

# Russian Multi-Domain Strategy against NATO: information confrontation and U.S. forward-deployed nuclear weapons in Europe

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## Table of Contents

1.	Introduction: linking information confrontation and U.S. forward-deployed nuclear weapons .....	2
2.	Defining information confrontation .....	4
2.	The evolution of information confrontation in Russian strategic thinking about multi-domain conflict .....	6
3.	Objectives, techniques, and strategy: historical continuity and adaptation .....	12
4.	Cold War case studies of information confrontation against NATO nuclear force structure.....	14
	<i>1977-1978: the neutron bomb .....</i>	<i>14</i>
	<i>1979-1983: theater nuclear force modernization .....</i>	<i>20</i>
5.	Contemporary information confrontation operations against U.S. forward-deployed nuclear weapons....	22
6.	Insights, questions for further study, and conclusions .....	24

## 1. Introduction: linking information confrontation and U.S. forward-deployed nuclear weapons

Western philosophical and moral principles incline strategic thinkers in democratic societies to reject the notion that information can be used as a weapon or a domain of warfare instead of a tool of freedom and truth. International law suggests that the vast majority of societies and governments agree that freedom of information and truth are crucial to healthy societies. In practice, however, there are also governments that perceive them as both a form of strategic deception and as a vulnerability that can be exploited through information operations.

An increasingly common dimension of Russian strategy against the United States and its NATO allies and partners is information confrontation [*informatsionnoe protivoborstvo*], or IPb. Russia actively pursues a strategy of exploiting perceived vulnerabilities of these democratic societies by carrying out informational-technical (e.g., cyber) and informational-psychological operations below the threshold of open military conflict in order to exacerbate pre-existing societal, political, and military divisions, thereby degrading NATO cohesion.<sup>1</sup> The literature on IPb suggests that a key element of this strategy is an effort to create confusion and sow doubt in the existence of truth.<sup>2</sup> Russia has also applied these operations alongside traditional military means of armed conflict in NATO partner states, Georgia and Ukraine, in order to slow down the decision-making processes in those countries as well as throughout the international community. In Georgia and Ukraine, Russia has employed both aspects of IPb to challenge the Westphalian international order and achieve a *fait accompli* with a limited use of military force.

The body of literature dedicated to understanding the role of IPb in Russian strategy has yet to explore its relationship to U.S. extended nuclear deterrence. This topic merits study for at least three reasons. First, Russian strategic thinkers and official strategic documents identify NATO as threat and assign an increased role for asymmetric, indirect, and non-military (including informational) measures in conflict resolution (see section 3). Second, Russia has historically used IPb against the Alliance with mixed success. In this regard, Soviet active measures [*aktivnie meropriyatiya*] operations targeting societal, political, and military divisions about NATO nuclear posture in the late 1970s and early 1980s are illuminating (see section 4). Finally, current Russian practice reflects an effort to propagate disinformation about U.S. forward-deployed nuclear weapons (see section 5).

This study seeks to contribute to the body of literature on IPb by analyzing the evolution of Russian strategic thought on and practice of IPb in relation to U.S. forward-deployed nuclear weapons in Europe. It explores the following questions: How and under which conditions does Russia employ IPb in an effort to achieve preferred strategic outcomes related to NATO nuclear force structure? What insights about contemporary Russian IPb efforts can be gained from studying Soviet active measures campaigns against NATO nuclear force posture?

Analysis of trends in Russian strategic thinking, official Russian strategic documents, and two cold war case studies suggest that IPb operations targeting societal, political, and military divisions within NATO regarding the role of U.S. forward-deployed nuclear weapons in its defense and deterrence posture are an important feature of Russia's multi-domain strategy against NATO. As the Soviet Union did, Russia pursues a two-tiered strategy "from above" and

“from below” that exploits pre-existing divisions and perceived vulnerabilities of democracies.<sup>3</sup> Rather than seeking to create confusion and sow doubt in the existence of truth in order to exacerbate existing divisions as the literature on IPb suggests, however, Russia promotes very specific, historically consistent, and simple political and security narratives about U.S. forward-deployed nuclear weapons that resonate with the growing anti-nuclear weapons movement in democratic societies and deflect attention from its own large stockpile of non-strategic nuclear weapons.

Russian IPb strategy differs from Soviet strategy due to three structural factors: the characteristics of modern warfare, the contemporary information ecosystem and its associated information technologies, and the increased influence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on global politics. These three structural changes allow Russia to blur the distinction between its campaigns “from above” and “from below” in a way that the Soviet Union could not. For example, it has covertly planted disinformation about U.S. forward-deployed nuclear weapons into the information ecosystem using small independent internet news agencies and enjoyed the subsequent proliferation of its story and narrative across the world by other news agencies which picked up the story and through social media websites like Twitter. By leveraging this new information environment, Russia seeks to influence government officials as well as the general public rather than targeting one specific group. Furthermore, Russia leverages the contemporary information ecosystem to promote its narratives without needing to tie its hands to the anti-nuclear weapons movement through front organizations or foreign political parties as the Soviet Union did. It no longer needs to fund civil society organizations like the World Peace Council (WPC) in an effort to enhance the legitimacy of its narratives because NGOs that agree with Russian narratives about the dangers of NATO’s nuclear posture today are more numerous and have more political influence and larger endowments than similar organizations during the cold war period. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)—the NGO which was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017 for promoting nuclear disarmament and its leadership in advocating the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)—and its 532 partner organizations in 103 countries is an example of this structural change. One significant consequence of these structural changes is that the pressure to pursue arms control arrangements is directed primarily at NATO instead of being distributed across NATO and Russia as it was distributed across NATO and the Soviet Union in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

These insights about Russian IPb strategy can contribute to informing discussions within NATO about developing a strategy for defending against and responding to Russian IPb. A better understanding of the Russian strategy of exacerbating pre-existing divisions about the role of U.S. forward-deployed nuclear weapons on the territory of NATO non-nuclear weapon States (NNWS) can also help foster a constructive dialogue between NATO and the anti-nuclear weapons NGOs, such as ICAN, which are currently targeting the same divisions within NATO. This is important because Russian IPb, together with the movement behind the TPNW, could facilitate the perception that Russia, which does not deploy its nuclear weapons on the territory of other countries, is more credibly committed to certain obligations under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) than the U.S. and its allies and partners. Faced with such circumstances, NATO would be under increased pressure to decrease or at least modify the structure of its reliance on U.S. nuclear weapons. Such a move would represent a

strategic victory for Russia and a defeat for not only NATO but also organizations like ICAN which seek to preserve and strengthen a rules-based international order that Russian IPb threatens.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Defining information confrontation

Information confrontation is the term used by Russian strategic thinkers to describe the role of information in conflict.<sup>1</sup> It is an element of Russian multi-domain strategy that is different from Western ideas about information in conflict in at least three ways. First, unlike similar Western conceptual frameworks for the role of information in conflict, the Russian conceptual framework of IPb encompasses the technological dimension of information and communication and expands beyond them to include the dimension of human cognition and emotion. Second, IPb is conceived as a defensive and offensive countermeasure to perceived Western offensive informational-technical and informational-psychological operations. Third, it is also an asymmetric and indirect measure against other forms of conflict operations, including nuclear deterrence. These three points are important because they provide useful insights into Russian threat perceptions and thinking about the nature of modern conflict.

Keir Giles, a leading expert on Russian strategic thinking about information confrontation, succinctly explains how the Russian conceptual framework for information is broader than the Western conceptual framework.<sup>5</sup> In Western strategic thinking, information operations are often framed within the domain of cyberspace and the physical infrastructure and devices that support or are enabled by it. In contrast, Russian strategic thinking about information incorporates these elements and also expands beyond them to include the domain of human cognition and emotion.<sup>6</sup> According to Russian strategic thought, Giles maintains, there is no distinction between information stored in a computer or in the human mind, just as there is no distinction between the way information is transferred between those storage spaces.<sup>7</sup> The implication is that information conceptualized in terms of its various spaces, means of transmission, and broad scope is subject to use as a tool, target, or domain of information confrontation operations.

In Western nomenclature, Russian IPb is often described using a range of terms, including: information warfare, political warfare, psychological warfare, hybrid warfare, cyber warfare, etc.<sup>8</sup> While describing similar concepts, these Western terms reveal the cognitive bias of mirror-imaging and fail to reflect the evolution of Russian strategic thought about the role and practice of information operations.<sup>9</sup> Dima Adamsky explores this problem, cautioning that “applying the Western conceptual HW [hybrid warfare] framework to explain Russian operational art, without examining Russian references to this term, isolating it from Russian ideational context, and without contrasting it with what Russians think about themselves and others, may lead to misperceptions.”<sup>10</sup> Significantly, Russian strategic thinkers use Western lexicon to describe Western approaches to the operationalization of information while describing the Russian approach using a term originating from the Russian language and Russian strategic thinking.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As noted by Dima Adamsky, the term “information warfare” is used interchangeably with IPb; however, its interpretation by Russian strategic thought differs from the Western interpretation.

