communization], and Armageddon [religious variant]. Soviet expansion led the U.S. media theme, which Gamson and Stuart discuss:

The issue is what's the best way to deal with an expansionist Soviet Union so that it will eventually change its ways. The United States doesn't start fights but we can't be pushed around either. Nor are we willing to see our friends bullied—we have a moral responsibility to protect the weak to the extent that we can. The Soviet Union is a classic expansionist power seeking to extend its control whenever it can make or exploit an opportunity. The best way to deal with a bully like that is to be strong and provocative. The danger of was comes when, by our appearing weak, the bully is encouraged to take advantage and then we can't avoid fighting back. Keeping U.S. nuclear forces equal or superior to Soviet nuclear forces will deter Soviet adventurism and best keep the nuclear peace.⁶⁹

According to Gamson and Stuart, then, the question was how to deal with a bully—one with nuclear capability.

In contrast, a separate package of themes emerged from the peace movement efforts. Although these groups were relatively underfunded, they produced remarkably powerful packages that encouraged people to mobilize in support of the anti-nuclear

⁶⁷ Knopf, *Domestic Society and International Cooperation*, 247.

⁶⁸ Gamson and Stuart, "Media Discourse as a Symbolic Contest," 60.

⁶⁹ Gamson and Stuart.

weapons effort. For example, Gamson and Stuart give the following example of the media packaging by peace movements:

No nation can ensure its own security at the expense of another. Common security necessitates real steps toward nuclear and conventional disarmament, economic and social development, and active conflict resolution. Because there is no possible defense against nuclear attack, military power and nuclear weapons cannot make a nation fundamentally secure. A militarized approach to security on both sides has promoted global polarization and an ongoing danger of the ultimate nuclear catastrophe. United States policy toward the Soviet Union must reject dangerous confrontation and promote mutual cooperation, trade, cultural interaction, problem solving, and peacemaking.⁷⁰

2. Star Wars Influencers: President Gorbachev's Media Freedom Attempts, President Reagan's "Hot Mic," and the INF

President Gorbachev, in his deliberate acts to bring *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) to the USSR, opened up a seemingly small opportunity to begin allowing non-state media. Even well-known U.S. journalists and media executives, such as Ted Turner, engaged Russian leadership to gain advantage in burgeoning media markets.⁷¹ The attempt to break into Russian markets ultimately failed due to the strictly limited allowance of foreign investment and lack of connections to the Russian oligarchy.⁷² Gorbachev's openness caused much disarray as media, in particular *Vzglyad*, with a striking contrast to Russia's *Vzglyad* narrative today,⁷³ enabled a wide-ranging Western and/or open discussion about information that was normally withheld from the public.⁷⁴ The small exceptions to making the media amicable to publishing controversial pieces enabled a broader effort that challenged Gorbachev's effort to control the information narrative.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Gamson and Stuart.

⁷¹ Zassoursky, *Media and Power*, 200–221.

⁷² Zassoursky.

⁷³ *Vzglyad* is now a pro-Russian regime outlet and somewhat conspiratorial.

⁷⁴ Scott Shane, *Dismantling Utopia: How Information Ended the Soviet Union* (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1995), 156–172.

⁷⁵ Shane, *Dismantling Utopia*.

President Reagan was known for his eagerness to label the evil of the Soviet empire, but he also made very open remarks that received a quick-fire response within Soviet news. One example is President Reagan's offhand radio remarks in which he stated, "My fellow Americans, I am pleased to tell you today that I've signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes." In a staunch response, the Soviet official press fired back:

*TASS is authorized to state that the Soviet Union deplores the U.S. President's invective, unprecedentedly hostile toward the U.S.S.R. and dangerous to the cause of peace. This conduct is incompatible with the high responsibility borne by leaders of states, particularly nuclear powers, for the destinies of their own people and for the destinies of mankind.*⁷⁶

The U.S. Department of State said that "the Soviet Union is blowing this subject way out of proportion for propaganda purposes." The administration, notably President Reagan, apologized for the unintended effects, yet this type of statement occurred more than once during his time as president.⁷⁷

The INF Treaty served as a ceiling on nuclear efforts for the following decades until the most recent U.S. withdrawal,⁷⁸ meaning that the Freeze movement did accomplish a substantial part of its goals. When the Cold War ended, the United States claimed success and realigned its geopolitical ties around the world. Previous Soviet states also sought new relevancy and realigned to foster economic growth and cultural globalization.

D. CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The Soviet oligarchy's use of Cold War information strategy serves as a critical opportunity in learning to shift into an assertive and timely offensive information strategy. This chapter discussed the historical height of nuclear armament and the tit-for-tat media war between the Soviet Union, while international and domestic peace movements, particularly the Freeze movement, aimed to eliminate nuclear arms. Both governments and

⁷⁶ Oberdorfer, *From the Cold War to a New Era*, 86.

⁷⁷ Oberdorfer.

⁷⁸ Andrew E. Kramer and Megan Specia, "What Is the I.N.F. Treaty and Why Does It Matter?," *New York Times*, February 2, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/01/world/europe/inf-treaty.html>.

Freeze movement organizations used media in various forms to publicized their narratives while gaining needed support. This chapter serves as a foundation in understanding today's tit-for-tat media and the discourse within social media about strategic nuclear weapons. Chapter III provides a detailed description of the existing Russian government narratives about strategic nuclear weapons and discusses the methods of influence within the content.

III. MEDIA FRAMING AND NARRATIVE

Following Chapter II's historical snapshot, Chapter III focuses on media content generated by Russian state-affiliated media reporting on two specific matters, the Status-6 "reveal" and the INF suspension to clarify Russia's potential objectives, narratives, and influence methods to inform and gain support from select groups and individuals. The chapter interprets news media content by applying various theoretical perspectives, which form a basis for understanding Russia's media methodologies. For example, *framing* is a way to understand media beyond basic biases and in consideration of cognitive domains while relating the presentation of the content to the broader cultural or political context.⁷⁹ In the words of Erving Goffman, framing defines "a situation" in which disputants, or belligerents, defend their interpretation.⁸⁰ Russia's cultural, sociological, political, and psychological framing aimed at influencing audiences is tailored to instill fear, reflect regime power, and to discredit the West. Each frame, or, in this case, each piece of media narrative, is bound together with various aspects of "footing"⁸¹ or "alignments between one another as well as between themselves and what is said."⁸² Although Russia's content is framed to varying degrees, each actor or social media account, *the broadcast node*, demonstrates similar pro-Russian and anti-West narratives. Following a note on methodology, the chapter examines Russia's framing and narrative, psychological framing, influence tactics, and the audiences.

⁷⁹ Stephen D. Reese, "Prologue-Framing public life: A bridging model for media research," in *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*, ed. Stephen D. Reese, Oscar H. Gandy Jr., and August E. Grant (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2001).

⁸⁰ Cynthia Gordan, "Framing and Positioning," in *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, ed. Deborah Tannen, Heidi Eherberger Hamilton, and Deborah Schiffrin, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015).

⁸¹ Gordan, 325.

⁸² Gordan.

A. METHODOLOGY

This chapter's theory includes, but is not limited to, the *CNN Effect*,⁸³ principles of influence and persuasion,⁸⁴ media, cultural, and psychological framing, and social movement theory. The thesis uses these theories and methodology based on historical understanding of Soviet and Russian influence efforts throughout the Cold War while considering the existing empirical research and lessons learned in opportunity, access, and speed, enabled by today's technologies. In recent years, the West has closely considered and recognized Russia's ability to seize resources and initiative in efforts to influence political processes. This chapter, therefore, applies historical and recently published scholarly evidence and primary research in consideration of Russia's orchestrated media strategy on the topic of nuclear weapons. Russian leadership and opponent narrative acts as major leading factors upon the media, a dependent variable.

Russia's current-day media empire developed out of its Soviet past, and some media organizations from that time still exist and espouse similar themes as during the Cold War. After struggling after the USSR's dissolution, state media revolutionized and reorganized in the following two decades. In the early 21st century, Russia's media construct shifted under the control of the Russian regime and oligarchy. Organizations such as *TASS*, derived from the former long form of *Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union*, *Vzglyad*, and *RIA Novosti*, evolved over time and fluctuated in their ownership. Media such as *RT* (formerly *Russia Today*) and *Sputnik* are tailored toward Western audiences and have branches that specifically target U.S. audiences. For additional Russian-affiliated news organizations, see the website of the Federation of American Scientists (FAS).⁸⁵

The Soviets actively used Far-East media outlets for the dissemination of news stories, such as the example of the false story of the U.S. government developing AIDS to kill African-

⁸³ Eytan E. Gilboa et al., "Moving Media and Conflict Studies beyond the CNN Effect," *Review of International Studies* 42, no. 4 (October 2016): 654–72, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S026021051600005X>.

⁸⁴ Robert B. Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, Rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), xi-16.

⁸⁵ "Russia—Source Descriptors of Key Russian Media," Open Source Center, December 6, 2007, <https://fas.org/irp/dni/osc/russian-media.pdf>, 15.

Americans.⁸⁶ This thesis's primary research shows that Russian themes and similar content are still being espoused from Indian and Far-East affiliated outlets; whether because of Far Eastern independent efforts or possibly cooption by Russia's media, media content is released and further disseminated within Far-East news outlets in English, such as the theindiansubcontinent.com and *The Hindu*, and much of it is exaggerated and conspiratorial.⁸⁷ The thesis further explores theindiansubcontinent.com in Chapter IV.

The methods and themes used to diffuse content on the Status-6 (see Figure 2 and Figure 3) and the INF dissolution differ in the following way: the Status-6 is presented as threatening weaponry to instill fear in audiences while making the information about the weapon itself scarce and esoteric. The INF content, however, while still seemingly aimed at controlling the narrative, is deliberately and consistently disseminated with persuasion rooted in authority and social proof.⁸⁸ Robert Cialdini defines authority as the belligerent's, or marketer's, reinforcement and requirement of the audience's submission and obedience.⁸⁹ *Social proof* is loosely defined as an individual's belief that something is true based on the acceptance and deliverance by others he or she trusts, often because of personal and cultural bias.⁹⁰ The internet provides opportunity for multiple trolls, bots, and seemingly persuasive authoritative figures, including seemingly educated figures, to recite, share, and endorse Russian media content.

⁸⁶ United States Information Agency, *Soviet Active Measures in the Era of Glasnost*.

⁸⁷ "Status-6 - TheIndianSubcontinent," search, IndianSubcontinent.com, accessed August 3, 2019, <https://www.theindiansubcontinent.com/search?searchword=status-6&searchphrase=all>; "Existence of Russian Doomsday Torpedo Confirmed," *The Hindu*, January 18, 2018, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/existence-of-russian-doomsday-torpedo-confirmed/article22465526.ece>.

⁸⁸ Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, 114–166, 208–236.

⁸⁹ Cialdini, 208–236.

⁹⁰ Cialdini, 114–166.

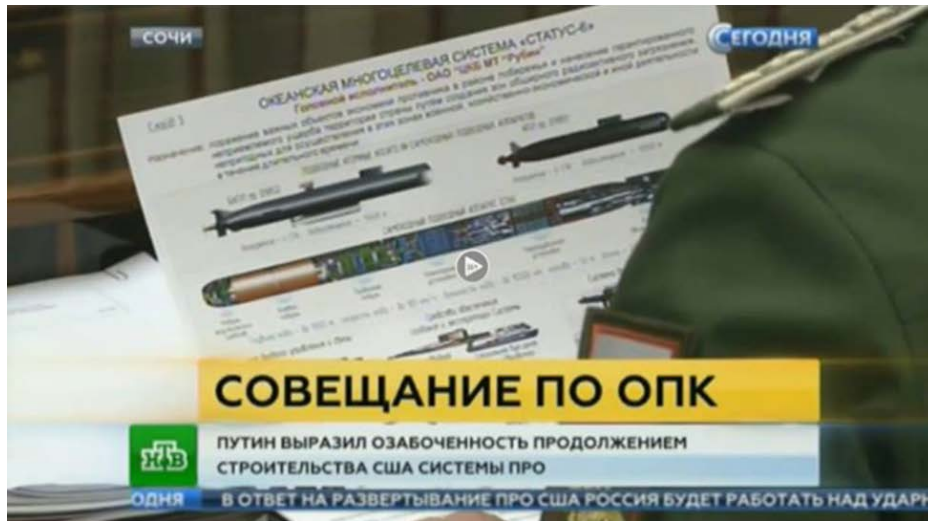


Figure 2. The “accidentally” and widely disseminated photo of the Status-6 autonomous nuclear torpedo bomb originating from Russian state media and posted on Twitter in 2015⁹¹

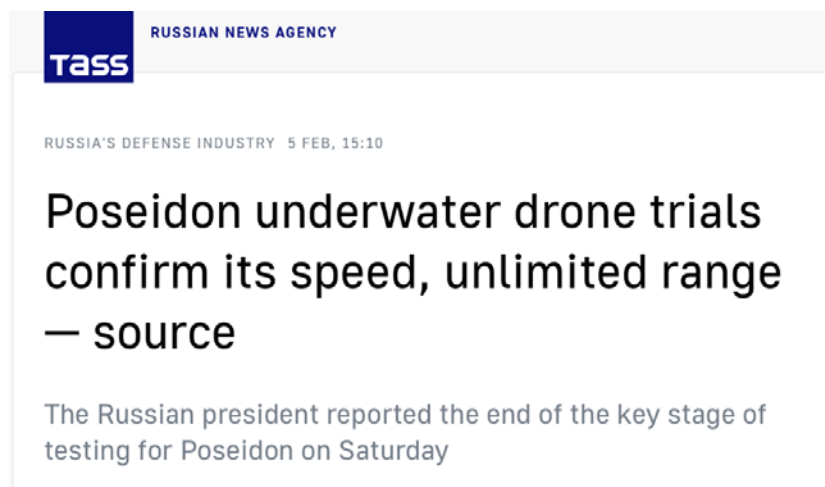


Figure 3. Russian-state news headline about the Status-6, Poseidon, torpedo⁹²

⁹¹ Source: Pavel Podvig (@russianforces), “Today in Sochi Putin is shown proposal for Status-6 - a massive ‘dirty bomb’ weapon system developed by Rubin,” Twitter, November 10, 2015, 12:17 p.m., <https://twitter.com/russianforces/status/664175004670644225>.

⁹² Source: “Poseidon Underwater Drone Trials Confirm Its Speed, Unlimited Range,” TASS, February 5, 2019, <https://tass.com/defense/1043379> (October 22, 2019).



