Russia's information warfare blurring the lines between war and peace. An interdisciplinary case study of the German security challenges

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Introduction

Over the last decades, Russia has significantly expanded its use of cyber operations, foreign propaganda, and disinformation campaigns as part of its broader hybrid warfare strategy. This practice has escalated again since the onset of the war against Ukraine, positioning Russia at the forefront of information warfare today. Central to this approach is its targeting of the transatlantic political hemisphere, with Germany emerging as a critical centre of these operations. Research indicates that within less than 9 months, targeted disinformation coming from Russian actors has reached over 38 million Germans, seeking to manipulate public opinion, divide the population, undermine democratic stability, and weaken the country's position in international alliances.[1] Russia is attacking, and it is effective. This entails critical implications for the German state and society and their evolving understanding of the predicaments of war and peace. Russia has for long been seen at best, as a friend and partner, and at worst, as a weakened antagonist in geopolitics without real threat-potential. Considering recent developments, this perspective can no longer be upheld. Therefore, the questions explored in this essay are as follows: Are we already in a state of war? Are we aware of it? And what does that entail? In pursuit of these questions, first, the practice of hybrid tactics in the 21st century will be briefly presented, with a particular emphasis on information warfare. The examination will then focus on how Russia and its associated agents employ these tactics, using the strategies directed against Germany as a key example. The way these tactics are perceived domestically and what consequences this entails will complete the analysis. The conclusions drawn from this indicate that there is a fundamental discrepancy between how Russia engages in information warfare today and how Germany and much of Europe perceives and reacts to it. This, in turn, exposes a somewhat naïve German public opinion that also relates to essential axiomatic differences in the country's perspectives on inter-state relations today.

The practice of information warfare

The concept of information warfare describes practices of strategic use and manipulation of information to achieve political or strategic goals. This strategy is part of the more general idea of hybrid warfare which can be described as 'an in-

[1] Auswärtiges Amt. *Deutschland im Fokus der pro-russischen Desinformationskampagne „Doppelgänger"*. Technischer Bericht zur Analyse des Auswärtigen Amts, 2024, https://www.auswaertiges- amt.de/resource/blob/2660362/73bcc0184167b438173e554ba2be2636/technischer-bericht-desinformationskampagne-doppelgaenger-data.pdf [access: 14 IX 2025]; A. Freytag von Loringhoven, *Germany in the crosshairs of Russia's information war.* Center for European Policy Analysis, October 15, 2024, https://cepa.org/article/germany-in- the-crosshairs-of-russias-information-war/ [access: 14 IX 2025].

terplay or fusion of conventional as well as unconventional instruments of power and tools of subversion. These instruments or tools are blended in a synchronised manner to exploit the vulnerabilities of an antagonist and achieve synergistic effects'.[2] In practice, the term hybrid tactics often refers to belligerent actions not carried out by a state's military but rather by other actors that often engage in non-kinetic warfare. Classic examples are espionage, cyberattacks, sabotage, but also proxy conflicts, etc. – and in recent years especially information warfare. Here it is important to acknowledge that these concepts, their exact definition, and their categorisation are disputed.[3] In this work, information warfare is primarily handled as the strategic use of dis-, mis-, or malinformation by a state or associated actors. These concepts can in turn be defined as the spreading of false or inaccurate information shared *without* malicious intent (Misinformation); the spreading of such information *with* malicious intent to deceive or manipulate people (Disinformation); and the spreading of partly true or decontextualised information equally used to maliciously mislead or manipulate (malinformation).[4] It might seem controversial to include misinformation as part of this deliberate form of warfare, since its definition excludes malicious intent. While respective strategies do not include exercising misinformation directly, they implicitly rely on it to a very large degree. A substantial part of the effect these campaigns entail is achieved not by the dis- and malinformation disseminated by deliberate action, but rather by the echo of misinformation it produces in e.g. social media.[5]