Information confrontation is conceptualized as a defensive countermeasure to Western threats and acts of aggression, including through information warfare, political warfare, psychological warfare, hybrid warfare, cyber warfare, etc.<sup>12</sup>

The defensive nature of IPb is formalized in official Russian strategic documents. For example, the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept and 2016 Information Security Doctrine emphasize the increased role for capabilities reflecting both components of IPb in influencing international politics and achieving foreign policy objectives in addition to military strength and traditional methods of diplomacy. With respect to the informational-technical component of IPb, the Concept observes that technological and IT capabilities are “taking center stage” alongside military might as tools used by states in pursuit of geopolitical interests.<sup>13</sup> Regarding the informational-psychological component, it notes that soft power diplomacy, which “primarily includes tools offered by civil society, as well as various methods and technologies—from information and communication, to humanitarian and other types,” has “become an integral part” of foreign policy efforts.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the 2016 Information Security Doctrine notes a “growing use of” and “growing risk of using” information technologies by states, with support from non-state actors, “to infringe on the sovereignty, territorial integrity, or political and social stability of the Russian Federation.”<sup>15</sup> These security threats are described as informational-technical and informational-psychological as well as external and internal.<sup>16</sup>

IPb is also an asymmetric and indirect offensive countermeasure to other forms of conflict, including nuclear deterrence. Official strategic documents do not explicitly discuss IPb, but they do allude to its increased strategic importance in 21<sup>st</sup> century conflict. The 2014 Russian Military Doctrine and 2015 National Security Strategy recognize an increasing role for non-nuclear, non-military (including informational), indirect, and asymmetric approaches to deterrence and conflict prevention in response to the changing nature of conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>17</sup> Reflecting these observations about the role of information in foreign, military, and security policy in the modern world, the Foreign Policy Concept includes in its main objectives two points directly related to information: “to consolidate the Russian Federation’s position as a center of influence in today’s world” and “to bolster the standing of Russian mass media and communication tools in the global information space and convey Russia’s perspective on international process to a wider international community.”<sup>18</sup> Information support for achieving these objectives is threefold. First, Russia seeks to promote the “delivery to the international community of unbiased information about Russia’s perspectives on key international issues, its foreign policy initiatives and efforts, processes and plans of its socioeconomic development and Russia’s cultural and research achievements.”<sup>19</sup> Second, it seeks to develop “effective ways to influence foreign audiences” with “new information and communication technology” to “ensure that the world has an objective image” of Russia.<sup>20</sup> Third, it seeks to develop public diplomacy through “greater participation of Russia’s academics and experts in the dialogue with foreign specialists on global politics and international security.”<sup>21</sup> In short, the Foreign Policy Concept outlines a systematic offensive effort to propagate Russian narratives using IPb.

In 2017, the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency published a definition of information confrontation which accurately reflects Russian strategic thought and minimizes the cognitive and conceptual issues arising from Western terminology. It describes IPb as “the Russian government’s term for conflict in the information sphere. IPb includes diplomatic, economic,

military, political, cultural, social, and religious information arenas, and encompasses two measures for influence: informational-technical effect and informational-psychological effect. Informational-technical effect is roughly analogous to computer network operations, including computer-network defense, attack, and exploitation. Informational-psychological effect refers to attempts to change people’s behavior or beliefs in favor of Russian governmental objectives. IPb is designed to shape perceptions and manipulate the behavior of target audiences. Information countermeasures are activities taken in advance of an event that could either be offensive (such as activities to discredit the key communicator) or defensive (such as measures to secure Internet websites) designed to prevent an attack.”<sup>22</sup> The informational-technical effect covers informational aspects characteristic of the Western concepts of hybrid and cyber warfare, while the informational-psychological effect encompasses the broader conception of information related to human cognition and emotion. Figure 1 provides a graphical illustration of IPb.

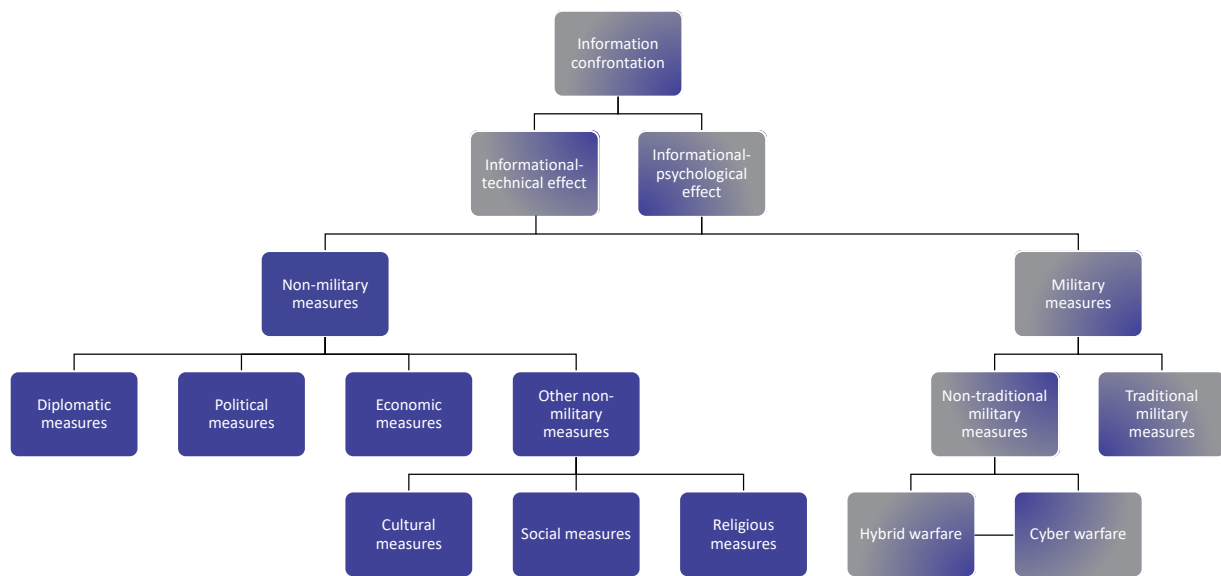


Figure 1: A colored schematic of IPb. Purple indicates a non-military measure while gray denotes a military measure

## 2. The evolution of information confrontation in Russian strategic thinking about multi-domain conflict

While traditional military measures are still considered the hallmark of inter-state conflict, Russian strategic thinking is increasingly highlighting the strategic importance of non-military, asymmetric, and indirect measures, including military and non-military IPb operations, in its multi-domain approach to conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

According to the Chief of the Russian General Staff, Valeriy Gerasimov, IPb is the only means of conflict resolution which spans across all stages of modern inter-state conflict and encompasses both military and non-military means (see Figure 2).<sup>23</sup> The complexity of its role

further increases during the initial stages of kinetic conflict operations. Reflecting a desire to minimize military confrontation during these stages, the ratio of non-military and military measures is described as 4:1.<sup>24</sup>

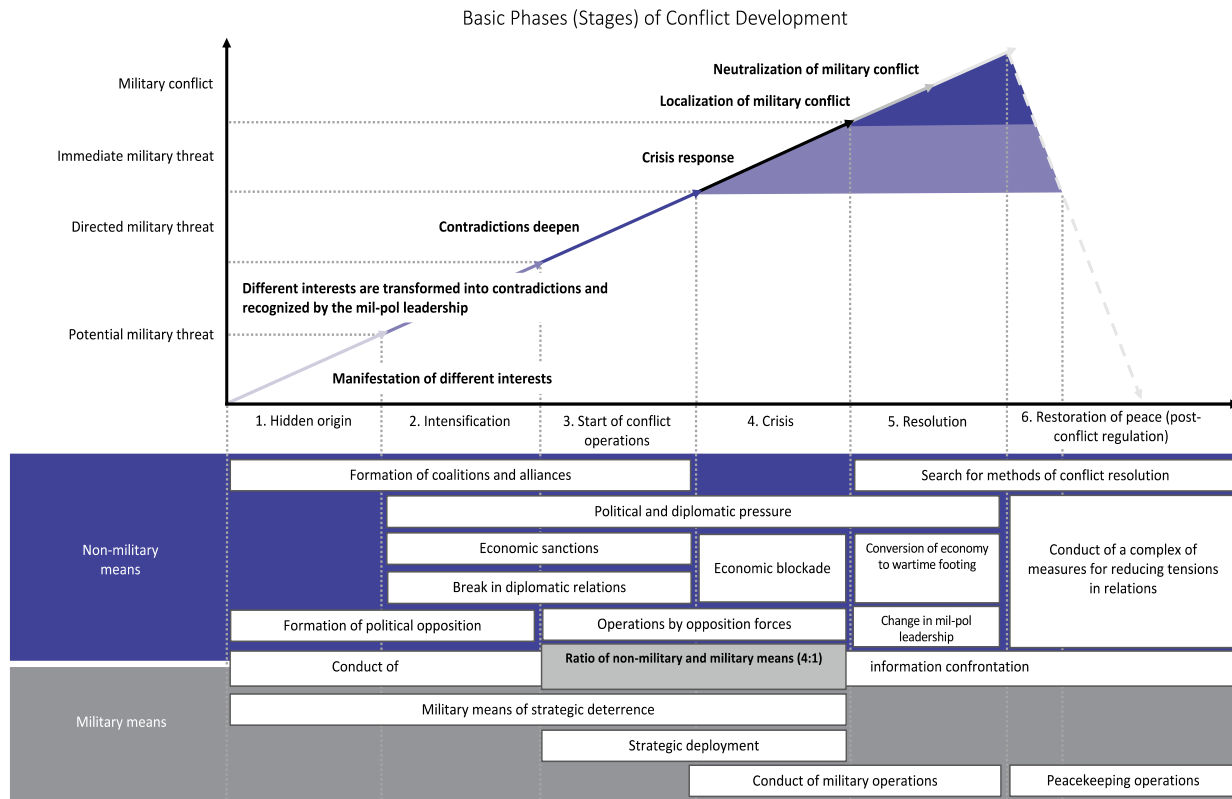


Figure 2: Chart taken from Valeriy Gerasimov (2013) “Tsennost nauki v predvidenii [The Value of Science lies in Prediction].” *Voенno-promyshlenniy kurer*. Translation by author.