Figure 4. Russian-state media photo about U.S. intelligence of Poseidon⁹³

B. INFLUENCE TACTICS

Robert Cialdini's ideas about influence provide a simple way to better understand and categorize the persuasion tactics employed by Russia's media. The media content on Status-6 uses principles and methods of authority, scarcity, channeled attention, threats, and even sexual lures.⁹⁴ By agenda-setting, Russia's media selects only specific details to share with its audience, details that benefit the Russian regime's political agenda. Initial reporting of the Status-6 occurred a few months prior to the accidental reveal; Bill Gertz used insider knowledge to detail a similar weapon under the name Kanyon in the *Washington Free Beacon*, though it failed to conjure major attention.⁹⁵ Furthermore, the idea of a similar weapon was envisioned by a Russian nuclear scientist, Andrei Sakharov,

⁹³ Source: "Russian Underwater Drone Poseidon Keeps U.S. Intel on the Alert," *Sputnik News*, March 26, 2019, <https://sputniknews.com/science/201903261073561919-udnerwater-drone-poseidon-intelligence-us/>.

⁹⁴ "Authority," "scarcity," "attention," "threatening," and "sexual lure" are terms from two of Cialdini's books on influence: *Influence and Pre-Suasion*.

⁹⁵ Jeffrey Lewis, "Putin's Doomsday Machine," *Foreign Policy*, November 12, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/11/12/putins-doomsday-machine-nuclear-weapon-us-russia/>; Bill Gertz, September 8, 2015, "Russia Building Nuclear-Armed Drone Submarine." *Washington Free Beacon*, <https://freebeacon.com/national-security/russia-building-nuclear-armed-drone-submarine/> (November 21, 2018).

in the 1950s, suggesting this weapon has been in development for a long time.⁹⁶ The supposed accidental reveal of the Status-6, the Russian government's reaction to withdrawal of related media on the reveal, and framing the weapon as unique and unlike that of any other nation-state all evidences the principle of scarcity as construed as a sense of secrecy. Publicly available information about this weapon is scarce yet what is available instills fear and concern.⁹⁷ This unique nuclear autonomous torpedo bomb being only partially revealed and supposedly as an accident at that apparently serves to conjure interest of an exaggerated weapon. Shortly after President Putin's early 2018 speech on Russia's strategic weapons capabilities, U.S. Defense Secretary James N. Mattis stated that he assessed Russia's military capability as unchanged and "still years away," reflecting little or no concern of Russia's actual ability to shift the balance of power.⁹⁸

Violence and sexual seduction are also evident in Russia's online propaganda, which often leverages physically attractive women to espouse some nuclear-related content in both English and Russian.⁹⁹ For example, anyone with internet access can view Maria Katasonova in a YouTube video promising that Russia will destroy the world if it loses the fight in Ukraine.¹⁰⁰ While originally posted in Russian, the video has also been translated and further shared. Evidently, though not in all cases, Russia's media strategy includes using attractive women engaging in face-to-face communications.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ "Status-6 / Kanyon - Ocean Multipurpose System - Russian and Soviet Nuclear Forces," GlobalSecurity.org, November 21, 2018, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/russia/status-6.htm>.

⁹⁷ Cialdini, *Influence*, 20.

⁹⁸ "Mattis Sees No Change in Russian Military Capability in Light of Putin," U.S. Department of Defense, accessed October 31, 2019, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/News/Article/Article/1463160/mattis-sees-no-change-in-russian-military-capability-in-light-of-putins-speech/>.

⁹⁹ "Novorossiia Wishes Merry Christmas and Promises to Destroy the World," January 13, 2015, Free Donbas, video, 0:57, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpcRgutKb3U>.

¹⁰⁰ Free Donbas.

¹⁰¹ Dorough-Lewis, "Exploring Identity and Negotiation among Women Military Interrogators"; Carolyn M. Byerly and Karen Ross, *Women and Media: A Critical Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), chapter 3.

C. RUSSIA'S FRAMING AND NARRATIVE

The Russian regime enables media and strategic narratives that parallel its goals for perceived regime power and also anti-West rhetoric in a form of direct strategic communication. The thesis considers research on Russia's consistent media themes that target U.S. audiences as a dependent variable, reflecting the regime's strategic discourse with adversarial state leaders.¹⁰² The independent variables that contribute to the media output are: the consideration of Russia's highly influential-on-its-media government, the media oligarchy, Russian nationalism, U.S. media and press releases, U.S. leaders' statements, historic use of conspiratorial framing, and the ease with which today's social media and the internet can diffuse information. Russia's press is highly restricted, degrading its ability to espouse countering views.¹⁰³ Mainstream broadcasting, such as *RT* or *Sputnik*, share content generally perceived as less conspiratorial but often limited in truth while other more conspiratorial outlets, such as *lenta.ru* or *Vzglyad*, freely produce and disseminate conspiratorial content, which is then often shared by trolls and bots.¹⁰⁴ As became apparent during this primary research, some of these websites and nodes also come from more than Russia's media; India- and Indonesia-affiliated websites and nodes also produce extreme conspiratorial content, including advertisements, to promote nuclear-weapons related content designed to instill fear. Today's search engines and web browsers make it even easier to translate the content into English, meaning that Russia's media content is that much more accessible.

¹⁰² Scheufele, D. A. "Framing as a Theory of Media Effects." *Journal of Communication* 49(1): 103–22, (February 7, 2006) (July 30, 2019): <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1999.tb02784.x>; Pamela J. Shoemaker and Stephen D. Reese, *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influence on Mass Media Content*, 2nd ed. (White Plains, NY: Longman Publishers, 1996); Gaye Tuchman and Barbara Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1978).; Zasurskiĭ, *Media and Power in Post-Soviet Russia*, 3–114.

¹⁰³ "Russia Profile," Freedom House, April 27, 2017, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2017/russia>.

¹⁰⁴ "Disinformation, 'Fake News' and Influence Campaigns on Twitter," Knight Foundation, October 4, 2018, <https://knightfoundation.org/reports/disinformation-fake-news-and-influence-campaigns-on-twitter>.

Russian media's agenda-setting¹⁰⁵ and conspiratorial framing¹⁰⁶ within the media is also not new, but recent studies illustrate how convincing "fake news" and cultural framing can be at placing a desired narrative simply and realistically in viewers' minds. Other scholarly material, from RAND and others, reflects similar framing of content.¹⁰⁷ During the Cold War, the Soviets used media disinformation in attempts to cover up the crumbling Soviet economy; this method is still used by Russian media today.¹⁰⁸ William Gamson and Andre Modigliani were the first scholars to decipher media in the larger context of public opinion on nuclear power, and their works provide a relative way to deconstruct today's Russian media.¹⁰⁹

With multiple outlets, Russia's media espouses thematic content in tit-for-tat commentary relative to U.S. actions on a strategic scale. Although many of these themes seem synchronized, individual media and key speaker notes also reveal a less coordinated effort. Recently, specific to the INF treaty suspension, Stopfake.org discredited Russian attempts to control the media narrative.¹¹⁰ Stopfake.org also identified contradictory information stated by the commander of Russia's missile forces: on January 17, 2019, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister stated on air that the 9M729 missile "has never been

¹⁰⁵ Robert B. Cialdini, *Pre-Suasion: A Revolutionary Way to Influence and Persuade* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016), Location 586–620, Kindle; Anjalie Field et al., "Framing and Agenda-Setting in Russian News: A Computational Analysis of Intricate Political Strategies," in Proceedings of the 2018 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing D18-1393 (Brussels, October–November 2018): 3570–80, <https://doi.org/10.18653/v1/D18-1393>.

¹⁰⁶ Ilya Yablokov, "Conspiracy Theories as a Russian Public Diplomacy Tool: The Case of Russia Today (RT)," *Politics* 35, no. 3–4 (2015): 301–15, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.12097>; Knight Foundation, "Disinformation, 'Fake News' and Influence Campaigns on Twitter"; Richard Sakwa, "Conspiracy Narratives as a Mode of Engagement in International Politics: The Case of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War," *Russian Review* 71 no. 4 (October 2012): 581–609, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23263931>.

¹⁰⁷ Knight Foundation, "Disinformation, 'Fake News' and Influence Campaigns on Twitter"; Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews, *The Russian "Firehose of Falsehood" Propaganda Model: Why It Might Work and Options to Counter It*, PE-198-OSD (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.7249/PE198>.

¹⁰⁸ Shane, *Dismantling Utopia*, 106; Field et al., "Framing and Agenda-Setting in Russian News."

¹⁰⁹ William A. Gamson and Andre Modigliani, "Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach," *American Journal of Sociology* 95, no. 1 (July 1989): 1–37, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2780405>.

¹¹⁰ StopFake.org, "Russia Demonstrates Missile Claiming No Violation of INF – Only to Prove Opposite." January 29, 2019, <https://www.stopfake.org/en/russia-demonstrates-missile-claiming-no-violation-of-inf-only-to-prove-opposite/>.

tested for a range banned.”¹¹¹ Not long after, Lieutenant-General Mikail Matveyevsky stated that “all launches of ground-to-ground missiles were conducted at a range not exceeding the range of the INF limits. The only exceptions are missile launches of the Strategic Rocket Forces, the notifications for which were sent to the U.S.”¹¹²

Specific to Russia’s nuclear-weapons-related content, themes capitalize on principles of authority and often use fake (nonexistent) authorities and intentionally misquote various officials to meet the regime’s agenda. Keeping in mind the influence tactics previously mentioned, the media themes have also seen a similar trend, particularly in mirror-imaging, in society at large and serve as an extension of Russia’s efforts to shape societal ideals.¹¹³ The thesis extrapolated the following themes from various Russian media,¹¹⁴ and are considered in the context of more recent Russian media as an extension of foreign policy during the tit-for-tat media about the INF Treaty.¹¹⁵

1. INF Themes

- The United States violated the INF treaty
- Authorities confirm Russia’s compliance and obligation to the INF
- The U.S. INF suspension caused Russia’s INF suspension

¹¹¹ StopFake.org.

¹¹² “Минобороны Предъявило Доказательства Отсутствия Нарушений ДРСМД Со Стороны РФ,” (The Ministry of Defense Presented Evidence of the absence of violations of the INF Treaty by the Russian Federation) accessed August 2, 2019, <https://tvzvezda.ru/news/forces/content/2019123126-DiO1a.html>; “Russia Demonstrates Missile Claiming No Violation of INF – Only to Prove Opposite,” StopFake.Org, January 29, 2019, <https://www.stopfake.org/en/russia-demonstrates-missile-claiming-no-violation-of-inf-only-to-prove-opposite/>.

¹¹³ Urie Bronfenbrenner, “The Mirror Image in Soviet-American Relations: A Social Psychologist’s Report,” *Journal of Social Issues* 17, no. 3 (April 14, 2010): 45–56, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1961.tb01682.x>; Mikhail Tsypkin, “Russia, America and Missile Defense,” *Defense & Security Analysis* 28, no. 1 (March 1, 2012): 55–64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2012.651379>; Sarah Oates, “Russian Media in the Digital Age: Propaganda Rewired,” *Russian Politics* 1, no. 4 (December 30, 2016): 405, 406, <https://doi.org/10.1163/2451-8921-00104004>.

¹¹⁴ Focused qualitative review for the above specific narratives was on *RT* and *Sputnik*.

¹¹⁵ Yablokov, “Conspiracy Theories as a Russian Public Diplomacy Tool.”

- The U.S. will place missiles in Russia's near-abroad
- The U.S. is Russia's competitor and a world aggressor¹¹⁶
- The NATO alliance threatens Russia and its partners
- The INF demise boosts the U.S. defense industry

2. Status-6 Themes

- Russian media accidentally revealed the Status-6
- Russia is technologically advanced and capable of nuclear attacks
- Status-6 can destroy the United States and the West
- Russia's government is a top nuclear world power
- The U.S. is Russia's competitor and a world aggressor
- The NATO alliance threatens Russia and its partners

D. PSYCHOLOGICAL FRAMING

Scholars argue that even the idea of nuclear warfare can have serious effects on the human mind. In 2001, Charles A. Salter said, "Most people fear a nuclear/radiological threat even more than a conventional explosion due both to their inability to perceive the presence of radiation with the ordinary human senses and to concerns about perceived long-lasting radiation effects."¹¹⁷ The psychological impacts and fear of nuclear proliferation or use are the focus of a handful of authors who agree on a significant set of worsened

¹¹⁶ Russian media also instigate the topic with inclusion of evidence with the first nuclear attack on Japan

¹¹⁷ Charles A. Salter, "Psychological Effects of Nuclear and Radiological Warfare," *Military Medicine* 166, supp. 2 (December 2001): 17–18, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11778420>; Tsytkin, "Russia, America and Missile Defense."

mental health issues over the concern of overwhelming medical emergencies and extreme dark fantasies in the minds of some adults.¹¹⁸

In fact, the majority of the U.S. public apparently believes that the next major attack against the United States will be from nuclear weapons. According to Pew Survey results,

most say that war, terrorism and environmental catastrophes are at least probable by the year 2050. Nearly six-in-ten (58%) see another world war as definite or probable; 53% say the same about the prospect for a major terrorist attack on the United States involving nuclear weapons.¹¹⁹

Also, according to surveys from 2010 and 2015, people believe that,

while many believe that the specter of large-scale nuclear war is now behind us, not all Americans agree. A 2010 CNN/Opinion Research Corporation survey found that 12% think a nuclear war is very likely in the next decade, 26% somewhat likely, 29% not too likely, and only 32% said it was not likely at all. And as recently as last November, a 60 Minutes/*Vanity Fair* Poll found that 35% most fear a nuclear war putting an end to humanity, compared to 23% who worry about a deadly virus, 15% the Rapture, 15% global warming, and 8% an asteroid hitting the Earth.¹²⁰

In a recent 2018 accidental false nuclear alarm in Hawaii, citizens demonstrated that they did not understand how to react and displayed frantic concern; analysis of the reactions via Twitter reflected widespread unpreparedness.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ John E. Mack, "The Perception of U.S.-Soviet Intentions and Other Psychological Dimensions of the Nuclear Arms Race," *The American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 52 (October 1982), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.1982.tb01448.x>; Susan T. Fiske, "People's Reactions to Nuclear War: Implications for Psychologists," *American Psychologist* 42, no. 3 (1987): 207–17, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.42.3.207>; Salter, "Psychological Effects."

¹¹⁹ "World War III and Nuclear Terrorism," Pew Research Center, July 14, 2010, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2010/07/14/world-war-iii-and-nuclear-terrorism/>; "Public Sees a Future Full of Promise and Peril," Pew Research Center, June 22, 2010, <https://www.pewresearch.org/2010/06/22/public-sees-a-future-full-of-promise-and-peril/>.

¹²⁰ "Public Opinion about Using Nuclear Weapons," Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, February 8, 2015, <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/blog/public-opinion-about-using-nuclear-weapons>.

¹²¹ Jeanna Bryner, "Hawaii's False Missile Alert Shows Americans Have No Idea What to Do in Nuclear Attack," *Live Science*, February 21, 2019, <https://www.livescience.com/64828-false-nuclear-missile-alert-not-prepared.html>; Rachel Becker, "CDC Confirms That Hawaii's False Missile Alarm Was Scary," *The Verge*, February 21, 2019, <https://www.theverge.com/2019/2/21/18234901/cdc-hawaii-false-missile-alarm-reactions>.