One analytical perspective on information warfare – and more generally hybrid tactics - is that they have been going on forever and signify an essential part of war.[6] This certainly is true. However, the extent to which both their deployment and effect are evident today is unprecedented. This is explainable from different perspectives. First, it is clear that there is a causal link between the increasing use and relevance of social media platforms and digital information dissemination. 'Fake news', such as the kind of information mentioned above, spread faster and more broadly than truthful information due to their novelty, salience, and the dynamic nature of social networks.[7] Research has shown that this indeed has a growing influence on public opinion, elections, and trust in political institutions and traditional media.[8] Disinformation campaigns make use of this phenomenon in any imaginable way. In practice their techniques include using troll farms, bot networks, and fake accounts to amplify their narratives, additional to creating deepfakes, fake

[2] A. Bilal, *Hybrid Warfare – New Threats, Complexity, and 'Trust' as the Antidote*. "Nato Review" 2021. https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2021/11/30/hybrid-warfare-new-threats-complexity-and-trust-as-the-antidote/index.html [access: 14 IX 2025].

[3] C. Bilban, H. Grininger, (Eds.), *Mythos „Gerasimov-Doktrin": Ansichten des russischen Militärs oder Grundlage hybrider Kriegsführung?* (Band 2). Landesverteidigungsakademie 2019. ISBN: 978-3-903121-57-7.; I. Kraft, *Hybrider Krieg – zu Konjunktur, Dynamik und Funktion eines Konzepts*. "Zeitschrift für Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik", 11(3) 2018, p. 305-323. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12399- 018-0705-x [access: 14 IX 2025].

[4] E. Higgins, *Journalism and the Modern Audience*. Presentation in Seminar, 2024, November 08, OSINT Community.

[5] Ibidem.

[6] A. Bilal, op. cit.

[7] E. Aïmeur, S. Amri, G. Brassard, *Fake news, disinformation and misinformation in social media: a review*. "Social Network Analysis and Mining", 13(1) 2023, p. 30. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13278-023-01028-5 [access: 14 IX 2025].

[8] Ibidem.

news portals, and website clones to fabricate credibility.[9] The goal behind this is to manipulate the information ecosystems and deceive audiences to an extent where 'truth' in the public debate ceases to exist.[10] Social media platforms, with their wide reach and ease of content dissemination, serve as critical tools for such campaigns.

However, these strategies have also gained additional popularity largely because they align with the changing nature of war and the current trends in geopolitics. After the abdication of the 'end of history', the 'pax americana', and other paradigms that were thought to bring stability to international affairs, the subsequent rise of multipolar competition and the interconnectedness of global economies incentivise states to avoid overt conflicts that could escalate unpredictably, while simultaneously driving them to demonstrate power and exert influence. Ambiguous, hard-to-trace actions – such as disinformation campaigns, cyberattacks, or other covert operations – are particularly effective because they minimise the risk of triggering retaliation or facing serious consequences under international law. These so-called 'grey zone conflicts' exploit the space between war and peace, operating in a realm that is often non-sanctionable yet capable of producing significant geopolitical effects.[11] For instance, a well-orchestrated disinformation campaign that destabilises a government might achieve the same strategic outcomes as a military coup, but without the risk of escalating into a full-scale war.[12] In scenarios where conventional kinetic warfare is too costly, risky, or politically unviable, hybrid tactics such as information warfare offer states a highly effective alternative. This approach reflects the growing emphasis on power projection and strategic competition in an era increasingly defined by a new geopolitical realism.