The novelty of Gerasimov’s perception of modern conflict (often described as the Gerasimov Doctrine) and the role of information in conflict resolution should not be overstated.<sup>25</sup> The literature on Russian IPb emphasizes that contemporary information operations demonstrate that “the Kremlin is falling on a time-honoured strategy in its propaganda war.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, Russian leaders have operationalized information for strategic purposes since at least the Revolution. The Soviet government developed and systematically applied active measures and deception techniques that were intensive, persistent in times of war and peace, worldwide in scope, and centrally coordinated in a way that was not mirrored by Western governments.<sup>27</sup> Informational-psychological operations were coordinated by the political leadership and implemented by the state security apparatus, specifically the KGB (and its predecessors) and to a lesser extent the GRU, both domestically and internationally.<sup>28</sup> Initially these operations were orchestrated on an ad-hoc basis, but by the late 1970s, an institutionalized system for coordinating and implementing them had been fully established. These overt and covert, non-military and military information operations were referred to by Soviet intelligence services as active measures. In 1982, the CIA described active measures as “an unconventional adjunct to traditional diplomacy. They are quintessentially an offensive instrument of Soviet policy.”<sup>29</sup>



The 1970s saw an organizational restructuring within the KGB and CPSU that signified an increase in the perceived strategic importance of active measures. According to a Ladislav Bittman, a former active measures agent for Czechoslovak intelligence (one of the most successful and loyal satellites of the KGB) who defected to the West, this organizational change was the result of an evolution in the perceived strategic importance of active measures that unfolded in three stages after World War II.<sup>30</sup> In the first stage (1945-1948), active measures were characterized by an ideological emphasis on communism. In the second stage (1948-1959), the Soviet Union sought to increase the efficacy of active measures by making them appear more objective. To achieve this, the Soviet Union dialed back the overt ideological emphasis of its propaganda and used communist front organizations and Soviet satellite intelligence services to conceal its role in coordinating active measures.

Bittman notes that the Soviet government valued active measures as secondary to intelligence collection in the first and second stages and that this hierarchy of values visibly reversed in the third stage, which began in 1959 with the establishment of a department of active measures within the First Chief Directorate of the KGB. Many Soviet satellite intelligence services soon established similar departments which carried out orders from the KGB in addition to their own operations. Throughout the 1970s the Soviet government formally established an institutionalized structure for coordinating and implementing active measures (see Figure 3). This process began in 1970 when the active measures department of the KGB was elevated to a special service called Special Service A within the First Chief Directorate. Special Service A was responsible for carrying out active measures which were coordinated by the International Department (ID) of the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU). The ID assisted the Politburo in coordinating policy by liaising with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, military, Academy of Sciences, the KGB, and non-ruling foreign communist parties.<sup>31</sup> In 1978, the CPSU established another department for coordinating active measures: The International Information Department (IID).<sup>32</sup> The IID was responsible for improving the effectiveness of Soviet propaganda abroad and improving treatment of foreign affairs by domestic media. Service A of the KGB managed the implementation of active measures coordinated by the IID as it did for the ID.

CHART 1

### SOVIET ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE FOR ACTIVE MEASURES

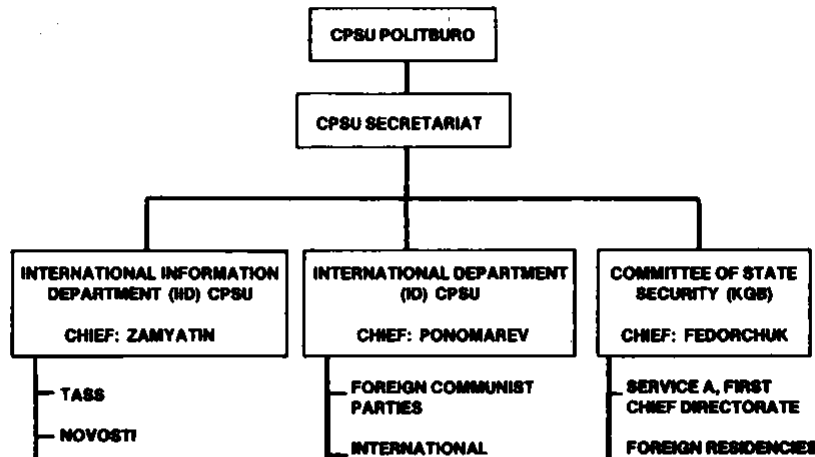


Figure 3: Chart taken from *Soviet Active Measures. Hearings Before the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. House of Representatives. Ninety-Seventh Congress, Second Session. 13-14 July 1982, p.228*

When exploring the causal mechanisms behind the institutionalization of active measures, one cannot overstate the influence the anti-war movement in the United States during the Vietnam War had on Soviet strategic thinkers. The movement demonstrated the potential efficacy of exploiting peace movements and public opinion in democratic societies to achieve political and security objectives.<sup>33</sup> The foundation for this strategy was embedded in Bolshevik and then Soviet strategic thought which embraced the Marxist-Leninist notion that the struggle for peace is constant and characterized by conflict.<sup>34</sup>

This same notion of constant conflict is reflected in Gerasimov's chart, particularly with respect to the role of IPb, since it is the only means of conflict resolution which is applied across all phases of conflict. The role of IPb in the Gerasimov Doctrine should therefore be interpreted as an evolution enabled by technological innovation, globalization, and the changing nature of conflict rather than a revolution in Russian strategic thinking about conflict.

Contemporary Russian strategic thinking about IPb developed within the body of thought known as New Generation War [*voyna novogo pokoleniya*], or NGW. Sergei Chekinov and Sergei Bogdanov published the seminal article on this concept in 2013. Entitled "The Nature and Content of a New Generation War," the piece describes thinking within the Russian Ministry of Defense about the nature and content of warfare in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as well as how to prepare for and emerge victorious from it.<sup>35</sup> NGW emphasizes the growing importance of non-military, asymmetric, and indirect means of conflict resolution over traditional military methods.<sup>36</sup> The theory of victory reflects an effort to achieve reflexive control [*refleksivnoe upravlenie*] without

resorting to the military subjugation of the adversary.<sup>37</sup> Under NGW, traditional kinetic military measures are used only after non-military measures and non-kinetic military measures fail to achieve strategic objectives or de-escalate a conflict. Figure 4 provides a graphical illustration of NGW and the Gerasimov Doctrine.

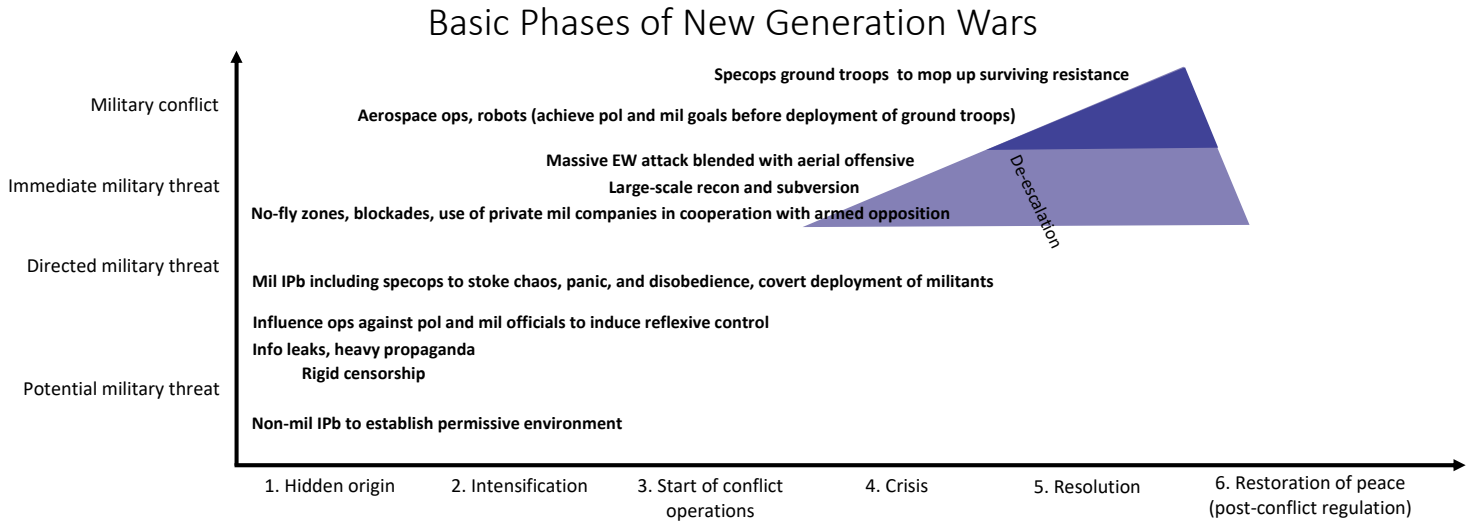


Figure 4: A graphical illustration of NGW and the Gerasimov Doctrine. See Sergei Chekinov and Sergei Bogdanov (2013), 19-22