Russia’s careful releases of information—such as target locations on the U.S. coast—are instrumental in fostering fear abroad and in the near-abroad. Chapter V describes how this tactic is used in deception and psychological warfare. According to Weisburd, Watts, and Berger, both *RT* and *Sputnik* promoted reporting on a false bomb attack on Disney in Paris; the authors claim it caused stock markets to drop.¹²² If accurate, *RT*’s and *Sputnik*’s strategy clearly signaled their ability to leverage psychological framing for immediate effects. James Thompson published studies on the impact of this fear, on the production of stress, and on negotiations and psychological processes that are negatively affected by bias and cognitive dissonance.¹²³

The Russian media reporting on Russia’s autonomous Poseidon possibly reflects an attempt to shape perceptions of specific audiences that oppose autonomous weapons development. Kevin Young and Charli Carpenter conducted a major survey to determine people’s perceptions of autonomous weapons and concluded that “consumption of frightening ‘armed AI’ films is associated with greater opposition to autonomous weapons.”¹²⁴ The counter-movement against fully autonomous weapons, including groups such as Human Rights Watch, portrays the weapons as negative and, according to Young and Carpenter, these perceptions evidentially reflect electoral behavior and impact on foreign policy.¹²⁵

E. THE AUDIENCES

Russia has long tried to influence and disinform its own citizens as a way of testing its content and to increase domestic support for the regime. This research reveals that Russia’s nuclear-related content, specific to Russian audiences and in Russian, is highly critical of the United States while reflecting a strategic elitist view of Russia’s hegemony.

¹²² Weisburd, Watts, and Berger, “Trolling for Trump.”

¹²³ James A. Thompson, *Psychological Aspects of Nuclear War* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 1985), 2–11 and 72–79.

¹²⁴ Kevin L Young and Charli Carpenter, “Does Science Fiction Affect Political Fact? Yes and No: A Survey Experiment on ‘Killer Robots,’” *International Studies Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (August 2018): 562–76, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqy028>.

¹²⁵ Young and Carpenter.

English-language content is subtler and can often be difficult to debunk. Content is framed in simple ways to reach a large variety of audiences.

Russia's media targets the following main audiences: domestic populations to increase nationalism, near-abroad populations to increase fear and recruit Russian ethnicities,¹²⁶ Western audiences to gain sympathy and to instill fear of a hegemonic power, and Western decision-makers and academics to achieve political objectives. This thesis focuses on the last two, Russia's efforts to influence U.S. audiences, specifically the following groups.

Secondary audiences, who serve as conduits of potential collective action to primary audiences:

- scholars, academics, and historians
- general population and voters
- thinktank members
- Russian expatriates and sympathizers

Primary audiences, who serve as policymakers or in other roles within the U.S. government:

- the Executive branch
- the Legislative branch
- Department of Defense officials
- U.S. nuclear policy officials

Nancy Baym points out that social media provides an extension to one's life and also provides new social norms and allowable fantasy projection.¹²⁷ This opportunity can

¹²⁶ Helmus et al., *Russian Social Media Influence*, 21.

¹²⁷ Nancy K. Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015).

then be used for good or ill, such as what the world has witnessed in Russia's use of coordinators, trolls, and media co-opters.¹²⁸ Over the past three decades, scholars have grappled with the *CNN Effect*, the ability of media to shape policymakers' perspectives and actions; this theory also applies to the Status-6 and INF media cycles.¹²⁹ This tactic exists in the nuclear discourse and the networks that promote Russian nuclear-topic content.

F. CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The media content disseminated by *RT*, *Sputnik*, and others illustrates a highly active cycle, reflecting themes derived from inter-relations between Russia and the United States (and the West); however, the Russian content clearly elects to publish themes only in the interest of Russian government and not of transparency. Two major topics, Status-6 and the INF, demonstrate clear messaging that has directly contributed the framework of the U.S. National Security Strategy and the Nuclear Posture Review. Chapter IV more clearly articulates and illustrates the existing audiences and the relationship to Russia's media networks, further exploring the potential for online actors to act as conduits for change within U.S. political processes.

¹²⁸ Helmus et al., *Russian Social Media Influence*.

¹²⁹ Eytan Gilboa, "The CNN Effect: The Search for a Communication Theory of International Relations," *Political Communication* 22, no. 1 (2005): 27–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600590908429>; Steven Livingston, "Diplomacy in the New Information Environment," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 4, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2003): 111–117, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43133532>.

IV. SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS OF RUSSIA'S MEDIA TWITTER NETWORK

In previous chapters, the thesis discussed historical patterns of the Soviet and Russian regimes' information warfare and media and media content analysis. The USSR used disinformation to influence audiences, both government decisionmakers and mass publics, in support of the regime's political goals. With the explosion of both the Internet and social media, Russia has taken advantage of widespread, often anonymous access, to information-dissemination channels. Recent election-meddling provides insight into the methods used by the RF to assemble groups of people, to diffuse information, and to gain access to audiences around the world. The thesis's exploratory research of Russian Twitter broadcast news media nodes¹³⁰ provides additional insight into the effort to diffuse Russian regime narratives to Western audiences. Determining influence in a conventional sense, determining identities and broader and more orchestrated efforts by the Russian government to influence U.S. policy, is outside the thesis's scope. Instead, Chapter IV provides the reader a snapshot, a specific case study, of the online social network (OSN) and modeling algorithms to determine prominent actors within the OSN and to, in turn, uncover the possibilities and opportunities for Russian influence. The research determines overall network centralization and the ego networks¹³¹ of Russian media accounts, illuminating Russian information operations. Following a results summary and notes on methodology, Chapter IV specifically provides four forms of information: first, the quantitative analysis and code book in seven sections, data boundaries, data source, data, quantitative understanding of overall network, subgroups of the network, key nodes of the overall network, and Russia's media ego networks; second, analysis of social media; third, analysis of Russia's attempts to influence OSN through advertisement; and, last, the potential for OSN to lead to physical mobilization.

¹³⁰ Node is also interchangeable with actor, user account, or agent.

¹³¹ Terminology of network centralization and ego-networks is further explained by the CORE Lab, Daniel Cunningham, and Sean Everton.; Daniel Cunningham, Sean Everton, & Philip Murphy, *Understanding Dark Networks: A Strategic Framework for the Use of Social Network Analysis* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016), 45, Kindle, Location 554- 870, 1329–1372 of 7566.

A. RESULTS SUMMARY AND NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

The results reflect that both Russian state-affiliated media broadcast nodes and foreign and domestic diplomatic and defense-oriented nodes contribute to the diffusion of Russian media and propaganda. Furthermore, Russian foreign policy nodes are also deliberately spreading content and are highly central¹³² in the network. For example, far-East media and political nodes, including but not limited to the *Hindu Times*, *Indian Subcontinent*, and senior political Indian figures disseminate pro-Russian content. Senior political leaders of India further act as nodes to expand unique ideas into and outside of the core network into further centralized networks.¹³³ Russia propagates some similar content to its domestic audiences as it does to audiences abroad. The audiences vary dramatically, but the receptive network of audiences includes scholars, pro-Russian regime and anti-autonomous weapons groups, as well as anti-nuclear weapons groups, U.S. policymakers and leaders, international organizations, journalists, Western media organizations, and other demographics also responsive to “fake news.” Some individual nodes within the network leverage “mentions” to post content favorable to the Russian government by highlighting the U.S. Executive and Legislative Branches current and former members, therefor leveraging existing U.S. political circles and audiences. For example, @realDonaldTrump is often included in posts by @SputnikInt and other Russian media. The tactic demonstrates a method used by some accounts to expand Russian content into U.S. policy circles to gain support and/or to enable questioning of U.S. policymaker audiences. However, both competing narratives, pro-Russian and anti-Russian nuclear weapons narratives of opponents, exist within the content of the overall network.

¹³² “Highly central” is based only by modeling within ORA and does not qualify in describing the Russian government’s influence of U.S. policy. The nodes within the network are only determined to be central within the immediate network of 3,587 nodes. I ran all measures analysis with unionized retweet, replies, and mentions in ORA-NetScenes, a joint product of the CASOS center at Carnegie Mellon University and Netanomics. Analysis was conducted on October 3, 2019.

¹³³ Based on eigenvector, hub, authority, and in-degree centralities. I ran all measures analysis with unionized retweet, replies, and mentions in ORA-NetScenes, a joint product of the CASOS center at Carnegie Mellon University and Netanomics. Analysis was conducted on October 3, 2019.

This research is restricted to tweets from Twitter broadcast nodes and followers of Russian news accounts. Data was collected by members of the Common Operational Research Environment (CORE) Laboratory through an endpoint included in the Twitter Application Programming Interface (API). The thesis's research of the CORE Lab data contributes to understanding the audiences and how these audiences should be considered in their potential for political activity.

B. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS AND CODE BOOK

1. Data Boundaries

From July through September 2019, with assistance from the CORE Lab, the thesis derived the actors and relational ties in this network solely from open source Twitter data. The data set was pared down to only include posts during the time of the United States' withdrawal from the INF treaty, from January 25, 2019 to June 1, 2019.

2. Data Source

The researcher created an initial list of thirty-five nodes, including but not limited to @RT_com, @RT_America, @SputnikInt, and @TASSagency_en, determined from primary and secondary research, and provided the list to the CORE Lab with a request to pull their wall posts. From these initial nodes, the researcher gathered a list of additional nodes for analysis. As such, the scope of data collection included the first- and second-degree connections for the original thirty-five nodes. The resulting Twitter dataset is comprised of 3,587 nodes. The network reflects agents that are more likely to reply, mention, or retweet information among each other.

The researcher structured the data for this analysis as an edge list for relational characteristics for the nodes in the network and a node list, characterizing attributes of each node. The edge list represents directed one-way communications between the nodes.

3. The Data

a. *Relational Data (User to User- Understanding the ties)*

The relational data, in the form of an edge list, represents the ties (relationship, arcs) between the nodes and is a compilation of each follower, reply, mention, and retweet in a matrix. This one-way directed communication is also termed an *arc*, which includes the following: replies, and mentions, and retweets.¹³⁴ For example, user A may reply to user B about a news article or user A may retweet user B's news article. User A follows user B on Twitter, but user B does not follow user A. These examples reflect a one-way directed tie, or arc, from user A to user B. A synopsis of the binary relationships follows.

- Followers are users and the accounts that they follow and befriend on Twitter,
- Reply and Mention is defined as a link created when users respond or mention other users, and
- Retweets are links created when users repost another account's content

b. *Attribute Data (Describes characteristics of each node/user account)*

Information gathered via Twitter is self-reported by the user account (node), meaning the individual's (online actor's) self-declared attributes, such as location and name are unknown to be true. The node list provides *attributes*, or characteristics, for each of the nodes and the nodes' followers, including the following:

- User Identification (User ID) is the unique identification number used to label each actor for the purpose for data use and tracking;
- Screen name is a user-selected name which is public;
- Source is the source device used for Twitter, whether a cellular phone, smart device, or computer;

¹³⁴ "Using Twitter," Twitter, accessed on October 27, 2019, <https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter>.

- Location is a self-reported location of the user account;
- Followers Count is the number of actors following the user account;
- Friends Count is the number of users the user follows;
- Account Created at indicates the time and day the user created the account;
- Verified indicates whether the actor, or Twitter user, used official documents to prove their authentic identity to Twitter

4. Quantitative Understanding of the Overall Network

The overall union network—all ties between actors, mentions, replies, and retweets—encompasses multiple central figures, with emphasis on Russian, Eastern, and Western. This analysis focuses on two perspectives of the same network. The first uses Girvan-Newman grouping to identify multiple potential sub-groups within the network, and the second uses a breakdown of ego-networks of the Russian media nodes.

The thesis chose to use Newman clustering, to identify subgroups and for visualizations in ORA, for its efficiency with large data sets and for the application of edge betweenness and its bottom-up approach in relating the nodes.¹³⁵ Twenty-six groups identified with the Newman clustering algorithm within ORA reflect a broad spectrum of audiences with varying influence.¹³⁶ In conjunction with the Newman Method Clustering Algorithm, a unionized matrix yielded a Newman Modularity score of .614, meaning the network is a very cohesive community structure¹³⁷ with a higher than average amount of ties between nodes. Twenty-six groups were located within the overall network with a

¹³⁵ Cunningham, Everton, and Murphy, *Understanding Dark Networks*, Kindle. loc. 2692–2739 of 7566.

¹³⁶ I located groups using Newman Clustering Algorithm, ORA-NetScenes, a joint product of the CASOS center at Carnegie Mellon University and Netanomics, October 1, 2019.

¹³⁷ M. E. J. Newman and M. Girvan, “Finding and Evaluating Community Structure in Networks,” *Physical Review E* 69, no. 2 (February 2004): 1–15, <https://link.aps.org/doi/10.1103/PhysRevE.69.026113>; M. E. J. Newman, “Equivalence between Modularity Optimization and Maximum Likelihood Methods for Community Detection,” *Physical Review E* 94, no. 5 (November 2016): 1–8, <https://link.aps.org/doi/10.1103/PhysRevE.94.052315>.

maximum group size of 512 nodes. Seven of these groups are five or less nodes. The smallest group size includes four nodes. The average size of each group is 187 while the standard deviation is 183 nodes.¹³⁸

Determining who is most prominent within the overall and individual ego networks is arguably a difficult task for which researchers could use many methods, quantitative and qualitative. This social network analysis does not necessarily reflect whether these nodes are influential outside of the OSN and does not reflect verified influence on U.S. policy or actions outside of the OSN's online Twitter behavior. Furthermore, this analysis is limited, but prompts opportunity for further major studies on the topic. However, according to Riquelme and González-Cantergiani, Twitter reflects “four types of public relationships: user-to-user, user-to-tweet, tweet-to-tweet and tweet-to-user.”¹³⁹ Retweeting a node's content is the strongest link between two nodes,¹⁴⁰ so the analysis considers that. To identify specific understanding of the type of actor—such as disseminator, leaders, amplifiers, curators, commentators, idea starters, and viewers—would require increased research and reliable methods to differentiate bots from human nodes.¹⁴¹ Russia's Ministry of Defense (MOD), as an extension of the Russian government, has high in-degree, meaning more ties are directed toward each of the nodes, in the networks.¹⁴² Russia's MOD is a strategic actor that is instrumental in Russia's weapons development, testing,

¹³⁸ I located groups using Newman Clustering Algorithm, Union Network, ORA-NetScenes, a joint product of the CASOS center at Carnegie Mellon University and Netanomics, October 1, 2019.

¹³⁹ Fabián Riquelme and Pablo González-Cantergiani, “Measuring User Influence on Twitter: A Survey,” *Information Processing & Management* 52, no. 5 (August 2015): 949–75, <http://arxiv.org/abs/1508.07951>.