Russia's disinformation campaigns

Russia has a very special connection with information warfare and is often seen as the principal case for the described practices. Nowadays, the foundation of this is the so-called Gerasimov Doctrine. The Gerasimov Doctrine is a concept derived from the ideas of Valery Gerasimov, the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, which has been firstly articulated in a 2013 publication in a Russian military journal.[13] It vividly describes a framework for a hybrid warfare strategy blending military and non-military tactics to achieve political and strategic objectives from a distinctly Russian point of view[14]. While not formally a doctrine – and also not undisputed[15]– it continues to reflect Russia's evolving approach to modern

[9] W. H. Schmidt, *Russlands Informationskrieg – Desinformation als Waffe*. „Europäische Sicherheit & Technik. Meldungen, Politik" 2024, November. https://esut.de/2024/11/meldungen/54201/russlands-informationskrieg-desinformation-als- waffe/ [access: 14 IX 2025]; E. Aïmeur, et.al. op. cit.; H. F. Splidsboel, *Russian hybrid warfare: A study of disinformation*. DIIS Report No. 2017/06. Danish Institute for International Studies. https://hdl.handle.net/10419/197644 [access: 14 IX 2025]; S. Hoekstra, M. Jongema, *Disinformation as a weapon in hybrid warfare*. "Atlantisch Perspectief", 40(5) 2016, p. 37–39. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48581310 [access: 14 IX 2025].

[10] H. F. Splidsboel, op. cit.

[11] A. Bilal, op. cit.; S. Hoekstra, M. Jongema, op. cit.

[12] Ibidem, Deutsche Bundesregierung, *Weißbuch 2016 zur Sicherheitspolitik und zur Zukunft der Bundeswehr*. Bonn, Berlin: BMVg 2016.

[13] C. Bilban, H. Grininger, op. cit.; V. Gerasimov, *Ценность науки в предвидении* [*The value of science is in the foresight*]. "Военно-промышленный курьер" [Military-Industrial Courier], (8) 2013, https://vpk- news.ru/articles/14632 [access: 14 IX 2025].

[14] C. Bilban, H. Grininger, op. cit.; O. Fridman, *On the "Gerasimov Doctrine": Why the West Fails to Beat Russia to the Punch*. "PRISM", 8(2) 2019, p. 100–113, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26803233 [access: 14 IX 2025].

[15] Ibidem.

conflicts. The prevailing view among analysts is that this undeniably represents a unique perspective and further solidifies Russia's leading role in information warfare. 'Russia is considered the motherland of disinformation. It has been a fundamental instrument of Russian politics domestically and abroad since the late Tsarist era. The Russian state has created a solid apparatus and a system to establish disinformation as an integral part of Russian politics.'[16] [*Translation by the author*]. The relevance of these practices is evident, but their individual strategies do differ.

Currently there are two central communicative goals that Russia follows with its approach in foreign countries. First, there is the direct attempt to convince people of a Russia-friendly position or the official Kremlin narrative on certain topics such as the war against Ukraine. This is however not the primary goal and could even be seen as just an extension of the endeavour to control the narrative and the available information within the domestic public sphere. This effect, largely achieved through e.g. the export of TV programs into foreign media, is so to speak a fortunate unintended consequence. The second, more significant goal in foreign societies, however, is creating an overwhelming flood of disinformation, aimed at oversaturating the public and creating a deliberately contradictory „reality" that results in a state of complete informational chaos[17]. This is not an attempt to convince someone of a certain perspective, but rather to confuse them so much that they are effectively immobilised and continue to lose trust in their relevant institutions and beliefs.[18] As one analyst puts it, 'this is an attack on facts and most of all an attack on the faith in facts.'[19] Here the Kremlin is not only trying to convince people that the respective actors in the West are lying or not trustworthy, but more fundamentally that truth, as such, does not exist.[20] The official Russian perspective on this can be summarised as follows: '[…] all news is constructed and therefore contested. In the best postmodern tradition there is no 'objective news'– only different, rivalling interpretations which purport to show different aspects of what may be called "reality".'[21] This ideological stance very successfully plays into the *Zeitgeist* of the institution-critical edges of the political spectrum. Taken together with the sheer amount of information-garbage that is thrown into the digital public and social media in particular, it is easy to see how the – for democracies essential – concepts of trust, truth, and informed agency are undermined.