Dima Adamsky provides a useful description of Russian NGW strategy using Western nomenclature while avoiding the cognitively and conceptually problematic terms such as hybrid warfare. Borrowing from the body of thought on cross-domain deterrence, he develops a concept called Russian cross-domain coercion. Cross-domain coercion “refers to the host of Russian efforts to deter and to compel adversaries by orchestrating soft and hard instruments of power across various domains, regionally and globally.”<sup>38</sup>

NGW first arose as a way to think about Russian military policy in light of U.S. advances in high-precision, non-nuclear military technology and its impact on the nature of conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>39</sup> U.S. operations in the First Gulf War and NATO operations in the Balkans during the Yugoslav wars were perceived by Russian strategic thinkers as a watershed in the evolution of conflict. The advanced military technology utilized by the U.S. and its allies allowed them to carry out military operations remotely and with high precision, thereby decreasing the need for the type and level of mobilization characteristic of previous conflicts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century while simultaneously increasing U.S. and NATO power projection. Russia, which was suffering through an economic crisis after the collapse of the Soviet Union, was not in a financial position to develop symmetric countermeasures to U.S. advancements in non-nuclear military capabilities. In light of this economic disadvantage, Russian strategic thinkers sought to conceptualize a theory and develop a strategy for countering U.S. conventional superiority using asymmetric, including non-military, and less costly methods.<sup>40</sup> Chekinov and Bogdanov note that the importance of this intellectual effort was highlighted by President Putin during a speech to the Federal Assembly in 2006 when he remarked: “We must consider the plans and development trajectories of the armed forces in other countries. We must be aware of perspective innovations.

However, we must not chase after quantitative indicators...Our response must be based upon intellectual superiority. It will be asymmetric and less costly.”<sup>41</sup>

Justification for the informational component of NGW was provided by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Color Revolutions, particularly those in the post-Soviet space, and Arab Spring.<sup>42</sup> Chekinov and Bogdanov argue that U.S. information warfare techniques were a major factor contributing to the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>43</sup> The perceived effectiveness of these techniques increased with the development of the Internet and social media. Russian strategic thinkers expressed alarm at the role of the Internet as a vehicle for undermining regime stability in the countries affected by the Color Revolutions and Arab Spring. They were further alarmed by Western financial, informational, and special operations support for anti-regime NGOs and political parties/movements in those countries. Such support, they contend, is a form of hybrid warfare that constitutes a violation of national sovereignty and is thus illustrative of Western aggression.

While condemning the use by adversaries of informational and other non-military, indirect techniques to undermine regime stability, Russia recognizes the strategic significance and cost-effectiveness of such efforts in 21<sup>st</sup> century conflict and therefore incorporated them into its own strategy. Reflecting upon Western involvement in the conflicts in Yugoslavia, Iraq, Libya, Tunisia, Syria, and Ukraine, General Alexander Dvornikov, Commander of the Southern Military District and Commander of Russian Armed Forces in Syria when Russia began its military intervention, observed: “Now, aggressor states achieve geopolitical goals through a complex of non-military means which in several cases significantly exceed the effectiveness of military means. The primary objective is not the physical destruction of the adversary, but rather his complete submission to your will.”<sup>44</sup> He further noted: “Modern armed conflict is acquiring a vast array of forms which, depending on the region and concrete situation, integrate separate elements into a unified approach. We [Russia] have taken account of this history, gained useful insights, and applied them to our operations in Syria.”

NGW identifies IPb as the primary tool in the Russian military and foreign policy toolkits for achieving victory in modern conflict as described by General Dvornikov, i.e. the submission of the adversary to one’s will rather than his complete military destruction. According to Chekinov and Bogdanov, “the means for exerting informational influence have reached a level of development whereby they are capable of resolving strategic objectives.”<sup>45</sup> They further note: “In the ongoing revolution in information technologies, information and psychological warfare will largely lay the groundwork for victory.” Some Russian strategic thinkers predict that military actions in the information space will become the “deciding factor” in armed conflict.<sup>46</sup>

Vladimir Novikov and Sergei Golubchikov, two prominent figures in recent discussions about the role of IPb in modern conflict, claim that preparedness for classical war with the use of conventional weapons and nuclear deterrence is no longer sufficient for guaranteeing national sovereignty.<sup>47</sup> They argue that the contemporary information and security landscapes have created a situation in which information confrontation is surpassing traditional military measures as the dominant means for achieving political, economic, and territorial objectives. In this new environment, the complete military destruction of the adversary is no longer necessary, nor is it desirable. In this new environment, reflexive control is a more realistic goal, and military means

are not immediately conducive to achieving it since they do not necessarily establish or maintain a permissive environment for influencing foreign governments and societies, especially if it is believed that they are used as tools of aggression.

### 3. Objectives, techniques, and strategy: historical continuity and adaptation

Analysis of Soviet active measures against NATO provides useful insights into contemporary Russian strategic thinking about IPb. There is much historical continuity between the objectives of IPb and active measures regarding NATO nuclear posture. As the Soviet Union did, Russia seeks to influence NATO members to make decisions about the Alliance's nuclear posture that are favorable to Russian security interests. While the objectives are the same, the techniques and strategy of contemporary IPb are adapted to three 21<sup>st</sup> century structural changes: the characteristics of modern warfare, the contemporary information ecosystem and its associated technological capabilities, and the increased influence of NGOs on global politics. In this new environment, traditional active measures techniques are now supplemented or replaced by new techniques, such as computational propaganda, and in some cases even antiquated, such as funding front organizations to provide legitimacy to Russian narratives. The strategy involves the promotion of specific political and security narratives through a two-tiered campaign "from above" and "from below," but, in contrast to Soviet active measures, the distinction between these two campaigns is now blurred by the three structural changes.

The objectives of active measures were primarily strategic and long-term in nature. Reflecting a high degree of patience in Soviet strategic culture, active measures aimed at shaping the opinions, behavior, and policies of foreign governments and societies in a way that was favorable to the Soviet government.<sup>48</sup> A central aspect of this effort was reflexive control, a concept which emerged in the 1950s under the body of Soviet strategic thought known as cybernetics. Reflexive control is "the practice of predetermining an adversary's decision...by altering key factors in the adversary's perception of the world."<sup>49</sup> It seeks to control rather than simply manage the target by "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."<sup>50</sup> According to former active measures agents for Soviet and Soviet satellite intelligence services, the Soviet Union sought to diminish the reputation of the target while simultaneously improving its own image.<sup>51</sup> This effort involved disrupting relations between countries, undermining confidence in foreign leaders and institutions, and discrediting opponents.<sup>52</sup>

The objectives of contemporary IPb operations are similar, if not identical, to the objectives of Soviet active measures.<sup>53</sup> According to Keir Giles, five specific and interrelated objectives have historically stimulated Soviet and Russian information operations: (1) strategic victory; (2) reflexive control; (3) the establishment of a permissive environment; (4) subversion and destabilization; and (5) defensive measures.<sup>54</sup> These objectives are aimed at both external and internal targets. By utilizing information confrontation techniques, Russia seeks to establish a permissive environment (internally and externally) for achieving reflexive control over the target

and, ultimately, strategic victory, which can entail subversion and destabilization of foreign governments while ensuring regime stability in Russia.

Russia has adapted Soviet techniques to account for the characteristics of modern warfare, modern capabilities, and the global environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as part of a holistic multi-domain effort to achieve its strategic objectives.<sup>55</sup> The techniques of active measures are well documented. According to the literature, the various non-military instruments fall into six categories: (1) political influence operations; (2) disinformation; (3) propaganda; (4) media manipulation and control; (5) front organizations; (6) non-ruling communist parties.<sup>56</sup> The 21<sup>st</sup> century information and security environments have enabled an evolution of the six categories of techniques. For example, reflecting the changes in Russian political philosophy and ideology since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia today does not necessarily support foreign communist parties. In contrast, it supports many right-wing nationalist parties.<sup>57</sup> In addition, Russia may not need to rely upon front organizations as the Soviet Union did because of powerful NGOs which promote Russian narratives without Russian support and the nature of the internet. Furthermore, Russian disinformation, propaganda, and media manipulation techniques have expanded to incorporate computational propaganda which is “the use of algorithms, automation, and human curation to purposefully distribute misleading information over social media networks.”<sup>58</sup>

The strategy underlying Soviet active measures was twofold: a campaign “from above” and a campaign “from below.”<sup>59</sup> The campaign “from above” sought to take advantage of the moral and psychological vulnerabilities of government officials through a variety of overt and covert means, ranging from disinformation to influence operations. The campaign “from below” aimed at exploiting the perceived vulnerabilities of democracies to the freedom of speech and public opinion by polluting information spaces with Soviet political and security narratives and disinformation which induce witting and unwitting people to adopt Soviet political and security narratives regardless of their ideology and perception of the Soviet Union. In short, to achieve the objectives of active measures, the Soviet government pursued a strategy of exploiting perceived vulnerabilities of government officials and democratic societies.<sup>60</sup>

The literature on Russian IPb strategy suggests that Russian strategy differs from Soviet strategy by an effort to undermine the very existence of truth since modern Russia is not guided by Marxist-Leninist ideology as the Soviet Union was. While in general it may be the case that Russia seeks to undermine the existence of truth by supporting contrasting and contradictory positions, such as with the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States,<sup>61</sup> in certain cases, Russia constructs and propagates a very specific truth while actively delegitimizing contrasting narratives. This is the case with Russian political and security narratives about U.S. forward-deployed nuclear weapons, and it is historically consistent (see sections 4 and 5).