¹⁴⁰ Riquelme and González-Cantergiani; Martin J. Chorley et al., “Human Content Filtering in Twitter: the Influence of Metadata,” *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies* 74 (February 2015): 32–40, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhcs.2014.10.001>.

¹⁴¹ Riquelme and González-Cantergiani, “Measuring User Influence on Twitter”; Miguel del Fresno García, Alan J. Daly, and Sagrario Segado Sánchez-Cabezudo, “Identifying the New Influencers in the Internet Era: Social Media and Social Network Analysis,” *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, 153 (2016): 23–40, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5477/cis/reis.153.23>.

¹⁴² Stefan Rübiger and Myra Spiliopoulou, “A Framework for Validating the Merit of Properties that Predict the Influence of a Twitter User,” *Expert Systems with Applications* 42, no. 5 (April 2015): 2824–2834, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eswa.2014.11.006>; Riquelme and González-Cantergiani, “Measuring User Influence on Twitter.”

and strategy development, and MOD's content is also provided to Russia's media broadcast nodes for their content.

5. The Subgroups of the Network

The overall network consists of varying subgroups. The following are subgroups of importance as the more influential group nodes have the highest in-degree likely indicating followership for information:¹⁴³

- Group 1: Anti-nuclear weapons, anti-autonomous robot, and human rights advocates nodes, including @marywareham and @BanKillerRobots
- Group 2: Nuclear security strategists, including @KomissarWhipla and @ArmsControlWonk
- Group 3: Investigative journalists and open source analysts, including @AricToler and @leonidragozin
- Group 4: U.S. news outlets, U.S. media specialists, and U.S. policymakers, including @realDonaldTrump and @nytimes
- Group 5: Anti-West rhetoric and anti-West conspiracy news sharing, including @VeraVanHorne and @Malinka1102
- Group 6: Russian government and Russian diplomatic, including @RusEmbUSA and @RusCons_TX
- Group 7: Critical of internal Russian affairs and Russia's involvement in the Ukraine, including @AbraxasSpa and @CalibreObscura
- Group 8: Russian speakers, pro-Russian content, including @navalny and i_korotchenko

¹⁴³ I located groups using the Newman Clustering Algorithm, ORA-NetScenes, a joint product of the CASOS center at Carnegie Mellon University and Netanomics. October 1, 2019.

- Group 9: Defense industry, including missile, anti-ballistic missile, aviation, researchers and developers, including @alpaytkn_ss and @hkilichsword
- Group 10: Indian-affiliated news and Indian government-affiliated nodes, including @ZeeNews and @narendramodi

Groups 1–10 include actors with highest in-degree, meaning an increased number of connections to other nodes within the group. Nodes with the highest total degree centrality, meaning the highest of in and out links, have increased access to knowledge and diffusion of ideas. However, the provided description of the nodes in each group is not indicative or descriptive of all nodes within each individual group. Each group has varying nodes, some of which serve as brokers between sub-groups and, therefore, reflect a full spectrum of identities and OSN pattern of life.

The nodes with a high brokerage potential between Newman groups of particular relevance to the network would fragment, meaning it would lose the existing diffusion of information conduits, if the following nodes were removed: RusEmbUSA, AricToler, and controlarms. RusEmbUSA is the Russian embassy in the United States and promotes the tweets of its consulates around the world and Russian culture, garners support for the freedom of Maria Butina, and highlights its defense industry-including content from @mod_russia. RusEmbUSA greatly connects the majority of Russian state-affiliated news nodes, therefore its connections enable the broader spread of Russian narrative. Aric Toler provides the network an investigative input of information that is critical of Russia while also displaying pro-West content. Control Arms provides information about and represents the arms control movement.

6. Key Nodes of the Overall Network

Figures 4 and 5 present visualizations of the overall network social media analysis. Figure 4 is a visual representation of the network with color representing Newman subgrouping. Nodes ranking in the top three of all centrality measures are labeled in white. The nodes proximity to the center of the visualization represents the node's centrality to the entire network. Figure 4, therefore, is a visualization of the entire network with labels

highlighting the most central figures while Figure 5 is a chart to compare the percentage of measures of the same visualized most central figures. Figure 5 shows top ten reoccurring nodes within the top three rankings of all centrality measures. This research does not cover each measure of centrality in depth or focus on any one measure of centrality, but it does provide a brief overview of the most central figures and a potential start point for future in-depth research on the network.

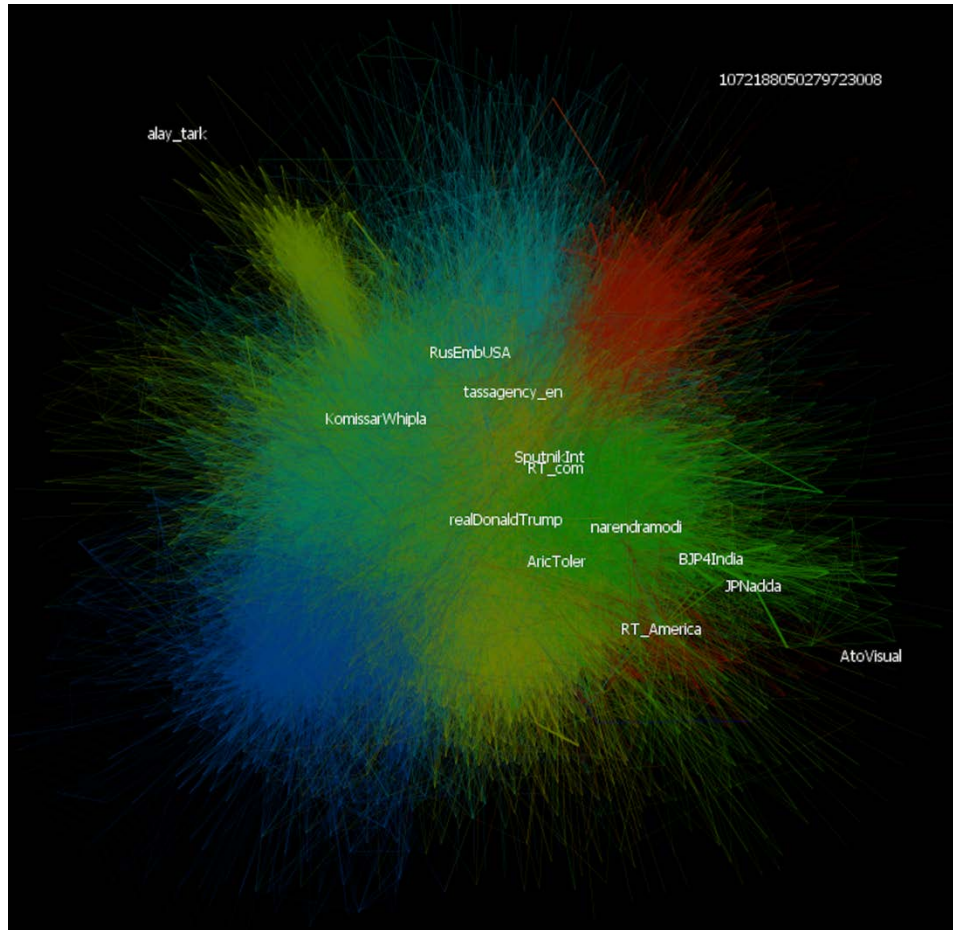


Figure 5. Visualization of the Russian Media Network, Newman subgroups, and nodes with the highest centrality¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ I created the visualization in ORA-NetScenes, a joint product of the CASOS center at Carnegie Mellon University and Netanomics. October 1, 2019.

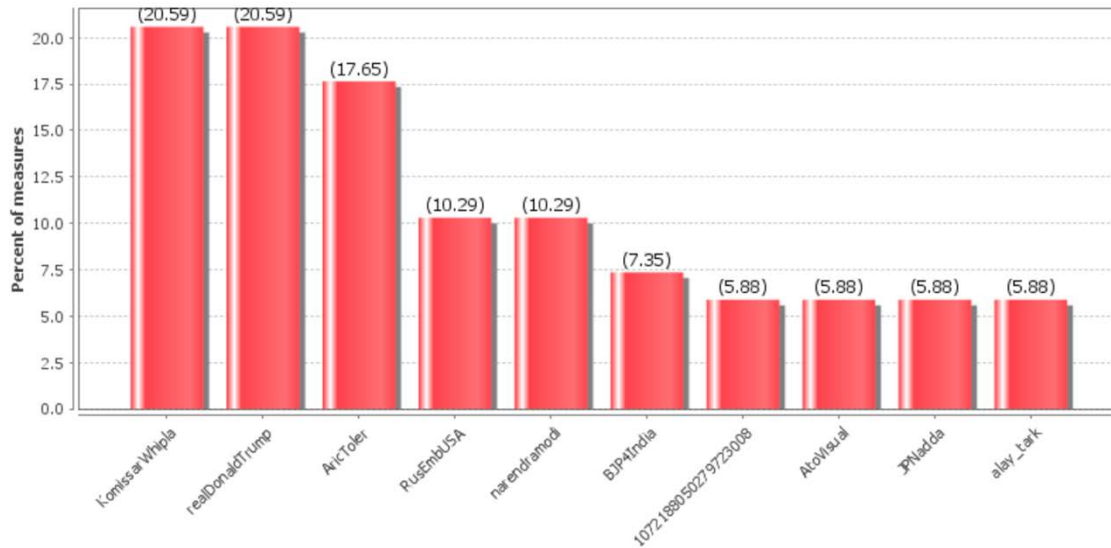


Figure 6. Top ten reoccurring nodes within the top three rankings of all centrality measures¹⁴⁵

The recurring top-ranked agents are chosen by each node’s recurring position within the top three positions of prominence for each of the centrality algorithms within ORA.¹⁴⁶

- KomissarWhipla (Sympathetic of Russian government, nuclear strategist)
- realDonaldTrump (President Donald Trump, 45th U.S. President)
- AricToler (lead investigator for Russian-topics for Bellingcat)
- RusEmbUSA (Russian Embassy in the United States)
- Narendramodi (Narendra Damodardas Modi, 14th Prime Minister of India)
- BJP4India (Bharatiya Janata Party of India)

¹⁴⁵ I located key entities with ORA-NetScenes, a joint product of the CASOS center at Carnegie Mellon University and Netanomics, October 1, 2019.

¹⁴⁶ Centrality measures include total degree, out-degree, in-degree, betweenness, ego betweenness, betweenness, closeness, eigenvector, contribution, hub, authority, constraint (structural holes), effective network size (structural holes), efficiency (structural holes), PageRank, and clustering coefficient; I located key entities with ORA-NetScenes, a joint product of the CASOS center at Carnegie Mellon University and Netanomics. October 1, 2019.

- 1072188050279723008 (Unknown, possible bot, troll, or deleted account)
- AtoVisual (Vague or little information, human rights and bio-diversity)
- JPNadda (Jagat Prakash Nadda, Indian politician)
- Alay_tark (Turkish speaker, political stance vague)

The top ten nodes with the highest in-degree of retweeting within the network include MID_RF (MFA_russia's account in Russian language), mfa_russia,realDonaldTrump, narendramodi, mod_russia, BJP4India, RT_com, NicolasMaduro, EmbassyofRussia, and EmbassyofRussia.¹⁴⁷ These accounts reflect an open discourse ranging in support of the Russian government, discourse on the conflict in Venezuela, and other political discourse.

The top ten accounts with higher than average values for out-degree, meaning the nodes have high number of outward directing arcs, include RusEmbUSA, KomissarWhipla, RussianEmbassyC, mission_russian, JPNadda, i_korotchenko, PCHannon, RusCons_TX, nstomar, and RusEmbEst.¹⁴⁸

These metrics suggest that India's politicians are prominently linked to the Russian media network on the topic of nuclear weapons. Russian foreign policy and diplomatic nodes are highly active and are a major source of information for the networks. Other politicians, including ones related to the Ukraine, Iran, and Venezuela, are also reflected in various centrality measures.¹⁴⁹ Some examples of the Tweets shared between Prime Minister Modi and President Putin follow in Figures 6, 7, 8, and 9.

¹⁴⁷ I located key entities with ORA-NetScenes, a joint product of the CASOS center at Carnegie Mellon University and Netanomics. October 1, 2019.

¹⁴⁸ See previous footnote.

¹⁴⁹ See previous footnote.



Figure 7. PM Modi reaffirming his support for President Putin¹⁵⁰



Figure 8. PM Modi thanking President Putin for his St. Andrew award¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Source: Narendra Modi (@narendramodi), "President Putin remains a source of great strength for the India-Russia friendship," April 12, 2019, 4:38 a.m., <https://twitter.com/narendramodi/status/1116666784197726209>.

¹⁵¹ Source: Narendra Modi (@narendramodi), "Honoured to receive this prestigious award. I thank President Putin and the people of Russia," Twitter, April 12, 2019, 4:36 a.m., <https://twitter.com/narendramodi/status/1116666441242034178>.



Figure 9. President Putin publicizes PM Modi’s St. Andrew award¹⁵²



Figure 10. President Putin congratulates PM Modi on his political party’s win in the election¹⁵³

In consideration of hub and authority centrality,¹⁵⁴ the researcher considers the nodes’ roles in information diffusion. Hubs and authorities are generally used specifically for sharing webpages and searching for understanding within broad-topic subjects. In this case, the authorities have information that hubs assume as credible or that answer the hub’s question. However, a hub is a node that is a source for many authorities. The top ten hubs within the

¹⁵² Source: President of Russia (@KremlinRussia_E), “Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi received the Order of St. Andrew for outstanding achievements in promotin partnership with Russia,” Twitter, April, 12, 2019, 3:18 a.m., https://twitter.com/KremlinRussia_E/status/1116646881168449537.

¹⁵³ Source: President of Russia (@KremlinRussia_E) “Vladimir Putin congratulated Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi on the victory of his Bharatiya Janata Party in the general election,” May 23, 2019, 4:12 a.m., https://twitter.com/KremlinRussia_E/status/1131518220530257921 TWEET

¹⁵⁴ “Hubs and Authorities,” Stanford University, accessed August 14, 2019, <https://nlp.stanford.edu/IR-book/html/htmledition/hubs-and-authorities-1.html>.

overall network with higher than normal value for retweeting include JPNadda, nstomar, smritiirani, BJP4Delhi, shripadynaik, drharshvardhan, ManojTiwariMP, BJP4India, and myogiadityanath. Nodes with higher than normal values for authorities centrality include narendramodi, BJP4India, and PMOIndia. Again, Indian government affiliated accounts assume roles for the transfer of news information. These nodes receive a wide array of information from other nodes that send out a large amount of information to a large audience.¹⁵⁵

Some Twitter nodes tag to official Russian government nodes, including the MOD. This research identifies MOD's lack of coordination in information warfare with Russia's main media networks. In fact, StopFake.org recognized a conflict of information dissemination on the topic of the INF this past January.¹⁵⁶ MOD and its main news outlet, *Zvezda*, do not reflect a robust cycle of dissemination compared to the Russian nodes RT_com, RT_America, SputnikInt, and Tassagency_en. MOD broadcasts on Twitter mainly in Russian but sometimes in English. MOD follows Russia's diplomatic nodes, but does not formally follow Russia's formal news media nodes.