Russia's strategy in Germany - The example of 'Doppelgänger'

Europe and especially Germany have become a central target of these disinformation campaigns over the recent years. One reason for this certainly is the widespread political and military support for Ukraine since the beginning of the war. But there are also more fundamental issues to consider. Part of a Russia's broader geopolitical strategy is undoubtedly to undermine the European Union and NATO. By sowing mistrust in these institutions and inciting division among different actors,

[16] „Russland gilt als das Mutterland der Desinformation. Sie ist grundlegendes Instrument russischer Politik im In- wie auch im Ausland, nachweisbar seit der späten Zarenzeit. Der russische Staat hat einen festen Apparat und ein System geschaffen, um Desinformation als Bestandteil der russischen Politik zu etablieren." W. H. Schmidt, op. cit.
[17] Ibidem; S. Hoekstra, M. Jongema, op. cit.
[18] H. F. Splidsboel, op. cit.; S. Hoekstra, M. Jongema, op. cit.
[19] S. Hoekstra, M. Jongema, op. cit., p. 37.
[20] W. H. Schmidt, op. cit.
[21] H. F. Splidsboel, op. cit., p. 22.

this objective is being pursued. The case of Germany is particularly significant, as it continues to be the largest and most influential driver of the European idea, a potentially pivotal geopolitical player, and also the second-largest supporter of Ukraine. This makes the country a central target for Russia's initiatives. 'The Russian offensive is poisoning German politics, softening the country's support for Ukraine, and shaking transatlantic relations.'[22]. A variety of tactics are at play, with most of those described earlier being actively employed. It is difficult to track them, attribute them to specific actors, or identify them within a coherent strategic framework, which makes fighting them exceedingly demanding. However, there are instances where authorities have a quite clear understanding of the situation, such as in the case of the ‚Doppelgänger' campaign.

The 'Doppelgänger' campaign, as largely researched and described by the German Foreign Ministry, is an integral part of the hybrid tactic employed within Russia's European strategy. Similar campaigns have been discovered also in France and other EU member states. These operations are typically targeted at a single country; however, it seems that the actors behind them are either the same or closely collaborate, often directly mirroring networks and messages. This even includes translating posts into other languages and publishing them within the relevant national networks. While the campaign was named in reference to the practice of 'cloning' or imitating real online news portals, its biggest influence is likely being achieved by the vast number of fake accounts on social media platforms such as X.

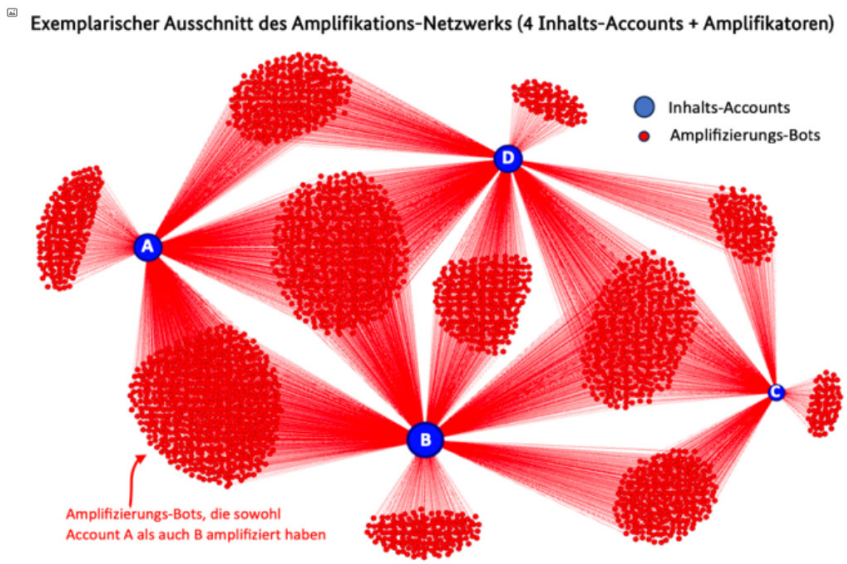

Figure 1. Visualisation of Bot Networks used in the 'Doppelgänger' campaign (Auswärtiges Amt, 2024, 13)

[22] A. Freytag von Loringhoven, op. cit.