As with contemporary IPb techniques, Russia has modified and adapted Soviet active measures strategy to incorporate modern technology and to account for the characteristics of modern warfare, the contemporary information ecosystem, and the increased influence of civil society organizations.<sup>62</sup> According to Russian strategic documents and strategic thinking, the characteristics of modern warfare, modern technology, and globalization have transformed IPb into a more effective tool within Russia’s military, security, and foreign policy toolkit for

exercising influence short of kinetic military operations in an effort to achieve preferred strategic outcomes.<sup>63</sup> In this new environment, the two-tiered nature of the strategy is not as clearly defined as it was during the Soviet period. Martin Kragh and Sebastian Åsberg have studied this change by exploring the distinction between informational-psychological operations and public diplomacy in contemporary Russian information operations against Sweden and conclude that the distinction is becoming increasingly blurred by modern technology—most notably the Internet and its associated IT capabilities—and the capabilities afforded by the contemporary information environment.<sup>64</sup> This change is also observed in the increased effort made by Russia to exploit unwitting agents. Thomas Rid notes that “the internet has made unwitting agents more potent, more persistent, and more pervasive.”<sup>65</sup> The increased role of NGOs in global politics also shapes Russian strategy. Many NGOs advocating the TPNW are among the unwitting agents that Russia exploits to achieve its strategic objectives. These phenomena can be seen in contemporary Russian informational-psychological operations against U.S. forward-deployed nuclear weapons in Europe (see section 5).

#### 4. Cold War case studies of information confrontation against NATO nuclear force structure

NATO cohesion with respect to the Alliance’s nuclear force structure became a major target of active measures beginning in the late 1970s following the institutionalization of a system for coordinating and implementing active measures within the KGB and CPSU. From 1977-1978, the Soviet Union waged an active measures campaign against the production and deployment of enhanced radiation/reduced blast weapons, known colloquially as neutron bombs.<sup>66</sup> Subsequently, from 1979-1983, the Soviet Union pursued a similar active measures campaign against NATO theater nuclear force (TNF) modernization plans.<sup>67</sup>

Both active measures campaigns incorporated the two-tiered strategy to influence the Alliance by driving wedges into pre-existing societal, political, and military divisions. The campaign “from above” aimed at the political elite within each member state, while the campaign “from below” targeted the general public.<sup>68</sup> Active measures which facilitated the dissemination and acceptance of Soviet political and security narratives about the dangers posed by NATO’s nuclear posture served as the wedges. When the environment was not conducive to diplomacy and a campaign “from above,” the USSR emphasized the campaign “from below.”

##### *1977-1978: the neutron bomb*

Prior to 1977, U.S. decisions regarding the production and deployment of nuclear weapons were made in secret at the highest levels of government. The debate about the neutron bomb was fundamentally different; it was carried out in public and on the international level due to the unplanned public disclosure of funding for the development and deployment to NATO allies of the weapon.<sup>69</sup> As such, the case of the neutron bomb illustrates a rare instance during the Cold War when nuclear weapons policy-making was exposed to public discourse and thus more vulnerable to Soviet active measures. Maynard Glitman, United States Representative to NATO

during the neutron bomb episode, remarked: “For almost a year, this issue would plague transatlantic security relations and influence Soviet perceptions of the solidity of U.S.-Allied cooperation in the nuclear area. Above all its unfavorable outcome would spur Soviet efforts to manipulate Western public opinion in the furtherance of Soviet policies, especially those aimed at breaking up the North Atlantic Alliance.”<sup>70</sup>

There were at least four significant divisions within the Alliance prior to and during the neutron bomb episode. One division was a lack of consensus on the role of theater nuclear weapons (TNW) in NATO defense and deterrence posture under flexible response.<sup>71</sup> The link between nuclear forces in the European theater and U.S. strategic nuclear forces lied at the core of the debate. In general, the European allies feared decoupling of the two, while the U.S sought to make plans for the controlled use of TNW in a way that prevented escalation to the strategic level. Flexible response was designed to balance these opposing interests by providing a certain level of ambiguity that facilitated both interpretations; however, this compromise did not resolve the issue.<sup>72</sup> There was a prevailing and paradoxical attitude within NATO which avoided resolving this tension in an effort to promote alliance cohesion.<sup>73</sup> This paradox was not lost on the Soviet Union.

These doctrinal issues were further complicated by the unintended public disclosure of U.S. plans to finance the production and deployment of ERWs when there was disagreement amongst allies over the deterrent value of the weapon. An ERW is thermonuclear device configured in a way that enhances the output of radiation while reducing the other nuclear weapons effects, including the blast wave and radioactive contamination. U.S. and NATO military officials thus perceived ERWs as a credible and effective option for countering the advantage the Warsaw Pact had over NATO in tank forces by providing the alliance with a discriminate capability which would penetrate heavily-armored tanks while minimizing collateral damage.<sup>74</sup> Others within the alliance, however, argued against the military efficacy of ERWs. While they were advantageous in so far as they reduce collateral damage, it was argued that this advantage was neutralized by the absence of an analogous Warsaw Pact capability.<sup>75</sup> Without an ERW of its own, the Warsaw Pact would have to respond to the use of an ERW with a more destructive theater nuclear weapon. In addition, some argued that the perceived usability of ERWs would lower the nuclear threshold.

A third tension was the divide between public opinion and government policy when the funding request for ERWs was disclosed. One illustration of this tension was the U.S. government’s reaction to the unauthorized public disclosure of classified information. When news about the secret “killer warheads” was first uncovered by Walter Pincus of the *Washington Post* on 6 June 1977, the Carter administration attempted to distance itself from the neutron bomb and the impending scandal.<sup>76</sup> On the one hand, the administration was frustrated with the unauthorized publication of highly classified information and the subsequent politicization of a policy decision which was traditionally confined to the highest levels of political and military decision-making. Secretary of Defense Harold Brown expressed this frustration with the following remark: “without the Pincus articles, they [ERWs] would have been deployed and nobody would have noticed.”<sup>77</sup> On the other hand, the administration had to craft a response that would mitigate the political damage that the media and Carter’s political opponents were inflicting on the new administration. Central to Carter’s appeal during the campaign process was his seemingly



unshakeable moral approach to politics and decision-making, so the suggestion that he had secretly allocated funds to the production of a new type of nuclear weapon four months into his presidency made him look like an insincere hypocrite. Moreover, the administration was embarrassed by being caught unaware of such a controversial item in the budget it had proposed because it made Carter look incompetent and unprepared to fulfill the duties of the office that he had assumed, particularly given that the abolition of nuclear weapons was an important platform of his presidential campaign.<sup>78</sup>

Lack of consensus on nuclear doctrine and force structure and public resistance towards nuclear weapons perhaps explains why the U.S. attempted to conceal funding for the ERW. The decision to request funding for the development and deployment of ERWs was enveloped by the Ford administration in such a high degree of secrecy that it caught the Carter administration by surprise. Zbigniew Brzezinski, National Security Adviser under President Carter, later recalled: “We were quite unprepared for the political storm that hit us only four and a half months after the inauguration.”<sup>79</sup> Carter had unknowingly approved funding for the development of the ERW when reviewing the 1978 budget proposal inherited from the Ford administration. In an effort to keep the device a secret from the public, President Ford authorized the funding without providing an Arms Control Impact Statement in violation of the Arms Control and Disarmament Act (ACDA).<sup>80</sup> Ford’s defeat in the election left Jimmy Carter responsible for the outcome of the violation.<sup>81</sup>

Ultimately, the policy of avoidance played into Soviet hands. The administration responded by attacking Pincus for publishing classified information rather than publicly presenting the security rationale behind ERWs. The failure to counter misperceptions about the weapon facilitated the propagation of Soviet political and security narratives. Brown later expressed his regret at this failure, commenting that “we have only ourselves to blame.”<sup>82</sup>

Despite—or perhaps because of—the public reaction, Carter made a political decision to keep the funding in the budget while refraining from deciding whether or not to approve the production and deployment of the weapons. Carter did not know what to do. “I wish I had never heard of this weapon” was a comment he made in a private meeting with Brzezinski.<sup>83</sup> On a personal level, he found ERWs to be morally egregious. He noted to his advisers that he “did not wish the world to think of him as an ogre” if he were to decide in favor of production and deployment.<sup>84</sup> As President, however, he also understood the contribution ERWs could make to enhancing NATO deterrence and defense posture under flexible response. Yet, as Brzezinski later recalled, Carter remained plagued by the prospect that his team could be “stamped forever as the Administration which introduced bombs that kill people but leave buildings intact.”<sup>85</sup>

Carter’s indecision was not politically sustainable and quickly led to controversy in Congress, which found itself in an awkward position. Senator Mark Hatfield, a Republican from Oregon, explained the predicament in this way: “This is backwards. We’re supposed to respond to the President’s request for funds. Here the President wants us to give him the money, then he’ll decide if he wants to use it.”<sup>86</sup> Senator Hatfield also voiced disappointment about the President having made this unconventional request without submitting an Arms Control Impact Statement. Without it, Carter was violating the terms of the ACDA, and therefore had no authority to ask the Senate to appropriate funds for an expensive program that may never come to fruition. Carter

eventually overcame the Congressional hurdle by publicly declaring on 12 July, three months after the ERW was publicly disclosed, that ERWs were in the “Nation’s security interests” and in line with NATO’s policy of flexible response.<sup>87</sup>