7. The Russian Media Ego Networks

An ego network is an “actor's (i.e., ego's)—immediate social environment: the set of actors (i.e., alters and neighbors) to which the actor has ties and the ties among them.”¹⁵⁷ The Russian media ego networks provide the opportunity to determine what other nodes are actively referencing, sharing, or retweeting the specific individual Russian-state affiliated media nodes: *RT*, *Sputnik*, and *TASS*. The conventional media, specific to webpages, are slightly different between the three as previously discussed in the previous chapter. Analysis of the ego networks is also a method to determine which nodes have the strongest relationship with the four Russian media ego nodes: RT_com, RT_America, SputnikInt, and Tassagency_en in the OSN.

¹⁵⁵ I located key entities using ORA-NetScenes, a joint product of the CASOS center at Carnegie Mellon University and Netanomics. October 1, 2019.

¹⁵⁶ StopFake.org, “Russia Demonstrates Missile Claiming No Violation.”

¹⁵⁷ Cunningham, Everton, and Murphy, *Understanding Dark Networks*.

However, the Ego-Network clustering algorithm in ORA produced the following networks with subgroup membership:

- RT_com ego-network consists of 403 nodes
- RT_America ego-network consists of 184 nodes
- SputnikInt ego-network consists of 162 nodes
- Tassagency_en ego-network consists of 124 nodes

The ego networks include a variety of nodes located throughout the multiple ego networks. Many of the nodes self-identify as Russian government and state-policy nodes, including Russian embassies, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (*OSCE*), and Russian Mission United Nations. Surprisingly, Russia's Ministry of Defense (MOD) is not highly central within the ego-networks.

Figures 10 through 13 offer ORA-generated visualizations of each of the ego-networks focused around Russian media broadcast nodes. The colorization of the nodes and ties represent Newman subgrouping. The strength in the ties is reflected by the width of the ties. Within the visualizations, the sociograms for each ego network are visualized equally. Each sociogram reflects node size for centrality nodes of authorities. The color of the nodes is based on Newman grouping. The strength value of the ties between nodes are reflected in the width of the tie. The main node of each network uses the logo for the node image. Hubs are also reflected with the Twitter image of the node although the ego's node is represented by the media organization's emblem.

Some nodes are algorithmically more central within each of the subgroups, and some have also been previously recognized previously in research, such as RenieriArts.¹⁵⁸ However, other hubs such as VeraVanHorne and RALee85, appear to have a high number of followers and are very vocal within the OSN. However, these two nodes are in major contrast

¹⁵⁸ @DFRLab, "#TrollTracker: From Tags to Trolling, How Tweets to a Small Group Precede Attacks on Critics of the Syrian and Russian Regimes," *Medium*, June 27, 2018, <https://medium.com/dfrlab/trolltracker-from-tags-to-trolling-58bb2ef87acd>.

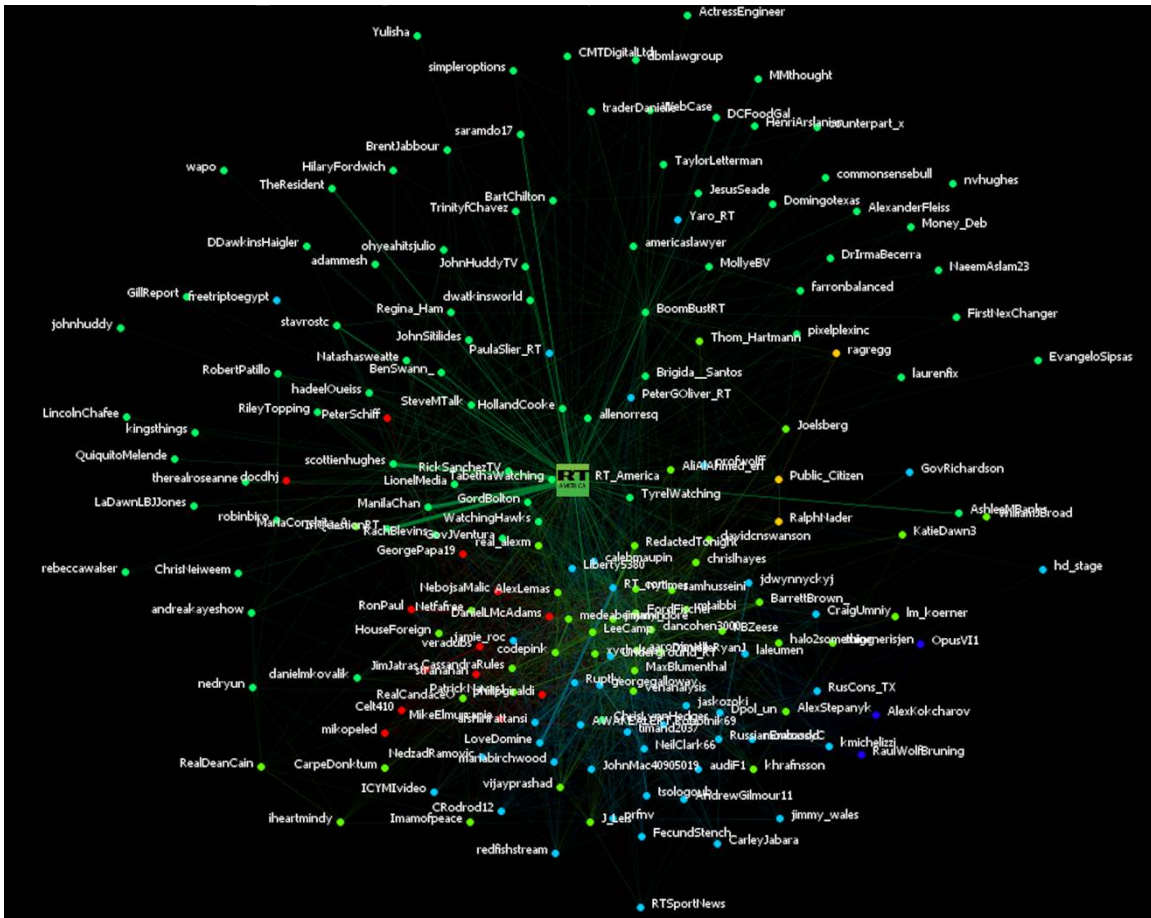


Figure 12. RT_america Ego Network ORA Visualization

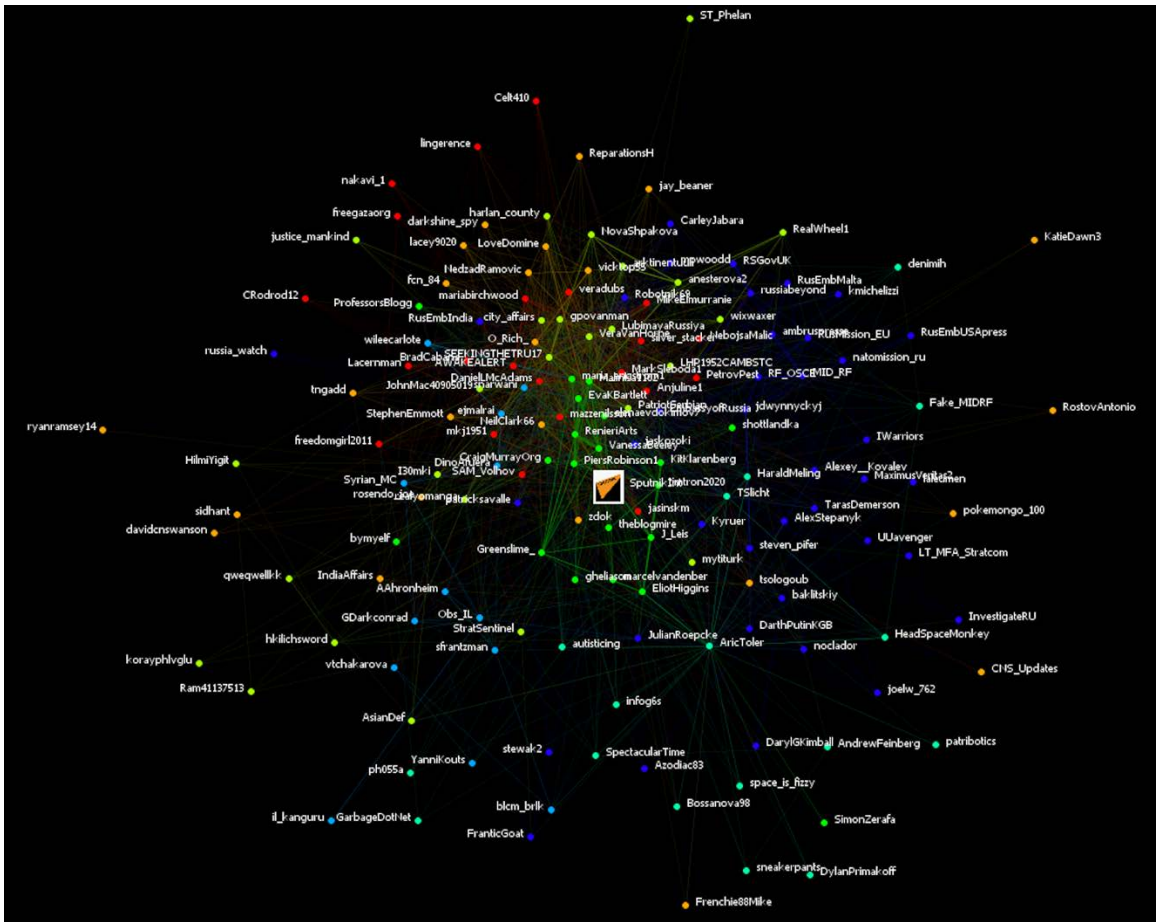


Figure 13. SputnikInt Ego Network ORA Visualization

C. SOCIAL MEDIA: A CRITICAL COMPONENT TO THE RUSSIAN REGIME'S MODUS OPERANDI

With the overall popularity of Twitter among educated groups and diverse use by people around the world,¹⁵⁹ this open-source online social network (OSN) provides an arena for scholarly research and strategic consideration of the dissemination of Russian propaganda and online active measures. Zachary Steinert-Threlkeld points out Twitter's use by academics, with 80% of users having earned a college degree, an income over \$50k a year, with 42% as daily users and 24% as weekly users.¹⁶⁰ According to experts, Twitter accurately reflects the social network construct of nodes' offline behavior within networks.¹⁶¹ In other words, a person's behavior on Twitter is likely to reflect similar relationships, weak or strong, within the person's actual life.¹⁶² Further, it likely reflects the conventional media and friends that the node interacts with or observes outside of Twitter. Nancy Baym points out that social media provides an extension to one's life, yet it also provides a path of new social norms and allowable fantasy projection.¹⁶³ The opportunity can then be used for good or ill, such as what we witness in Russia's use of coordinators, trolls, media co-opters.¹⁶⁴ Approximately 8% of tweets are from news outlets although up to 15% of topics originate from news outlets.¹⁶⁵ Therefore, those statistics potentially relate to the percentage of tweets derived from Russian news broadcast nodes and the topics on which their ego-centric networks diffuse information.

During the 2016 U.S. elections, Russia's Internet Research Agency (IRA) used two strategies through Twitter: operating individual Twitter accounts to falsely represent U.S.

¹⁵⁹ Zachary C. Steinert-Threlkeld, *Twitter as Data* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 4, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108529327>.

¹⁶⁰ Shannon Greenwood, Andrew Perrin, and Maeve Duggan, "Social Media Update 2016," PEW Research Center, November 11, 2016, <https://www.pewinternet.org/2016/11/11/social-media-update-2016/>.

¹⁶¹ R. I. M. Dunbar et al., "The Structure of Online Social Networks Mirrors Those in the Offline World," *Social Networks* 43 (October 2015): 39–47, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2015.04.005>.

¹⁶² Dunbar et al., "The Structure of Online Social Networks."

¹⁶³ Baym, *Personal Connections*.

¹⁶⁴ Helmus et al., *Russian Social Media Influence*.

¹⁶⁵ Momin M. Malik and Jürgen Pfeffer, "A Macroscopic Analysis of News Content in Twitter," *Digital Journalism* 4, no. 8 (February 2016): 955–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2015.1133249>.

persons and operating automated bot networks.¹⁶⁶ The accounts would then disseminate original content by direct messaging and open-source posting.¹⁶⁷ During January 2018, Twitter identified 3,814 IRA-affiliated accounts that had disseminated 8.4% of 175,993 tweets relating to the 2016 elections.¹⁶⁸ In fact, Twitter also notified roughly 1.4 million people who had contact with IRA-controlled accounts.¹⁶⁹ According to Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller, III, in his report,

on February 16, 2018, a federal grand jury in the District of Columbia returned an indictment charging 13 Russian nationals and three Russian entities—including the Internet Research Agency (IRA) and Concord Management and Consulting LLC (Concord)—with violating U.S. criminal laws in order to interfere with U.S. elections and political processes.¹⁷⁰

Although scholars, investigators, and politicians are all trying to determine Russia's effectiveness with elections meddling, the abovementioned indictment by the United States FBI clearly provides federal recognition of Russia's potential to have impact through direct interference using social media. In the next sections, the thesis further explains how the IRA directly encouraged political activity through advertisement and social engineering as described within the indictment, while relating it to the current Twitter activity described in this research.

D. ADVERTISEMENT: THE UNRESTRICTED WEAPON TO INFLUENCE OSN

The Russian regime has proved its ability to employ assets and resources to harness the opportunity of advertising within OSN.¹⁷¹ The 2016 U.S. elections illuminated Russia's Facebook advertising campaign, funded by approximately \$46,000, to influence

¹⁶⁶ Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller, III, *Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election Volume I of II* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, March 2019): 26, <https://www.justice.gov/storage/report.pdf>.

¹⁶⁷ Mueller, 27.

¹⁶⁸ Mueller, 28.

¹⁶⁹ Mueller, 28.

¹⁷⁰ Mueller, 174.

¹⁷¹ Mueller, 174.

up to 150 million Americans.¹⁷² This monetary figure was revealed by Vice President and General Counsel of Facebook, Colin Stretch, during a testimony in 2017 to the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.¹⁷³ However, this monetary figure may not fully represent unknown advertising efforts directed by the IRA. Advanced Persistent Threat (APT) 28 was deemed responsible in these cyber operations and skillfully took advantage of opportunity by purchasing thousands of advertisements that targeted varying demographics. APT 28 is a known cyber group affiliated with the GRU and is deemed responsible for the U.S. 2016 elections hacking.¹⁷⁴ The IRA also sent spearfishing emails to public officials and individuals affiliated with voting technology.¹⁷⁵ Considering this technique in advancing their political goals, the Russian government apparently realizes the potential to further influence audiences with paid advertisements, further instilling fear and garnering support for their objectives. On August 19, 2019, Twitter stated it “will not accept advertising from state-controlled news media entities... that are either financially or editorially controlled by the state”; however, this does not address cover platforms or third-party proxy companies advertising in the interest of the state,¹⁷⁶ and the IRA has previously contracted third-party companies for advertisement during the 2016 U.S. elections.