As visualised in Figure 1, thousands of fake accounts and bots are created in order to build a propaganda network that resembles the way communicative networks online work, thereby spreading the priorly designed messages throughout the respective platforms. From a technical perspective, this is achieved through a network of 'content accounts' that regularly and automatically post material created by 'propaganda factories,' often with the aid of AI tools.[23] These are complemented by a vast number of fully automated 'amplification accounts,' which frequently use cross-referencing to reinforce narratives and construct a distinct version of media reality.[24] This is then again centrally supported using the mentioned cloned or imitated online news portals.

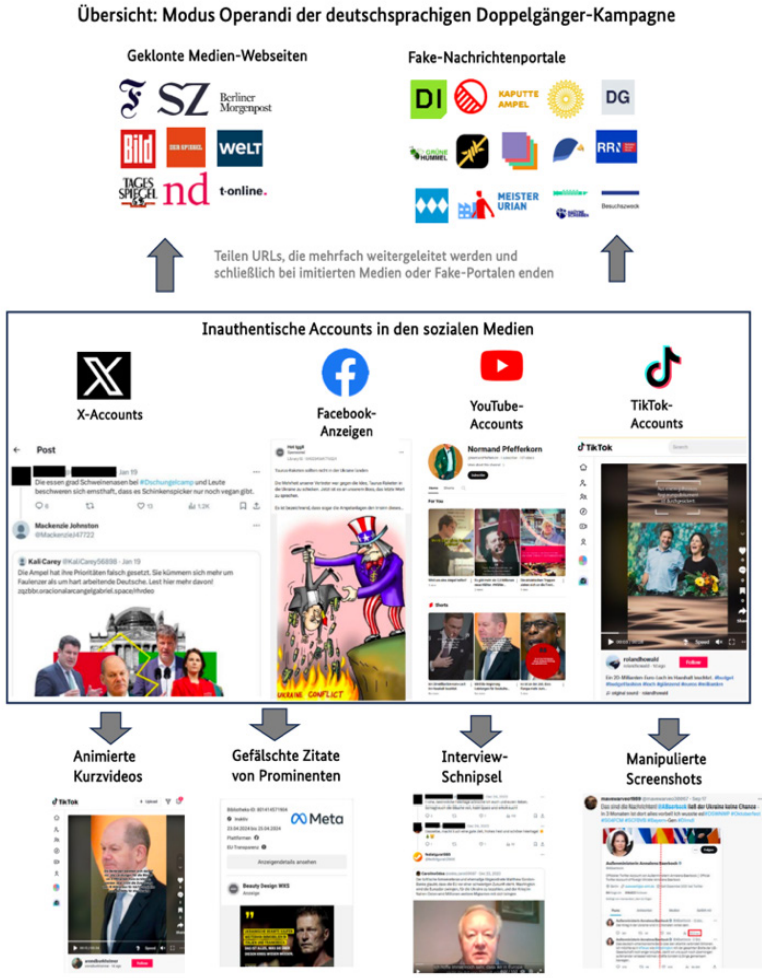

Figure 2. Operational structure of the 'Doppelgänger' campaign (Auswärtiges Amt, 2024, 5)

[23] Auswärtiges Amt, op. cit., p. 13.
[24] Ibidem.

The full visualisation of how this process works can be seen in Figure 2. Accounts on social media platforms disseminate entirely fabricated, manipulated, misattributed, or contextually distorted content in visual, audiovisual, and written forms. They reference and repost each other, amplifying their reach, and reinforce their narratives by linking to external platforms, particularly news websites designed to appear credible. These sites often closely mimic legitimate news outlets such as 'Zeit' or 'Bild', with only minor deviations in their web addresses that are impossible to detect for the public.[25] This strategy gives an impression of legitimacy to the claims circulating on social media, as people tend to trust established institutions and professionally designed news websites far more than individual posts on platforms like X[26]. By combining these tactics, propagandists create a highly convincing alternative media reality that strategically exploits existing social fault lines[27].