Carter passed the congressional hurdle, but he still needed to overcome his internal barriers. On 17 August 1977, he announced a solution to his moral and political dilemma: the burden of responsibility for the decision would be shared with NATO allies, especially those who would host ERW deployments. Carter declared that he would approve the production and deployment of ERWs only upon receiving unwavering support from European NATO allies, most importantly West Germany. This approach garnered support from some in Congress who had also begun to speak of the need for the participation of NATO allies in this decision, since ERWs, having little practical application in the U.S., would be deployed to Europe. At this point, Carter believed that he would no longer “bear the political burden of the ERW alone.”<sup>88</sup>

However, NATO allies did not welcome this attempt at burden-sharing. This was a fourth source of inter-alliance tension. Carter was not popular amongst allies, particularly West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, because he did not interact with allies the way his predecessors had.<sup>89</sup> Auger argues that Carter set a new precedent for NATO nuclear weapons policy when he rejected U.S. unilateral political leadership regarding ERW production and deployment.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, this episode sharply contrasts with one that occurred between NATO commander General Lauris Norstad and Charles de Gaulle in 1958, when the newly elected French president inquired about NATO deployments in France. Norstad replied by informing de Gaulle: “I cannot reply to your questions, to my very great regret.”<sup>91</sup> Nearly 20 years later, the tables had turned. The President of the United States was actively trying to include NATO allies in nuclear weapons policy decisions, but the political administrations of those countries did not want to engage. European allies did not want to take part in the decision because of unresolved disagreements about NATO doctrine regarding theater nuclear weapons as well as growing public opposition that was fueled in part by Soviet active measures.<sup>92</sup> This was a particularly acute problem for the Schmidt government, which “hoped that President Carter would spare them a public decision for the weapon.”<sup>93</sup> Carter, however, was not politically prepared to push forward alone, so the issue remained unresolved.

Unfortunately for Carter, indecision and uncertainty, especially on an issue related to nuclear weapons, are not perceived by allies nor the American public as respectable positions for the President of the United States. In November 1977, Brzezinski took the lead on the ERW, urging Carter to push forward with production to prove that he was “tough” on foreign policy.<sup>94</sup> Carter accepted this advice and began to look favorably upon the production of ERWs, but he still remained undecided on questions of deployment. In the months that followed, he allowed Brzezinski to work out a compromise with NATO allies. Yet two days before the compromise was to be announced at a NATO meeting on 20 March 1978 Carter pulled the rug out from underneath Brzezinski and all those who had worked on making the deal. When the final agreement came across his desk on March 18, he wrote a brief comment: “No—hold. J.”<sup>95</sup> On 27 March in a private meeting, he decided to cancel the production of the neutron bomb, and on 7 April, he issued a public statement announcing the indefinite deferral of ERW production.

The media and political leaders across the Alliance did not react positively to Carter's seeming flip-flop. Roger Morris described the first eight days in April 1978 as a time when the press demonstrated the destructive power of journalism by "flattening" Carter.<sup>96</sup> In particular, he observes that *Newsweek* characterized the decision as "sloppy, confused, haphazard—unexplained and probably inexplicable," while *The Washington Post* went as far as to call it "the most politically bungled major weapons project in NATO history." This attitude was shared across the Atlantic. The liberal French newspaper *Le Monde* commented on the entire episode in the following way: "Rarely has American confusion and emptiness been so deep."<sup>97</sup> Political leaders offered similar commentary. Speaking about the Carter administration, U.S. democratic Senator Sam Nunn remarked: "I'm dismayed and puzzled. I don't understand...they're not on a very clear course."<sup>98</sup> German Chancellor Schmidt offered perhaps the most severe criticism of the decision when he reportedly described Carter as "an unfathomable amateur dilettante who is trying to apply his private morals to world politics."<sup>99</sup>

Throughout the entire neutron bomb episode, from the nature of its public disclosure to the way it was navigated and eventually resolved by President Carter, the cohesion of the Alliance was vulnerable to Soviet active measures. While much of the peace movement and the public more broadly sincerely found the neutron bomb to be abhorrent regardless of Soviet active measures, the confluence of Soviet interests with those of the peace movement presented the Soviet Union with an opportunity to exacerbate divisions within the Alliance and potentially influence decisions related to the structure of its nuclear forces.<sup>100</sup> The effect of Soviet influence operations may be impossible to measure, but ultimately the outcome aligned with Soviet objectives. The success of the Soviet campaign is best illustrated by the creation and propagation of a specific pro-Soviet political narrative which not only corresponded with the narrative propagated by the peace movement but also drowned out the alternative U.S./NATO narrative.

The Soviet Union pushed its narrative by waging an intensive active measures campaign "from below" and "from above." The campaign "from below" applied a "united front" approach that leveraged the diverse elements of the peace movement which—regardless of Soviet influence—described the neutron bomb as the ultimate capitalist weapon that kills people but leaves buildings intact. Rather than causing the movement, the Soviet Union simply facilitated the growth of an organic wave of public outrage against the neutron bomb by providing financial and policy support to non-ruling communist parties and front groups involved in the peace movement. These groups, notably the World Peace Council (WPC) and Dutch Communist Party, protested the neutron bomb by organizing demonstrations, rallies, letter-writing campaigns, and conferences across the Euro-Atlantic, including Prague, Washington D.C. Mexico City, Athens, Geneva, and Amsterdam.<sup>101</sup>

Crucially, the Soviet Union coupled its "united front" approach with an effort to expand its influence on foreign audiences that were critical of the Soviet Union by deemphasizing the overtly ideological elements of Soviet propaganda and diplomatic initiatives.<sup>102</sup> Targets of this effort included environmentalist, pacifist, and anti-nuclear groups. For example, from 6-13 August 1977, a few weeks prior to the United Nations General Assembly, the WPC organized an Action Week dedicated to "launching a mass campaign aimed at achieving a ban on this weapon of mass destruction."<sup>103</sup> During that week 28 communist parties called upon all communities regardless of ideology to support the WPC campaign. The Dutch Communist Party played a

particularly active leadership role in this campaign. With the help of the International Department of the CPSU and the KGB, on 18 March 1978 in Amsterdam communist leaders used their own front group, The Joint Committee, Stop the Neutron Bomb—Stop the Nuclear Arms Race, to host a rally which was attended by approximately 50,000 people. Only a fraction of the participants were communists. Significantly, former American military analyst and anti-Vietnam War activist Daniel Ellsberg attended and gave a speech in which he warned that the neutron bomb would lower the nuclear threshold.<sup>104</sup>

The campaign “from above” included a mixture of influence operations and traditional diplomatic measures. For example, a Belgian political leader from the Christian Socialist party claimed that “The Soviet ambassador said that if I didn’t come out against the [neutron] bomb I would be considered a warmonger and a saboteur of détente.”<sup>105</sup> This tactic was applied on a wider scale in early 1978 when Secretary Brezhnev sent personal letters to the heads of state of NATO allies imploring them to reject the neutron bomb for the sake of détente.<sup>106</sup> Soviet propaganda also tainted more traditional diplomatic efforts. Soviet representatives to the United Nations pontificated about the need to prevent the development of “inhumane weapons” such as the neutron bomb. In what is recognized by former Soviet officials as an annual propaganda and intelligence-gathering stunt, the Soviet delegation proposed resolutions in support of the establishment of a convention prohibiting new types of weapons of mass destruction, including the neutron bomb, and these resolutions garnered widespread support amongst the non-aligned states.<sup>107</sup> The Soviet Union also proposed a U.S.-Soviet bilateral prohibition on neutron bombs—a proposal which was swiftly rejected and dismissed by the U.S. officials as a propaganda stunt.

Against the backdrop of this active measures campaign, the NATO political and security narrative was lost. This was due to the complexity of the counternarrative as well as the failure to adequately propagate it. Many U.S. and NATO officials argued that neutron bombs were more accountable to the laws of proportionality and discrimination than traditional nuclear weapons by emphasizing that they enhanced the radiation effect while minimizing the blast effect. In this context, they described the device in more amicable terms, referring to it as an “enhanced radiation weapon” or “reduced blast weapon.”<sup>108</sup> They purposely avoided the term “neutron bomb” due its negative connotation. This battle over nomenclature was easily won by the Soviet Union. According to Glitman, “Washington seemed to have given up any hope of getting the media to drop the inaccurate and unfavorable ‘neutron bomb’ label, and it stuck.”<sup>109</sup>

Viewed through the lens of IPb, the indefinite deferral of the ERW production and deployment decision represented a strategic victory for the Soviet Union. ERWs presented the Soviet Union with a legitimate security concern, since they would correct the asymmetric advantage the Warsaw Pact enjoyed over NATO in tank forces and they would also leave the Soviet Union in a place where it could not respond symmetrically or credibly (i.e., proportionally). Soviet active measures facilitated the maintenance of a permissive environment which had been established by the peace movement. In this permissive environment, active measures may also have achieved the objective of reflexive control. They drove a wedge into pre-existing divisions across the Alliance and pressured democratic leaders by feeding public opposition to U.S. forward-deployed nuclear weapons and the potential deployment of neutron bombs. The Soviet security narrative about neutron bombs was shared by a large fraction of the non-aligned states as well as the general public across the Alliance. President Carter was especially vulnerable to this

permissive environment and Soviet efforts at reflexive control because from the outset he was morally and politically opposed to neutron bombs. Although Soviet influence operations eventually led Carter to put his political support behind ERWs for the sake of alliance cohesion, in the end, his moral anxiety and ethical principles trumped political considerations.<sup>110</sup> Active measures may have even contributed to the objective of regime change in West Germany. Throughout the episode, Schmidt had to walk a tight rope between German defense interests and public opinion by trying to appear neutral and on the side of alliance cohesion. The outcome contributed to his loss of political capital and eventually his position as Chancellor.