The advertisement in Figure 15, self-identifying as “Democrat Indians” in what seems to be an India-affiliated website, surfaced during a search on the Status-6 and provides a link for individuals to gain additional knowledge about the Status-6. The website, theindiansubcontinent.com, provides conspiratorial information about various

¹⁷² *Hearing on Social Media Influence in the 2016 United States Presidential Elections before the House Select Committee on Intelligence*, House, 115th Cong., 1st sess., November 1, 2017, <https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/os-cstretch-110117.pdf>; Farhad Manjoo, “Tackling the Internet’s Central Villain: The Advertising Business,” *New York Times*, January 31, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/31/technology/internet-advertising-business.html>.

¹⁷³ *Hearing on Social Media Influence in the 2016 United States Presidential Elections before the House Select Committee on Intelligence*.

¹⁷⁴ “APT 28,” Council on Foreign Relations, accessed October 21 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/interactive/cyber-operations/apt-28>.

¹⁷⁵ Mueller, *Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference I*, 51.

¹⁷⁶ “Updating Our Advertising Policies on State Media,” Twitter, accessed November 1, 2019, https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2019/advertising_policies_on_state_media.html.

topics, including the Status-6 weapon and its claimed catastrophic effects. The unsecure website also provides further information on other conspiratorial topics. The website is registered through name.com, resulting in few ownership details within whois.net registration results. However, it does reflect a registration date of October 22, 2012. Furthermore, a third-party application, Ecroaker Master, was the platform used to propagate the tweet.¹⁷⁷ If Ecroaker Master is affiliated with Ecroaker.com, it is further a subsidiary of IntelligentTriangle, a third-party application based in Bangalore, India. Ecroaker identifies as an entertainment, consulting, and information technology business. This company also has applications available for download from GooglePlay and has a Facebook page.¹⁷⁸ India not only hosts advertisement efforts, but it is potentially a victim of the recent data privacy breach. India is referenced in the recent Cambridge Analytica (CA) data breach; evidence of recent testimonies suggests the parent company of CA, Strategic Communications Limited (SCL), were also involved in recent Indian elections.¹⁷⁹

The United States' weak regulation of the advertising industry, the increasing advancement of technology, and powerful social media companies provide massive opportunity to other nation-states to inexpensively leverage opportunity from across the world while enabling a sense of plausible deniability. Russia's advertising during the U.S. elections was hardly known to the common person and took major governmental effort and the keen insights of cyber-security companies to determine the Russian regime's involvement. A recent study released by Carl T. Bergstrom and Joseph B. Bak-Coleman reveals the concept of Stewart's et al. "information gerrymandering," in which:

an analysis shows that information flow between individuals in a social network can be 'gerrymandered' to skew perceptions of how others in the

¹⁷⁷ DemocratIndians (@Democratindians), "Check out who is Trending the hashtag Статус-6 and why," Twitter, November 11, 2015, 9:07 p.m., <https://twitter.com/DemocratIndians/status/664670944334643200>.

¹⁷⁸ Ecroaker (@Ecroaker), Facebook," <https://www.facebook.com/ecroaker>."

¹⁷⁹ Vidhi Doshi and Annie Gowen. March 28, 2018. "Whistleblower Claims Cambridge Analytica's Partners in India Worked on Elections, Raising Privacy Fears." *Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/whistleblower-claims-cambridge-analyticas-partners-in-india-worked-on-elections-raising-privacy-fears/2018/03/28/1168c04c-328a-11e8-b6bd-0084a1666987_story.html (November 22, 2018).

community will vote — which can alter the outcomes of elections... In geographical gerrymandering, the borders of voting districts are drawn so as to concentrate voters from the opposition party into one or a few districts, leaving the voters for the gerrymandering party in a numerical majority elsewhere. In information gerrymandering, the way in which voters are concentrated into districts is not what matters; rather, it is the way in which the connections between them are arranged. Nevertheless, like geographical gerrymandering, information gerrymandering threatens ideas about proportional representation in a democracy.¹⁸⁰

The authors further point out the effects of website technology and micro-targeted political advertising, which also became apparent during this research. Dipayan Ghosh and Ben Scott recently wrote the *Digital Deceit: The Technologies Behind Precision Propaganda on the Internet*.¹⁸¹ Ghosh and Scott explain the negative impacts of present-day methods in online advertising that include behavioral data tracking, online ad buying, search engine optimization (SEO), social media management services (SMMS), and artificial intelligence in marketing.¹⁸² The effects can include but are not limited to privacy interference, money loss, or social polarization. Although one's online pattern can have positive outcomes in one's life, such as recommending vacation spots or the next best pair of shoes, multiple pitfalls indicate a need for improved understanding. Phones are tracked by satellites, further enabling detailed tracking of one's location and activity, despite some individually enabled phone-sharing restrictions. "Disinformation operators"¹⁸³ can interfere with what you see within your social media feed, prioritizing advertisement. Furthermore, click-bait from unregulated advertisements can lead to computer network attacks, such as planting viruses or web cookies from websites and related third-parties. One may think an online anonymizer or virtual private network will protect from such advertisement, but today's methods still allow ample opportunities. Social media accounts

¹⁸⁰ Carl T. Bergstrom and Joseph B. Bak-Coleman, "Information Gerrymandering in Social Networks Skews Collective Decision-Making," *Nature* 573 (September 2019): 40–41, <http://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-02562-z>; Alexander J. Stewart et al. "Information Gerrymandering and Undemocratic Decisions," *Nature* 573 (September 2019): 117–21, <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-019-1507-6>.

¹⁸¹ Dipayan Ghosh and Ben Scott, "Digital Deceit: The Technologies behind Precision Propaganda on the Internet," *New America*, January 3, 2018, <https://www.newamerica.org/public-interest-technology/policy-papers/digitaldeceit/>.

¹⁸² Ghosh and Scott.

¹⁸³ Ghosh and Scott.

often owned by just a few major companies can enable the data generated by the person's application use to drive the advertisement. Perhaps one's internet protocol address is from across the world, but your activity related to your specific account gives all the data needed to generate precise targeting. The U.S. government is slow and unlikely to agree to or pass bills on the topic, including the H.R. 896: Fairness in Political Advertising Act of 2019.¹⁸⁴

Figure 14 is an advertisement for the Status-6 as a topic to be further explored in an Indian-affiliated website. This advertisement targets inquiry of the search term Status-6. I strongly advise against visiting this website based on security risks.



Figure 15. Advertisement for the Status-6 Nuclear Weapon¹⁸⁵

E. FROM OSN TO PHYSICAL MOBILIZATION

Previous chapters focused on the media, methods of dissemination, and networks, but the opportunity also exists for audiences to mobilize or further engage in the physical world. As previously discussed in Chapter II, non-government organizations, including the WPC and USPC, were successful with disseminating information and rallying support with little funding compared to major government organizations. Chapter IV, this current chapter, discussed some of the basic social network structures of the Russian media's

¹⁸⁴ *Fairness in Political Advertising Act of 2019, H.R. 896, 116th Cong.* (2019).

¹⁸⁵ Source: Democrat Indians, "Check Out Who Is Trending."

online networks and ego networks and the relations within the OSN. These networks can also be considered in a relational sense within social movement theory.¹⁸⁶ In fact, the Mueller report confirms IRA's purchase of online advertisements to promote IRA-organized U.S. rallies.¹⁸⁷ IRA nodes (personas) announced and promoted the events, both broadly and via direct message. The IRA node would then tell one of the potential rally recruits that the node couldn't attend and needed the recruit to serve as the coordinator on the ground at the rally.¹⁸⁸ Further photos and videos from the event were posted on the IRA's accounts.¹⁸⁹ Besides promoting rallies, the IRA also funded and hired a self-defense instructor to teach any OSN recruits following an IRA-node (persona) called the "Black Fist," an account amplifying black social activism.¹⁹⁰ The IRA also recruited U.S. persons to act as spokespeople and to amplify IRA-generated content, treating these individuals as tasked agents, tracking their activities.¹⁹¹ This 2016 IRA-induced elections activity represents an opportunity for the IRA's ability to initiate disarmament, pro-Russian, or anti-West protests and rallies against U.S. nuclear armament and nuclear policy. The success of historic Freeze groups proved successful in rallying over these same topics and should be considered in today's security environment.

Returning to the concept of netwar, Arquilla and Ronfeldt stated, in 2001, that "Case studies and an Internet activist survey indicate that the Internet, including electronic mail, the web, and its other facets, gives grassroots groups an important new tool for attempting to foster political change."¹⁹² The discourse of existing grassroots groups could

¹⁸⁶ Gemma Edwards, *Social Movements and Protest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 71.

¹⁸⁷ Mueller, *Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference*, 25.

¹⁸⁸ Mueller, 29.

¹⁸⁹ Mueller, 29.

¹⁹⁰ Mueller, 32.

¹⁹¹ Mueller, 32.

¹⁹² John Arquilla and David F. Ronfeldt, "The Advent of Netwar (revisited)," in *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy*, ed. John Arquilla and David F. Ronfeldt (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2001), 292.

achieve increased media attention and increased connectivity from outside actors with the means, such as funding and media processes, to do so. In today's information age, even a smartphone video can be reformatted to fit a media outlet's information objectives. During recent indictments of Russian agents and Maria Butina's integration into the National Rifle Association (NRA),¹⁹³ key indicators imply the possibility of further integration of Russian agents into the social media groups of the U.S. military-industrial complex that study, work, write policy, and engage in the discourse on nuclear weapons. In fact, both the Russian and U.S. nuclear weapons and related armament industrial complexes are subjects of the Russian media Twitter network. Russian companies within the network include but are not limited to Rostec and Rosatom, the two largest and best-known companies in this field.

Zúñiga, Jung, and Valenzuela pointed out in 2012 that “after controlling for demographic variables, traditional media use offline and online, political constructs (knowledge and efficacy), and frequency and size of political discussion networks, seeking information via social network sites is a positive and significant predictor of people's social capital and civic and political participatory behaviors, online and offline.”¹⁹⁴ According to a 2019 investigation, the IRA initiated a large-scale development of social media groups in early 2015 that falsely claimed affiliation with U.S. political organizations.¹⁹⁵ During the 2016 U.S. elections, Russia demonstrated its ability for trolls to mobilize groups of people for political protest.¹⁹⁶ Twitter accounts including @March_for_Trump, a Russian-linked account, successfully organized pro-Trump rallies. Another Russian initiated group called “United Muslims of America” was used for pro-Hillary protests as the Russians

¹⁹³ Matthew Rosenberg et al., “Beyond the N.R.A.: Maria Butina's Peculiar Bid for Russian Influence” *New York Times*, August 4, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/04/us/politics/maria-butina-nra-russia-influence.html>.

¹⁹⁴ Homero Gil de Zúñiga, Nakwon Jung, and Sebastián Valenzuela, “Social Media Use for News and Individuals' Social Capital, Civic Engagement and Political Participation,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 17, no. 3 (April 2012): 319–36, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2012.01574.x>.

¹⁹⁵ Mueller, *Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference*, 22.

¹⁹⁶ *Disinformation: A Primer in Russian Active Measures and Influence Campaigns*, Senate, 115th Cong., March 30, 2017, <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/CHRG-115shrg25998/CHRG-115shrg25998/summary>.

simultaneously paid one of the protestors to hold a sign at the protest stating “I think Sharia Law will be a powerful new direction of freedom.” The Mueller team’s indictments reflect at least another half-dozen instances of Russian social media actors successfully encouraging protest during the elections for divisive results. Russia also rallied people using social media during the attempted coups of President Erdogan, and conjured protests over nuclear weapons and the weapons’ locations.

In 1998, Jeffrey Knopf’s mixed-methods research concluded that there has been at times a significant impact of societal activism on arms control and disarmament within the U.S.¹⁹⁷ However, Knopf does not address two key accelerating factors in today’s revolution in information warfare: the advantages of speed and brand access provided by social media platforms. Knopf found that an influencer can use his or her full-advantage of opportunity to impact arms policy by integrating and maximizing within the three clear and established processes in American politics: “(1) mobilizing public opinion to exert electoral pressure (2) working with sympathetic political elites to alter the amount of support for the President’s policy in Congress, and (3) generating ideas that have utility for agencies in the executive.”¹⁹⁸ Today’s *Global Zero* movement, a modern international anti-nuclear weapons group, has over 70 elites representing North America that are tied to civic, military, and political communities.¹⁹⁹ Dozens of other active groups engage in anti-nuclear weapons communication, policy writing, and protests. This form of activism is not indicative of Russia’s influence operations, but provides opportunity for human engagement and influence by means of social media. In fact, many of these groups, including but not limited to Human Rights Watch, Ban Killer Robots, Global Zero, Ministry4Disarmament, and the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, a Nobel Peace Prize winning group, are discussed and highlighted within the Russian media Twitter network. Russia has opportunity in three distinct ways: rallying action of various

¹⁹⁷ Knopf, *Domestic Society and International Cooperation*, 247.

¹⁹⁸ Knopf, 51.

¹⁹⁹ “A World without Nuclear Weapons,” Global Zero, accessed February 18, 2019, <https://www.globalzero.org/>.

primary audiences of weapons-related groups and key leaders to change U.S. nuclear policy; inciting chaos within civil and military environments to decrease trust in the U.S. government; and trying to influence secondary audiences in an attempt to influence U.S. policy. Over the past three decades, scholars have grappled with the *CNN Effect*, the ability of media to shape policymakers' perspectives and actions, yet its direct application to nuclear security strategy has yet to be fully addressed.²⁰⁰

In consideration of political process theory, Russia acts as an external elite and movement entrepreneur that uses media in efforts to spark collective action supporting its goals.²⁰¹ This thesis considers political process theory in understanding this network because Russia's state-sponsored media construct can and chooses to use resources and influential people to gain social support and access, which play a major role in contentious politics. Previously, this thesis discussed Russia's media as a dependent variable also reliant on the Russian regime's intent to achieve power and persuasion on the global stage. The application of political process theory is no different and reflects the Russian media network as a dependent variable as well. Both Gamson and Goldstone debate the factors that influence social movement success.²⁰²

However, in the case of Russia's attempts to gain power and influence via social media, both theorists' contributions serve as a foundation. Goldstone argues that "national political or economic crises" contribute to favorable political social movements while Gamson argued that more organized and centralized social movements will succeed.²⁰³ However, if we consider deliberate intervention of a state-actor, such as Russia, using well-organized social movement organizations (SMO) during national political crises, real or

²⁰⁰ Gilboa, "The CNN Effect"; Livingston, "Diplomacy in the New Information Environment."