These key issues are structurally conveyed through the campaign in a certain manner. The research of the German Foreign Ministry has identified ten central messages.[28] These include the highlighting of connections between Ukraine aid and the economic situation in Germany; suggestions that the German government is neglecting its own population; the claim that sanctions against Russia are ineffective or harmful to Germany. Furthermore, they reject arms deliveries to Ukraine and call for negotiations; they highlight allegedly negative consequences of Ukraine's potential EU membership. Ukraine's military situation is depicted as hopeless; the Ukrainian government accused of Nazi ties or corruption. Additionally, there are polemical attacks against individual members of the German government; as well as attempts to criticise and divide the transatlantic alliance; and the general spread of conspiracy theories and fearmongering among the public. These messages are carefully selected and sensibly communicated. The general salience and prior civil dissensus about many of these topics make it easier to exert influence over the target audience[29]. As a result, the campaign encourages real people to engage with its networks by sharing content and amplifying its narratives. This organic participation significantly complicates efforts to dismantle or neutralise these networks.

Analytical perspectives and their consequences

The way these operations are designed, fundamentally entails the goal of fooling the population and staying covert. This is apparently working quite well. 'The majority of the people (in Europe) do not know that disinformation is such an extensive problem and that it is not only targeting Russians, but also people outside Russia.'[30]. Here again Germany can be taken as a principal example. While it is understandable that the general population is becoming somewhat immobilised and unsettled by the manipulation it is exposed to, it also appears that there simply isn't enough systemic action against it. The 'main problems for the West is the lack of money and people for an effective counterstrategy and the absence of a western counter narrative that can compete with the Russian one.'[31] While the EU did establish

[25] Auswärtiges Amt, op. cit.
[26] Ibidem.
[27] A. Freytag von Loringhoven, op. cit.
[28] Auswärtiges Amt, op. cit.
[29] Ibidem.
[30] S. Hoekstra, M. Jongema, op. cit., p. 39.
[31] Ibidem, p. 37.

some endeavours against Russian disinformation, such as through the 'East StratCom task force', they are simply not effective enough.[32] From the very outset, the origins of this conflict make it increasingly difficult – if not impossible – to disprove fake news. Even when debunking is successful, the imbalance in cost and time between spreading disinformation and correcting it is immense. This fundamental issue will persist, regardless of how decisively the EU, NATO, or Germany combat it. However, this is only part of the picture; there are also significant challenges in how the issue is perceived and the level of urgency with which it is addressed.

The interesting question is how Russia's disinformation campaigns are analysed by government and society, also regarding the bigger picture of inter-state relations. The most popular opinion here, arguably, is that Russia with its disinformation campaigns does act illegitimately and is in fact trying to manipulate e.g. Germanys policy and public opinion regarding Ukraine. Yet, it is not actively trying to harm the country, such as in a direct conflict. This perspective, however, might be called naïve for two reasons. While it signifies awareness for what is happening (even if not to the full extent), it ignores the implications this has on a larger scale. It neglects the fact that this is quite literally *the strongest form of aggression* Russia can exercise while averting the risk of a war with NATO. It is no secret that the Russian military is currently not ready for extensive military action beyond Ukraine. However, assuming that the prior conclusion is accurate, and given the fact that Russia is preparing for further militarisation and armament, there is reason to believe that the currently employed hybrid tactics are part of a larger long-term military strategy against NATO and EU. This becomes more evident, when looking at the current expansion of the Gerasimov Doctrine. The author of which is said to double down on his original claims, postulating that 'armed fighting is no longer a necessary attribute [of war]'.[33] If leading military thinkers of Russia openly state that this – and to some extent only this – is their weapon of choice in a modern global war, we are forced to alter our perspective on it as well.