Glitman, who became the head of the U.S. negotiation team for the INF Treaty, opined that Carter's "abrupt about-face" on ERWs had "far-reaching negative consequences for our efforts to strengthen NATO."<sup>111</sup> It convinced the Soviet Union that its active measures campaign was successful and that it could be applied to other areas of strategic concern, first and foremost U.S. forward-deployments of Pershing II IRBMs and Gryphon GLCMs.<sup>112</sup> Brezhnev explicitly confirmed this when commenting on the perceived success of the neutron bomb campaign in the context of Soviet plans to prevent the Euromissile deployments: "We have on that account not bad experience: the mass campaign against neutron weapons. Even the leaders of the NATO countries acknowledge that that campaign seriously interfered with the realization of their military-political schemes. Let's transfer that experience also to other parts of our struggle against the arms race, for military détente."<sup>113</sup> Although it is impossible to assess the impact of the campaign on Carter's decision to indefinitely defer the production and deployment of ERWs, the Soviet perception that it did play a role offers insights into the role of IPb in contemporary Russian strategy against NATO.

### *1979-1983: theater nuclear force modernization*

Inspired by the perceived success of the neutron bomb campaign, from 1979-1983, the Soviet Union pursued an active measures campaign aimed at preventing U.S. deployments of Pershing II IRBMs and Gryphon GLCMs in Europe while cultivating support for Soviet SS-20 IRBM deployments. As with the neutron bomb campaign, the TNF campaign was characterized by a vast array of active measures techniques and was waged "from below" and "from above." One major difference between the neutron bomb and TNF campaigns is that the TNF campaign "from above" was comparatively less intense due in part to the deterioration of the political environment after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

As with the neutron bomb episode, the TNF modernization process exposed divisions within the Alliance. One major division was stemmed from the tension between strategic arms control and the impression amongst European NATO allies of decoupling. This issue had presented itself during the neutron bomb episode, but it was comparatively acute during discussions about TNF modernization because of the SALT negotiations. U.S. strategic negotiations with the Soviet Union involved decreasing the range of Backfire bombers, thereby creating a strategic challenge for European NATO allies. Those negotiations created an analogous problem with Soviet ICBMs. The USSR agreed to forgo the deployment of SS-16 ICBMs and then used the SS-16 to create the SS-20 IRBM—the missile which motivated the deployment of the Euromissiles. Schmitt raised this issue in a lecture in October 1977. He warned that the codification of an approximate parity in strategic weapons created a "gray zone" in Europe.<sup>114</sup>

The second major division was the continued growth of public discontent with nuclear weapons. With the indefinite deferment of the neutron bomb decision, the societal and political movements aimed at preventing the production and deployment of the neutron bomb shifted their advocacy towards the prevention of the Euromissile deployments. Reflecting on the impact of the peace movement on the INF Treaty negotiations, Glitman expressed frustration that the movement targeted primarily NATO countries because the return was higher in democratic countries than in the USSR which was not accountable to public opinion. He recalled that this disproportionate influence was felt heavily in international fora where representatives of NATO countries had more heated exchanges with the peace movement than with the Soviet representatives.<sup>115</sup> Former Deputy Director of the CIA John McMahon expressed the same concern during a Congressional hearing on Soviet active measures.<sup>116</sup>

These pre-existing divisions were vulnerabilities that the Soviet Union sought to exploit through active measures, as it did during the neutron bomb episode. The campaign “from above” incorporated influence operations aimed primarily at academic institutions in West Germany. The USSR sent Soviet representatives to universities there at a rate of 20 per month.<sup>117</sup> In late 1979, the Soviet Union also offered one NATO country favorable trade agreements if they came out against the Euromissiles.<sup>118</sup> From the outset, however, the campaign “from above” was weakened by the deterioration of the U.S./NATO-Russian relationship following the invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. The invasion put a hold on détente, so the efficacy of active measures aimed at influencing high-level public officials was markedly less in comparison to the campaign against the neutron bomb.

The campaign “from below” adopted the “united front” approach and ideologically neutral tone of active measures against the neutron bomb. In 1980, the WPC received an estimated \$63 million from the Soviet Union. This sum was over half of the total funds the Soviet Union annually allocated to its 13 major international front organizations.<sup>119</sup> The WPC council was instructed to use these funds to accelerate the “peace offensive.”<sup>120</sup> It organized and executed massive public demonstrations similar to those held in the Netherlands during the neutron bomb campaign as well as international conferences. In 1983, one such conference held in Prague was specifically dedicated to discussing the dangers of NATO INF missiles while Soviet SS-20s were excluded from the debate. The Dutch Communist Party also actively organized events that attracted figures who were not members of the communist party. At one event in 1980, religious, academic, and non-communist political leaders, including members of the Belgian Parliament, were in attendance.<sup>121</sup> Ad-hoc front organizations such as “Generals for Peace” and the “Democratic Front Against Repression” were also utilized in the active measures campaign “from below.”<sup>122</sup>

Forgeries were another technique of the Soviet active measures campaign. One forgery depicted classified U.S. war plans on basing sites for U.S. GLCMs in the United Kingdom. Another was a fake letter to NATO Secretary General Joseph Luns from the retiring SACEUR General Alexander Haig. The letter outlined a strategy for the limited use of U.S. nuclear weapons, including those delivered by intermediate-range missiles.<sup>123</sup>

All of these techniques sought to propagate a specific political and security narrative about the military balance, U.S. aggressive motives, and arms control. Glitman noted that the Soviet position and strategy was easier to comprehend than the NATO narrative: “A Soviet position, while inherently faulty, could usually be presented as a slogan on the front of a T-shirt. Our logic stood up better under careful examination, but required several paragraphs to explain.”<sup>124</sup> A lack of unclassified information on Soviet nuclear forces, most importantly the SS-20, contributed to this problem.<sup>125</sup> Without unclassified information, NATO governments struggled to convince their societies that the Euromissile deployments were a response to Soviet SS-20 deployments.

Through the lens of IPb, the Euromissiles active measures campaign was motivated by strategic objectives. Soviet officials conjectured that the campaign might yield similar results as the neutron bomb campaign, thereby securing their advantage in intermediate range missiles.<sup>126</sup> From a defensive perspective, the Euromissiles presented a strategic threat, as they could reach targets deep within Soviet territory. A tertiary strategic objective of the campaign was to distract attention away from Soviet military operations in Afghanistan by keeping the peace movement occupied with nuclear weapons issues. As with the neutron bomb campaign, the two-tiered strategy “from below” and “from above” facilitated the establishment of a permissive environment and reflexive control.

This active measures campaign was not as successful as the neutron bomb campaign. In this regard it is important to note that the Alliance was less divided on TNF modernization than the neutron bomb in part because the neutron bomb episode helped improve alliance cohesion. After the Soviet active measures campaign against the neutron bomb, the Alliance better prepared itself to defend against active measures. TNF modernization also generated more support than the neutron bomb because it was a symmetric response to Soviet SS-20 deployments. Another factor, Glitman argues, is that the USSR overplayed its hand by tying itself politically to the Western peace movement that demanded arms control.<sup>127</sup> Yet Soviet leaders suggest that the campaign may have nonetheless contributed to the delay in deployment in the Netherlands and Belgium.<sup>128</sup>

## 5. Contemporary information confrontation operations against U.S. forward-deployed nuclear weapons

On 17 August 2016, EURACTIV, a news website focusing on issues related to the European Union, published an article with the following headline: “US moves nuclear weapons from Turkey to Romania.”<sup>129</sup> The article cites two independent, anonymous sources who informed EURACTIV that the United States is in the process of transferring nuclear weapons from its military base in Incirlik, Turkey to its military base in Deveselu, Romania.

The report is objectively false. While the U.S. government does not publicly comment on classified information related to its forward-deployed nuclear weapons, any transfer of nuclear weapons would be preceded by intensive consultations within NATO which would likely be difficult to conceal from the public. In addition, the transfer of nuclear weapons to a former Warsaw Pact state would constitute a major violation of the NATO-Russia Founding Act.<sup>130</sup>

Moreover, the report was dismissed by the Romanian government as well as security analysts who can easily assess the veracity of the alleged transfer using open source tools.<sup>131</sup> Yet the story nonetheless gained traction. Other news outlets across the world, including Sputnik, Haaretz, and Breitbart, published articles on the subject.<sup>132</sup>

Why did this false report emerge and why did it gain traction? Jeffrey Lewis argues that this report has many of the markings of a standard informational-psychological move from the Soviet strategic playbook on active measures.<sup>133</sup> The geopolitical context of the EURACTIV report suggests that the Russian government is at the helm of this disinformation. In May 2016, Deveselu became the host of a certified U.S. Aegis Ashore ballistic missile defense battalion as part of NATO's European Phased Adapted Approach (EPAA) program. The article accurately emphasizes that the "US missile shield" being constructed through EPAA has "infuriated Russia."<sup>134</sup> A major aspect of Russian anxieties about the Aegis Ashore deployments is a sincere, if paranoid, fear that the system will be used offensively in a first strike against Russia as part of a U.S. grand strategy of unilateralism and global dominance that entails encircling and constraining Russia. The transfer of U.S. nuclear weapons to the Aegis Ashore base in Romania would support this Russian narrative.