²⁰¹ Edwards, *Social Movements and Protest*, 57; John D. McCarthy and Mayer Zald, "The Trend of Social Movements in America: Professionalization and Resource Mobilization" (working paper, Vanderbilt University, 1973), <https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/50939/164.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

²⁰² William A. Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1990); Jack A. Goldstone, "The Weakness of Organization: A New Look at Gamson's The Strategy of Social Protest," *American Journal of Sociology* 85, no. 5 (March 1980): 1017-42, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/227123>.

²⁰³ Gamson; Goldstone.

perceived, then perhaps both theorists' ideas apply to Russia's influence attempts aimed at current U.S. policy circles. Nuclear weapons groups and collective groups of concerned citizens during crises might also have increased ability to shape the public discourse. *RT* and *Sputnik* have previously tweeted false information about bombs exploding within Paris, a possible attempt to create civil unrest.²⁰⁴ Kitschelt's 1986 research reflects that open societies, such as the United States, provide even more opportunity for social movements.²⁰⁵ The open society, contrary to Russia's partially closed society, provides further opportunity for attempts to achieve some degree of social influence.

The suspension of the INF Treaty, the increase in civil polarization, the increase of power and unregulated internet environment and related companies, U.S. difficulty in labeling Russia as an enemy, the turmoil that results from the two-party system, and the contention within the U.S. government writ large all pose as clear examples within Tarrow's and Tilly's political opportunity framework.²⁰⁶ The below chart reflects the political opportunity structure, verbatim:

- the multiplicity of independent centers of power within the regime;
- its relative closure or openness to new actors;
- the instability or stability of current political alignments;
- the availability of influential allies or supporters;
- the extent to which the regime represses or facilitates collective claim making;
- decisive changes in these properties.²⁰⁷

F. CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter revealed the most-linked nodes that, in various ways, espouse Russian media content along with the densest network. Furthermore, this chapter discussed the

²⁰⁴ Weisberd, Watts, and Berger, "Trolling for Trump."

²⁰⁵ Herbert P. Kitschelt, "Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest: Anti-Nuclear Movements in Four Democracies," *British Journal of Political Science* 16, no. 1 (January 1986): 57–85, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/193981>.

²⁰⁶ Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, "Contentious Politics and Social Movements" in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, eds. Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes. Oxford University Press., eds. Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1.

²⁰⁷ Tarrow and Tilly, "Contentious Politics and Social Movements," 1.

potential, based on recent evidence during the 2016 elections, for the OSN to enable political activity and to set media conditions for the benefit of accomplishing Russian government political aims. Chapter V presents the findings as considered theoretically and in consideration of Russia's doctrine and ongoing strategy.

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V. RUSSIA'S INFORMATION STRATEGY

The thesis's previous chapters provided some historical background on the Soviet and Russian information strategy and tactics while also providing analytical insight into Russia's current efforts with social media and other means of content diffusion. Building on that work, Chapter V specifically applies that evidence to RF's nuclear security strategy. The Russian regime is relying on a show of force in the media in efforts to deter and influence the West, setting advantageous conditions for its policies. In a Machiavellian sense, Russia's attempts seem designed to convince the West and others that the cost of any war with Russia would be too high. Furthermore, the Russian regime aims to gain credibility as a global superpower while discrediting the West.

The Russian regime is using strategic weapons media content in striving to influence and deceive audiences, increasing fear and developing regime power. Robert Art describes such behavior as “swaggering” and as “ill-defined” and as a state's effort to increase prestige and power. This is usually expressed in two ways: “displaying one's military might at military exercises and national demonstrations and buying or building the era's most prestigious weapons.”²⁰⁸ He further notes this behavior is not “undertaken solely or even primarily” to enhance “defense, deterrent, and compellent capabilities,” but also as a low-cost method to increase prestige. Access to today's media and advertisement is cheap and enables such behavior as a way to influence a broad spectrum of audiences. Media “swagger” can also be undertaken over the long-term, as a part of “reflexive control,” such as how Russia shifted its release of information about the Status-6 weapon over a four-year period. Robert Art further describes the use of the irrational and rational perceptions of military power, a method inherently visible in Russia's strategic weapons messaging.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ Robert J. Art, “To What Ends Military Power?,” *International Security* 4, no. 4 (Spring 1980): 3–35, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2626666>.

²⁰⁹ Art.

The Status-6 is a weapon that is claimed, incredibly, to have the ability to destroy the entire U.S. Eastern coast with its large-scale load of multiple torpedoes amounting to over 200 nuclear megatons. This weapon clearly demonstrates a blend of both the rational and irrational. The fear of nuclear weapons further demonstrates the potential psychological impact. Over the past four decades, the American public has largely lost its familiarity with and understanding of nuclear weapons, exposing a significant U.S. vulnerability.

A strategy comprised of large-scale media efforts, including unfounded claims and deception, lends to a wide-reaching and potentially influential strategy to gain political support from civil populations and key leaders while ultimately influencing foreign policy. President Putin's strategy can, therefore, be viewed, on a continuum over long periods of time, regardless of major shifts in nuclear or defense strategy, as an attempt to set favorable political conditions while using specific methods of deterrence or coercion to further gain ground on political goals. Contrary to Art, this thesis argues that, in this continuum, Russia's secondary audiences and primary audiences, not restricted to audiences of the West, are critical extensions of political targets. These audiences pose further opportunities for influence in line with the Russian regime's political goals. Furthermore, this media strategy provides a predictable environment for illustrating ally cooperation, such as India's Prime Minister's support of Russian policy, as another method of demonstrating credibility to its audiences.

Chapter V theorizes the prestige and preservation of Russia's regime, psychological warfare, and informational deterrence as it relates to the research of this thesis.

A. PRESTIGE AND PRESERVATION OF THE REGIME

President Putin and his close circle apparently desire to keep control over the government and further do so by extending their power and control into the media and the Internet. President Putin emerged from a long career in the former KGB to take over the presidency in 1999. He was appointed president by the previous president, Boris Yeltsin and has stated numerous times that he desires to reverse the fall of the Soviet Union. He recently won a majority vote of over 76%, thus reaffirming his presidency. It is likely that

his regime will aim to continue the status quo of President Putin beyond 2024, regardless of economic costs.²¹⁰ President Putin's desire to maintain prestige and continuing control of the government is reflected by the nation's key policy decisions. Security conditions are prioritized over the economy, which is already suffering after sanctions by the United States and its allies. In March 2018, Putin stated that, if he could change any one thing of the past, he would "reverse the collapse of the Soviet Union."²¹¹ He obviously wants Russia to be a leading power in a multipolar world and also sees the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as a threat to his ability to reach this goal. He emphasizes expanding Russian influence in the near-abroad, a process he started in 2008 with seizure of an Ossetian enclave in Georgia. President Putin has also maintained a sphere of influence within other former Soviet territories through long-term mass communication aimed at ethnic Russian audiences, providing essential services, and spreading propaganda that paints a patriotic picture of Russia.²¹²

Russia's military is strong, regardless of sanctions on the economy. Russia regularly flexes its muscles around its borders, conducts large-scale military exercises with China and other partners, and has a far-reaching network of spies, criminals, and special operations personnel able to act quickly in Russia's interests.²¹³ In 2000, former Russian Intelligence Agent, Colonel Stanivlav Lunev, warned the U.S. government during testimony before Congress: "I can say to you very openly and very firmly that Russian intelligence activity against the United States is much more active than it was in the time

²¹⁰ Mark Galeotti, "The Kremlin's Newest Hybrid Warfare Asset: Gangsters," *Foreign Policy*, September 5, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/06/12/how-the-world-of-spies-became-a-gangsters-paradise-russia-cyberattack-hack/>; "Timeline: Vladimir Putin's 8 Years as Russian President," *Reuters*, February 28, 2008, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-election-putin/timeline-vladimir-putins-8-years-as-russian-president-idUSL2890991520080228>; "Putin Coy about Extending His Rule in Russia beyond 2024," June 5, 2018, Associated Press, <https://apnews.com/ce86968b65094649ab1950608b5980d0> (November 10, 2019); Leonid Bershidsky, "Putin Is Running Out of Options to Extend His Power," July 24, 2019, Bloomberg, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2019-07-24/vladimir-putin-is-running-out-of-options-to-stay-in-power>.

²¹¹ "Putin, before Vote, Says He'd Reverse Soviet Collapse if He Could: Agencies," *Reuters*, March 2, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-election-putin/putin-before-vote-says-hed-reverse-soviet-collapse-if-he-could-agencies-idUSKCN1GE2TF>.

²¹² Helmus et al., *Russian Social Media Influence*.

²¹³ Mark Lowenthal, *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy*; Mark Galeotti, *The Vory: Russia's Super Mafia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), Kindle.

of the former Soviet Union's existence. It's more active today than it was then."²¹⁴ Most importantly, Russia's cyber warfare capabilities are highly evolved in terms of both offensive and defensive operations.

President Putin's IRA wages battles across a full spectrum, as previously mentioned, in the informational, psychological, and digital-technological domains.²¹⁵ In 2017, Putin hinted that "patriotically minded" hackers could have been responsible for the attacks during the elections on the Democratic National Committee: "If they are patriotically minded, they start making their contributions — which are right, from their point of view — to the fight against those who say bad things about Russia;" hacktivists have gained a reputation in light of activities of Anonymous, and sympathizers of the Russian government could be no different.²¹⁶ Russia's Federal Security Service recruits hackers and then threatens them with jail unless they choose to serve Russia with their skills.²¹⁷ Students and private individuals are often required to fulfill a mandatory military service obligation.²¹⁸ The Russian Business Network (RBN) functions as the internet complex for service, tools, and programs in Russia.²¹⁹

B. PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE

In 2000, the United States received warning in testimony of the Russian spy network and its potential to conduct psychological warfare against the United States. The recent decade represents the fruition of the psychological warfare warned as Russia

²¹⁴ *Russian Threats to United States Security in the Post-Cold War Era, House, 106th Cong., 2nd sess.*, January 24, 2000, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-106hhrg66968/html/CHRG-106hhrg66968.htm>.

²¹⁵ Dimitry (Dima) Adamsky, "Cross-Domain Coercion: The Current Russian Art of Strategy," (*Paris: Institut Français des Relations Internationales, Proliferation Papers* no. 54, November 2015), <http://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/pp54adamsky.pdf>.

²¹⁶ Andrew Higgins, "Maybe Private Russian Hackers Meddled in Election, Putin Says," *New York Times*, June 1, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/01/world/europe/vladimir-putin-donald-trump-hacking.html>.

²¹⁷ Galeotti, "The Kremlin's Newest Hybrid Warfare Asset: Gangsters"; Galeotti, *The Vory*.

²¹⁸ Higgins, "Maybe Private Russian Hackers Meddled in Election, Putin Says."

²¹⁹ Galeotti, *The Vory*.

strengthens and diversifies its ability to achieve influence of the United States and the West. Below is an excerpt from a Russian journal referenced during the testimony.

In 1995, a Russian author published an article in a Russian-Federation-sponsored military journal and was later used in a testimony in 2000 about the Russian threats to the United States:

Psychological special operations, which aim to change in the requisite direction the emotional attitudes and behavior patterns of enemy (designated country or area) military servicemen or civilian population on certain military-political and other matters as well as to counter propaganda by the opposing side among own troops and civilians. The type of operation consists of demoralizing and confusing the enemy (armed formations) personnel, persuading it to stop resistance, to desert, surrender, and support opposition political activity; and shaping a favorable attitude toward the Russian army among the local population.²²⁰

This thesis defines *psychological warfare* as efforts to use information to influence audiences, which, as this thesis has previously described, Russia has used previously. The Russians have always deliberately used, and often excelled at, psychological warfare.²²¹ The thesis further considers reflexive control²²² and deception as subcategories of psychological warfare, focused on enemy leaders.

²²⁰ Excerpt from the Colonel V.V. Kadetov. "The Employment of Special Task Forces Under Contemporary Conditions," *Military Thought, Military Theoretical Journal*. July-August 1995, extracted from *Threats to United States Security in the Post-Cold War Era. 2000*. (House of Representatives) Washington, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-106hhrg66968/pdf/CHRG-106hhrg66968.pdf> page 36.

²²¹ I use the term psychological warfare so that the reader understands the strategic application and the requirement of engineering audiences' perceptions, both individuals and groups, and throughout all levels of war: tactical, operational, and strategic. The term is often used to describe U.S. psychological and information warfare, but allows the reader to conceptualize the consolidated impact of the efforts in consideration to setting advantageous political conditions to achieve Russian political objectives.

²²² Thomas describes that "Reflexive control is defined as a means of conveying to a partner or an opponent specially prepared information to incline him to voluntarily make the predetermined decision desired by the initiator of the action. Even though the theory was developed long ago in Russia, it is still undergoing further refinement," of which he also shows Russia's continued use of this concept, Vladimir E. Lepsky, "Refleksivnoe upravlenie v polisubektnikh i mnogoagentnikh sistemakh (Reflexive Control in Multi-Object and Multi-Agent Systems)" (undated manuscript) in Timothy L. Thomas, "Dialectical versus Empirical Thinking: Ten Key Elements of the Russian Understanding of Information Operations," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 11, no. 1 (December 2007): 40–62, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518049808430328> and Timothy L. Thomas, "Russia's Reflexive Control Theory and the Military," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 17, no. 2 (2004): 237–56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518040490450529>.

Throughout the Soviet era and in more recent Russian history, *maskirovka*, also known as strategic deception, is another instrument of information strategy, at which the Russians have excelled.²²³ The Russians have long used such tactics. For example, see the false AIDs narrative²²⁴ and various other stories aimed at winning the narrative war as discussed in the previous chapters. The current Russian regime uses deception, psychological operations, and coordinated media strategy in diverse ways in pursuit of its objectives although the specific methodology is very dependent on the objectives at hand. The strategic use of deception and influence, as described by Sun Tzu as “all warfare is based on deception,” “to subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of the skill” and “a victorious army wins its victories before seeking battle,”²²⁵ can help us understand Russia’s prioritized use of such strategy.

Michael Mihalka previously published on Soviet strategic deception and the required comparison and use within the Soviets’ posture regarding strategic weapons.²²⁶ In fact, Mihalka warned us during the 1980s “War Scare’ of the Soviets” opportunity to disrupt the American political process.²²⁷ The regime is likely still using deception to hide its intent within the nuclear policy realm, as it does with other political aims.²²⁸ The Russian regime likely knows that the deceptions illustrated within media, both known state-

²²³ Christopher D. Jones, “Soviet Military Doctrine as Strategic Deception: An Offensive Military Strategy for Defense of the Socialist Fatherland,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 16, no. 3 (2003): 24–65, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13518040308430567>; Michael Mihalka, “Soviet Strategic Deception, 1955–1981,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 5, no. 1 (1982): 40–93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402398208437102>; Charles A. Ziegler, “Intelligence Assessments of Soviet Atomic Capability, 1945–1949: Myths, Monopolies and Maskirovka,” *Intelligence and National Security* 12, no. 4 (1997): 1–24, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02684529708432446>; Cull et al., *Soviet Subversion, Disinformation and Propaganda*; Adamsky, “Cross-Domain Coercion.”