Another essential point is the following. In the past disinformation campaigns have often 'only' been seen as a way to manipulate public opinion towards a certain goal. This mainly served the purpose of influencing certain policies e.g. towards a specific engagement in an international undertaking. It was in this sense classified as just another, maybe enhanced, but not fundamentally different form of propaganda. However, it has not been seen as a direct attack on a state. This perspective should be reconsidered today. The mediatised public sphere and everything that is connected to it, *is de facto* part of the critical infrastructure of states in the 21st century. Digital infrastructure – including secure, reliable, and trustworthy access to information in the digital public space – is a vital component of a democratic nation's foundation. Though often implicit or buried within broader discussions, its significance cannot be overstated. An attack on this infrastructure does – maybe not critically but yet directly – undermine the stability and security of the country itself. Although commonly disregarded, important actors – such as the German Ministry of Defence – have been aware of this fact and its military exploitability for a

[32] L. Benková, *The rise of Russian disinformation in Europe.* Austria Institut für Europa- und Sicherheitspolitik: Austria 2018. https://www.aies.at/download/2018/AIES-Fokus_2018-03.pdf [access: 14 IX 2025].

[33] H. F. Splidsboel, op. cit., p. 28

long time.[34] The German government principally already attained the position that the consequences of warfare directed towards this target are easily able to "match those of armed conflicts and can escalate into the non-virtual world."[35] [*Translation by the author*]. This part of the analysis is crucial. If (1) Russia, through its actions as well as public statements by legitimised personnel, fully dedicates itself to a form of warfare that is both total and primarily based on information warfare and other hybrid tactics; And if (2) information warfare, by its nature, deliberately targets the stability, security, and sovereignty of other states, thereby attacking part of their integral infrastructure; Then (3) Russia's large-scale disinformation campaigns must be understood as an open act of aggression against the targeted countries—such as in the case of Germany.

Different worldviews – Conclusion

This conclusion would indeed surprise most people in the German and wider European public. But when looking at the Russian perspective of inter-state relations and its underlying ideology of world politics, it is not surprising at all. In practice it is visible every day in Russia's communication. 'A current meta-narrative in Russia may be the claim that "the West is locked in centuries-old conflict with Russia". It is reinforced by the heavy focus on military preparedness in Russia, ranging from the emphasis on patriotism to the very public celebration of the country's nuclear arsenal.'[36] The tradition of an antagonistic *Realpolitik* in international relations is deeply inscribed into the history of the Russian state. In modern days – the post- war period, the Cold War, and its aftermath – Russia has continued, maybe even intensified, its consistent perspective on international relations as a struggle for power, influence, and survival. In contemporary Russian strategic thought, this is seen as an almost necessary axiom. This perspective has been significantly shaped by thinkers such as Aleksandr Dugin, who's Neo-Eurasianist ideology assumes an existential clash of civilisations, with Russia positioned in direct conflict to Western liberal hegemony.[37] Accordingly, Russian geopolitical strategy operates on the assumption that the international system is inherently hostile, necessitating continuous resistance and countermeasures. In line with this worldview, Dugin – much like Gerasimov – advocates for asymmetric warfare, with information warfare serving as a key instrument of resistance against the risk of Western dominance.[38] Therefore, Russia's engagement in information warfare should be seen not merely as a tactical manoeuvre but as a manifestation of its deeply rooted beliefs in geopolitical antagonism as the fundamental reality of international relations.

This perspective couldn't be further from the European and especially German narrative – both in regards of Russia as well as inter-state relations per se.[39] 'Germany is home to a tradition of Russian-romanticism and self-professed "Russland-Versteher" [Russia-understanders]. The 3.5 million Russian speakers in Germany

[34] Bundesregierung, op. cit., p. 37.
[35] „können denen bewaffneter Auseinandersetzungen entsprechen und in die nichtvirtuelle Welt eskalieren." Ibidem.
[36] H. F. Splidsboel, op. cit., p. 28.
[37] M. Składanowski, *From an ideological war to an ideology of war: Aleksandr Dugin's assumptions of neo-Eurasianism and their application to Russian preparations for the war against Ukraine*. "Studia Rossica Gedanensia", (9) 2022, p. 175–186.
[38] Ibidem; V. Gerasimov, op. cit.; C. Bilban, H. Grininger, op. cit.
[39] A. Freytag von Loringhoven, op. cit.; O. Fridman, op. cit.