The timing of the story also lent it a degree of plausibility, thus leading to its proliferation by other media sources, particularly those with a specific political agenda. When the disinformation was published, a serious discussion on the security of U.S. forward-deployed nuclear weapons had been ongoing in response to the failed coup in Turkey in July 2016 and a downturn in U.S.-Turkish relations. July also saw the NATO Warsaw Summit where the alliance agreed to prioritize enhancing its deterrence and defense posture against Russia—a marked shift in the Alliance's policy toward Russia since the end of the Cold War.<sup>135</sup> After the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO adopted an approach to Russia which emphasized cooperation and partnership. However, Russian foreign and military policy trends, culminating in the annexation of Crimea in March 2014, led NATO to reconsider this approach. Yet there are divisions within the Alliance regarding the specific measures to enhance its deterrence and defense posture against Russia. These divisions are most clearly illustrated by the Alliance's resistance to publicly identifying Russia as an adversary.

The disinformation propagated by EURACTIV about NATO nuclear posture is not an isolated case. Russia also utilizes disinformation at the diplomatic level to propagate the same political and security narrative about the U.S. in order to exacerbate existing divisions within the Alliance regarding its nuclear posture. At the 2015 NPT Review Conference, the Russian delegation accused the U.S. and its NATO allies who host U.S. nuclear weapons on their territory of violating Articles I and II of the Treaty.<sup>2</sup> Since at least 2002 the Russian delegation has called upon the United States to follow Russia's example by removing all forward-deployed nuclear weapons from foreign territories, but until 2015, Russia had not accused the United States of violating the NPT for failing to do so.<sup>136</sup> Like the EURACTIV report, this accusation is flawed. The negotiation record of the NPT demonstrates that the Soviet Union agreed that U.S. forward-

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<sup>2</sup> Under Article I nuclear-weapon States (NWS) undertake to refrain from transferring nuclear weapons to non-nuclear-weapon States (NNWS) or assisting them in acquiring nuclear weapons. Article II obligates NNWS to refrain from acquiring and seeking to acquire nuclear weapons independently or with the assistance of other NNWS or NWS.



deployed nuclear weapons on the territory of NATO allies and the nuclear sharing arrangements which govern them are compliant with the Treaty.<sup>137</sup> Despite this, Russia continues to push its political and security narrative and accuse the U.S. and NATO of violating the NPT.

Why did Russia pursue this strategy in 2015? The strategy guiding this private and public diplomacy disinformation campaign targets divisions within NATO which manifested publicly during the formation of the 2010 Strategic Concept and the 2012 Deterrence and Defence Posture Review.<sup>138</sup> Although Russia's annexation of Crimea consolidated political support at the governmental level within NATO countries for maintaining a role for U.S. forward-deployed nuclear weapons within an enhanced deterrence and defense posture against Russia, public opinion across the Alliance is still divided on the presence of U.S. forward-deployed nuclear weapons on European soil. Civil society organizations such as ICAN play a significant role in shaping the public discourse about nuclear weapons and pressuring political administrations across the Alliance to reject nuclear deterrence and an international order founded primarily upon national sovereignty and instead embrace disarmament and an international order which shows preference to human rather than state security.<sup>139</sup> Between 2010 and the 2015 NPT Review Conference these organizations were integral to the creation and advancement of the Humanitarian Consequences movement which paved the way towards the adoption of the TPNW. This Treaty constitutes an unprecedented challenge to nuclear deterrence and NATO nuclear posture. It is important to note that the Executive Director of ICAN has openly stated that ICAN is specifically targeting NATO NNWS which host U.S. nuclear weapons on their territory.<sup>140</sup> Significantly, Russia intensified its information confrontation campaign against the backdrop of the Humanitarian Consequences movement. While Russia does not support the TPNW, it benefits from the political pressure the Treaty places on NATO and it agrees with ICAN's political and security narratives about the dangers of U.S. forward-deployed nuclear weapons in Europe.

## 6. Insights, questions for further study, and conclusions

The effort to comprehensively understand contemporary Russian IPb objectives, techniques, and strategy faces is hampered by a lack of historical hindsight. Unlike the case studies from the cold war period, contemporary case studies are not afforded the historical clarity provided by reflections of political leaders after they leave office, defectors from intelligence services, declassified documents, or an established body of academic work. As a result, it may be impossible to assess all of the IPb techniques being used by Russia, particularly those that are covert and nature and associated with Russian intelligence services, such as the establishment of front organizations and financing or in other ways influencing non-ruling political parties or civil society groups. However, analysis informed by historical case studies offers useful insights into contemporary Russian strategic thinking. A comparison of Soviet active measures and Russian IPb reveals important similarities and differences in techniques and strategy.

The current Russian strategy emulates the Soviet strategy in a number of ways. First, Russian IPb campaigns incorporate the two-tiered model "from above" and "from below" practiced by the Soviet Union. Second, when the political atmosphere is not conducive to diplomatic solutions

or a campaign “from above,” the campaign “from below” is emphasized. Third, Russia exploits pre-existing divisions within the Alliance to propagate the same specific and simple political and security narratives as the Soviet Union did to counter the more complex U.S./NATO narrative. Fourth, Russia continues the Soviet strategy of exploiting the tendency of peace movements to target democratic governments.

There are also major differences between Soviet active measures and Russian IPb. First, the characteristics of modern warfare, the contemporary information ecosystem and its associated information technologies, and the increased influence of NGOs on global blur the distinction between the campaigns “from above” and “from below.” Russian political and security narratives injected into the contemporary information ecosystem proliferate across the globe over social media, reaching both government officials and the general public at the same time. These narratives are granted legitimacy by the rate and volume by which they spread, and their origin can be easily obscured and forgotten. NGOs promoting the same narratives, regardless of their intention, further legitimize Russian narratives. Second, Russia has learned lessons from Soviet errors. It no longer ties itself to Western peace movements as overtly as the Soviet Union did. One result is that it can sit aside and watch NGOs pressure democratic governments without committing itself to arms control arrangements as it did during the anti-TNF modernization campaign. A third difference relates to the argument that the peace movement may be more capable of effecting change today than it was during the late cold war period. The humanitarian consequences movement and the TPNW are a testament to the growing influence of NGOs on global politics and international law. Russia understands this development and is exploiting it through IPb, knowing that democratic governments cannot reject arms control as easily as Russia can without suffering political blowback from the public. A fourth difference relates to the prevailing taboo against discussing nuclear weapons within NATO even in the face of the TPNW.<sup>141</sup> Russia exploits this taboo with IPb. Fifth, the contemporary information ecosystem decreases the need to rely upon front groups as an IPb technique. In order to achieve its strategic objectives, Russia can instead use techniques such as media influence and propaganda (computational and traditional) to pollute information spaces with disinformation and its preferred political and security narratives and rely upon unwitting agents to accept and further propagate those narratives. Russia does not need to support organizations such as ICAN as the Soviet Union needed to rely upon the WPC, and this grants the Russian position further legitimacy.

NATO cannot afford to ignore Russian IPb even though the weaponization of information is philosophically inconsistent with democratic values. Russia has historically waged active measures and IPb campaigns targeting pre-existing divisions within the Alliance in an effort to not only sow doubt and confusion thereby weakening alliance cohesion, but also to influence its nuclear posture with simple and consistent political and security narratives. Recognizing Russian IPb does not require NATO to respond to Russian IPb with its own information confrontation techniques. It should, however, spark further studies of Russian IPb as well as discussions about how to respond. Moving forward, there are many questions that merit further study. Is there an institutionalized structure for IPb within the current Russian government? If so, how is it similar to and distinct from the Soviet system for active measures? Can data analysis methodologies be used to foster a better understanding of Russian IPb techniques targeting NATO nuclear posture such as computational propaganda?

Recognizing Russian IPb should also initiate discussions about how the Alliance should defend itself and respond. The U.S. and NATO need to debate the efficacy of competing with Russian IPb and whether and how the contemporary information ecosystem has changed the nature of strategic competition as traditionally understood. What are the consequences of competing in the domain of information for democratic societies? If they choose to compete, how do they do so without contradicting their values? Will promoting a counternarrative work if the Alliance is restricted by a lack of unclassified information? The literature in experimental psychology suggests that promoting a counternarrative might actually have the reverse effect of reinforcing the Russian narrative, so counternarratives may not work even if unclassified information becomes available.<sup>142</sup> There are no easy answers to these questions, especially when the national security establishments and civil societies of NATO countries are polarized on nuclear weapons. Russian IPb targets this division above all others, and the longer the two communities are at odds, the more successful Russian strategy will be. Overcoming this challenge requires at the very least the two communities to come together and begin a discussion about their mutual vulnerability to Russian IPb.

*The views summarized here are those of the author and should not be attributed to CGSR, LLNL, LLNS, or any other organization. This work was performed under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Energy by Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory under Contract DE-AC52-07NA27344. LLNL-TR-767588*

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