²²⁴ Adam B. Ellick, Adam Westbrook, and Jonah Kessel, “Meet the KGB Spies Who Invented Fake News,” November 12, 2018, in Operation Infektion produced by *New York Times*, video, 15:37, <https://www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/100000006210828/russia-disinformation-fake-news.html>.

²²⁵ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 66, 77, 87.

²²⁶ Mihalka, “Soviet Strategic Deception, 1955–1981.”

²²⁷ Mihalka, 4.

²²⁸ Helmus et al., *Russian Social Media Influence*, 75,79.

media and plausibly deniable third-party media, can be difficult for the West to counter and verify.

The Russian government is actively using social media in efforts to influence audiences and decisionmakers as a way to deter and coerce Western leaders and to foster political change conducive to Russian security objectives. As discussed in previous chapters, the Soviet government used and the Russian government uses media in efforts to advance security objectives and capitalize on populations and opportunity within its overarching strategy.

In 1993, Arquilla and Ronfeldt also warned of a transition, a military technical revolution, in which “the future of war—specifically the U.S. ability to anticipate and wage war—will be shaped in part by how these technological advances are assessed and adopted.” These gentlemen even argued that technology can have a significant impact on ways of societal thinking and the efficiency of various activities.²²⁹ This mode of thinking can be applied to nuclear warfare in concert with information operations, both of the Russian Federation and the United States. Although they do not specifically name the Russian Federation in consideration of nuclear war, one could consider Russia’s ongoing New Generation Warfare (NGW) and use of information operations as a blend of netwar and cyberwar. As Arquilla and Ronfeldt state, “while both netwar and cyberwar revolve around information and communications matters, at a deeper level they are forms of war about ‘knowledge’—about who knows what, when, where, and why, and about how secure a society or a military is regarding its knowledge of itself and its adversaries.”²³⁰ They deliberately address nuclear warfare, but do not directly illustrate the potential use of netwar and cyberwar in a formal nation-state nuclear warfare strategy, including protracted and conventional.²³¹ In a nuclear netwar and cyberwar, Russia’s opportunity exists to empower anti-nuclear weapon groups protesting for disarmament. In 2018, RAND

²²⁹ Arquilla and Ronfeldt, *Cyberwar Is Coming!*

²³⁰ Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 47.

²³¹ Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 47; Arquilla and Ronfeldt, “The Advent of Netwar (revisited),” 48, 119, 480, 492.

published findings that provide evidence of the Russian use of propaganda and pro-Russian and anti-Russian communities on Twitter attempting to achieve political objectives.²³² The United States' recent discontinuation of the INF Treaty flags further concerns from scholars and policymakers about a new nuclear arms race and new war scare.²³³

Russia's use of social media, including the use of bots and trolls, is an example of Russia's method to disorient U.S. institutions and societies, while also discrediting the U.S. and West. In Arquilla's and Ronfeldt's, *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy*, they addressed concerns of "soft power," "knowledge," "information operations," "perception management" and its relation to media-oriented measures "that aim to attract or disorient rather than coerce, and that affect how secure a society, a military, or other actor feels about its knowledge of itself and of its adversaries. Psychological disruption may become as important a goal as physical destruction."²³⁴ This thesis also provides statistics reflecting the ongoing activities of Russian media and the discourse generated within social media, while also confirming potential grave effects if not further recognized and analyzed.

Even after a blatant warning from scholars such as Arquilla and Ronfeldt, RAND points out that the United States still does not properly tell the U.S. story, does not provide adequate content, and is not properly analyzing or tracking Russian social media efforts.²³⁵ Arquilla and Ronfeldt speak only in direct terms of nation-state cyberwar: "Nuclear counterforce strategies were very much interested in destroying the key communications centers of the opponent, thereby making it impossible for him to command and control far flung nuclear weapons." Although the interpretation of this seems to be focused on hard infrastructure destruction, it could be farther considered in terms of propaganda. If a nation-state, such as the United States, fails to not only understand existing hard-wire networks and networked access [social groups] by technical pathways to human audiences with

²³² Helmus et al., *Russian Social Media Influence*.

²³³ Kramer and Specia, "What Is the I.N.F. Treaty and Why Does It Matter?"

²³⁴ Arquilla and Ronfeldt, "The Advent of Netwar (revisited)," 20.

²³⁵ Helmus et al., *Russian Social Media Influence*.

semiotics, social networks, and communication methods, how can it win a net-cyberwar? Mostly, they reference terrorist use, but, in today's environment, we can likely see that Russia's proxies, mafia, internet agency, intelligence and security organizations have similar capabilities.

Dima Adamsky, Ulrich Kühn, and Kristin Ven Bruusgaard provide a clear description of Russia's information warfare and New Generation Warfare (NGW), which includes non-nuclear deterrence and informational deterrence as inseparable from its nuclear aspirations and development.²³⁶ Adamsky, in his systematic piece on *Cross-domain Coercion*, best details this: "Russia's NGW efforts, the 'informational-psychological struggle' is the initial main effort, as the 'moral-psychological-cognitive-informational suppression of the adversary's decision-makers and operators assures conditions for achieving victory." Adamsky also states that "asymmetrical and indirect actions of political, economic, informational, and technological nature neutralize the adversary's military superiority," and "indirect strategy in its current technological look" is founded using "informational struggle to counterbalance the adversary with or without minimal employment of military force, mainly through informational superiority, in all domains."²³⁷ The "Information Struggle," "aimed at achieving this superiority, blurs war and peace, front and rear, levels of war (tactical, operational, and strategic), forms of warfare (offense and defense), and forms of coercion (deterrence and compellence)."²³⁸ Adamsky further states that "the use of cyber is defined by Russia as cybernetics, including both digital-technological and cognitive-psychological domains and is an integral part of the broader informational environment."²³⁹ The thesis also considers Adamsky's

²³⁶ Adamsky, "Cross-Domain Coercion;" Ulrich Kühn, *Preventing Escalation in the Baltics: A NATO Playbook* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2018); Kristin Ven Bruusgaard, "Russian Strategic Deterrence," *Survival* 58, no. 4 (2016): 7–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2016.1207945>.

²³⁷ Adamsky, "Cross-Domain Coercion."

²³⁸ Adamsky.

²³⁹ Adamsky.

sociological, psychological, and cognitive tactics and methods targeting the populace and ultimately U.S. decision makers as mentioned previously.²⁴⁰

The International Security and Defense Policy Center of the RAND National Defense Research Institute conducted research sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense's Rapid Reaction Technology Office. Findings indicate that the RF uses conventional and social media in a synchronized manner in effects to influence internal and external audiences to achieve its political objectives and to create unrest within adversarial nation-states.²⁴¹ RAND studied Russian-language social media content and networks within the near-abroad populations and provided policy recommendations. Although RAND's study brings attention to Russia's use of social media to stoke fresh fear of nuclear war and use of Twitter to give false locations of nuclear weapons, it does not specifically address Russia's direct targeting of U.S. populations, including government or influential nuclear-related policy groups on social media.²⁴²

As witnessed in this research, the Russian government capitalizes on the sociological, psychological, and cognitive tactics and methods targeting susceptible internet audiences and ultimately U.S. decision makers as mentioned previously by Adamsky.²⁴³

C. INFORMATIONAL DETERRENCE, *INFORMATSIONNOE SDERZHIVANIE*

The use of cyber is defined by Russia as "cybernetics," or *kibernetika*, including both digital-technological and cognitive-psychological domains and is an integral part of the broader informational environment.²⁴⁴ Also, according to Adamsky, in Russia's NGW efforts,

²⁴⁰ Adamsky.

²⁴¹ Helmus et al., *Russian Social Media Influence*.

²⁴² Helmus et al., 21.

²⁴³ Adamsky, "Cross-Domain Coercion."

²⁴⁴ Adamsky.

the “informational-psychological struggle” first takes a leading role, as the moral-psychological-cognitive-informational suppression of the adversary’s decision-makers and operators assures conditions for achieving victory. Second, asymmetrical and indirect actions of political, economic, informational, and “technical nature neutralize the adversary’s military superiority. “Indirect strategy in its current technological look” is primarily about using informational struggle to neutralize the adversary without, or with minimal, employment of military force, mainly through informational superiority (both digital-technical and cognitive-psychological). Third, the complex of non-military actions downgrades the adversary’s ability to compel or to employ force, and produces a negative image in the world public opinion that eventually dissuades the adversary from initiating aggression. Fourth, the side initiating NGW employs a massive deception and disinformation campaign (along the lines of the traditional strategic-operational *maskirovka* concept) to conceal the time, scope, scale, and the character of the attack. Fifth, the subversion-reconnaissance activities conducted by special operations, covered by informational operations, precede the kinetic phase of the campaign. Sixth, the kinetic phase starts with space-aerial dominance aimed at destroying critical assets of civilian industrial-technological infrastructure and centers of state and military management that will force the state to capitulate. Operating under no-fly zones (along lines of anti-access/ area denial principles), private military companies and armed opposition prepare an operational setup for invasion. Seventh, by the phase of the territorial occupation, most of the campaign goals have been achieved, as the ability and will of the adversary to resist have been broken and have evaporated.²⁴⁵

Worth repeating, the “Information Struggle” is “aimed at achieving this superiority, blurs war and peace, front and rear, levels of war (tactical, operational, and strategic), forms of warfare (offense and defense), and forms of coercion (deterrence and compellence).”²⁴⁶

D. CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Most importantly, this thesis describes how the Russian government can use a media strategy to shape long-term favorable conditions in the realm of societal perceptions of nuclear weapons to achieve security objectives. This chapter described existing theory on Russian deception, informational deterrence, coercion, and psychological warfare as a part of media strategy and as it relates to the findings within the overall research of this

²⁴⁵ Adamsky.

²⁴⁶ Adamsky.

thesis. Even after the stark warning in the year 2000 and other warnings from scholars and theorists, social media platforms have served and are continuing to serve as both battlefield and domain for Russian operations. Media, and social media by extension, enable Russia to use messaging and psychological warfare to advance its narrative and shape the global environment in favor of its security strategy in support of its political aims.

VI. CONCLUSION

“Does Russia’s use of social media influence the American public discourse on nuclear weapons?” This thesis shows that, yes, many groups described within the SNA chapter are reactive to the content. However, this is measured only by the existing reactions within Twitter and within the OSN, while also considering the reaction from U.S. media and reactive policy statements of the U.S. government. This research does not find that Russian media is successfully influencing and persuading U.S. audiences to believe Russian content. The indictment for the elections meddling described needed evidence that Russian messaging not only encourages American discourse, but also leads to protests as described during 2016 elections. Various U.S. audiences share and retweet Russian media about strategic nuclear weapons, whether supporting and believing in it or in defiance and as an effort to discredit.

This thesis illuminates how the Russian social media network has shaped discourse and content on the Status-6 and the INF Treaty, connecting those efforts to Russia’s information strategy in support of their nuclear security objectives. Russia’s cooperation with Indian media outlets permeates the Twitter network in English language as a display of support among top leaders of India and Russia. The research also highlights a small portion of a long-term media dissemination campaign orchestrated by Russia’s officials with the willing support of Russian and international media entities.

Further research would be useful to determine the discourse around U.S. strategic weapons to determine if a network exists that reflects anti-war, anti-weapon, or anti-West sentiment generated by Russian media. The overall research advances our understanding of the uses of social media for strategic objectives and how such activities should inform U.S. strategic policy perspectives on the topic of Russian strategic weapons.

Although the researcher used qualitative research by viewing homepages, timelines, books, and related internet material about the hubs, not all actors within the network were closely analyzed. Semiotic analysis and a full knowledge of the actors’ posts, and perhaps how their habits have shifted over time, is worth consideration. Another step for additional research would be to distinguish bots and personas from real U.S. persons. The researcher relied on node self-identification and deemed credibility from other

published research sources. However, further considerations could determine the authenticity and true identities of the nodes. In today's society, the use of virtual private networks (VPN), virtual systems, spoofed internet protocol (IP) addresses, and spoofed hardware identification can allow social media to be a playing field for anyone around the world. We have seen in the most recent elections meddling and hacking the OPCW an example.²⁴⁷ RF's Internet Research Agency (IRA) enabled teams, inside Russia and even marketing teams within the United States, to conduct their work with millions of Twitterbots. Could IntelligentTriangle and website advertisements like *DemocractIndians*, as mentioned previously, be Russia or another actor's effort to leverage the Twitter algorithm for viral sharing of deceptive content with plausible deniability? Yes, and this use of marketing is a method to focus targeting audiences, particularly for surgical engagement to describe and provide a narrative. While *Operation Infektion* was illuminated by the USG, further research could consider to what extent India and other countries are willingly or otherwise enabling Russia's media sharing via social media today. It would be in the interest of the United States and the international community to investigate and understand the sources, capabilities, intentions, and true identities of the full range of Russian media manipulation.

The final recommendation for further research is to closely compare printed material as presented in conventional media and archives. Research in this area is time-intensive and often difficult to acquire, as realized during the initial phase of this study. Accessing key documents often requires understanding the Russian (or other non-English) languages, careful consideration of the researcher's media acquirement, and understanding of their public release methods inside and outside their country. Historically, Russia [former Soviet Union] has released much of its propaganda in non-U.S. countries, so that the media piece would be disseminated more naturally through the use of unwitting

²⁴⁷ Crerar, Pippa, Jon Henley, and Patrick Wintour. 2018. "Russia Accused of Cyber-Attack on Chemical Weapons Watchdog." *The Guardian*, October 4, 2018, sec. World news. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/04/netherlands-halted-russian-cyber-attack-on-chemical-weapons-body>.

individuals, which fail to recognize the use of information and narrative tailored to fit criteria of their cognitive and perceptual bias.²⁴⁸

In closing thoughts, this research represents only a small portion of what could be a larger Russian Federation influence operation for achieving nuclear security strategy objectives. If Russia is using strategic deception with social media to boast their strategic weapons program, is their effort significantly impacting U.S. and allies' decision-making? Certainly, history illustrates the USSR and Russia's use of media to advantage and it would be no surprise to see more active measures intended to advance the political value of Moscow's nuclear arsenal. The Status-6 and INF Treaty Twitter Network is a small piece of a looming puzzle. Understanding the pieces and purpose of that puzzle could help the United States to counter Russia's nuclear game of *maskirovka* and win the ongoing battle of the narrative about nuclear security and stability-

²⁴⁸ "Soviet Active Measures in the Era of Glasnost: A Report to Congress by The United States Information Agency," Inside the Cold War, 1988, <http://insidethecoldwar.org/sites/default/files/documents/Soviet%20Active%20Measures%20in%20the%20Era%20of%20Glasnot%20March%201988.pdf>. p 71.

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