present a vulnerable target. Germany's postwar peace movement and "Ostpolitik" live on and undermine solidarity with Ukraine.'[40] The sympathy for Russia is deeply rooted and was nurtured for many years, not at last by the idea of *Wandel durch Handel* [Change through trade]. This led to the image of Russia as a partner or even somewhat like a friend, and it will be hard to get this image out of people's head. Under optimal circumstances this would be a supportable position. Europe and arguably many of the liberal western nations are centrally a peace project. The ideology behind that entails the image of international relations as a Positive-sum game, with the assumptions that institutionalism works, and that the world is ideally moving to something like a Kantian idea of peace between democratic states.[41] International analysts have noticed this trend and its problems already at the start of the millennium: 'Europe is turning away from power or, in other words, moving beyond it. It is entering a self-contained world of laws, regulations, transnational negotiations and transnational cooperation, a post-historical paradise of peace and prosperity that is tantamount to the realisation of "Kant's eternal peace"'.[42] While this ideal is universally acceptable as a good one, it, however, falls short of a defensive spirit in the face of challenges such as the modern hybrid warfare and its consequences as well as the simple fact that not everyone adheres to these values. Moreover, just like it is the case in Russia, this general ideological perspective is strongly being reflected in the way people think about the threat at hand here: '[…], the danger is often underestimated by the general public and many politicians. There is far too little awareness of the Russian hybrid warfare that is being waged against us. It is often also a case of 'not wanting to admit it', along the lines of 'it cannot be what must not be'.[43] The erosion of analytical clarity among key actors, especially the general public, has led to significant shortcomings in the situational assessment. This is highly influenced by the discrepancy in predominant worldviews and the risk of being blinded by an ideal which only one side subordinates to[44].

It, however, would also be unjust to claim that this challenge goes entirely unnoticed. Policymakers are, at least to some extent, aware of the issue and its delicate nature, which is in many cases the very reason why it is not openly addressed. Directly confronting Russia's hybrid strategies carries diplomatic risks and the potential to provoke public fear – two strong incentives for avoiding the topic publicly to some extent. After all Russia actively weaponizes these very dynamics, using political and psychological manipulation to sow fear and push their victims into a language of conflict in order to frame them as the aggressor. Nevertheless, a shift in public consciousness is needed. To counteract these tactics, academia, journalism,

[40] A. Freytag von Loringhoven, op. cit.

[41] O. Höffe, *Immanuel Kant: Zum ewigen Frieden*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag 2004, https://doi.org/10.1524/9783050050270 [access: 14 IX 2025]; R. Kagan, *Macht und Schwäche. Was die Vereinigten Staaten und Europa auseinandertreibt*. „Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik", 02 (10) 2002, p. 1194-1206. https://www.blaetter.de/ausgabe/2002/oktober/macht-und-schwaeche [access: 14 IX 2025].

[42] „Europa wendet sich von der Macht ab oder es bewegt sich, anders gesagt, über diese hinaus. Es betritt eine in sich geschlossene Welt von Gesetzen, Regelungen, transnationalen Verhandlungen und transnationaler Zusammenarbeit, ein posthistorisches Paradies des Friedens und des Wohlstands, das der Verwirklichung von Kants „ewigem Frieden" gleichkommt." Ibidem.

[43] „[…] in der breiten Gesellschaft und bei vielen Politikern wird die Gefahr oft unterschätzt. Die Wahrnehmung für die russische hybride Kriegsführung, die gegen uns läuft, ist viel zu schwach. Häufig ist es auch ein «Nicht- wahrhaben-wollen», so nach dem Motto «es kann nicht sein, was nicht sein darf»." O. Hofer, op. cit.

[44] Ibidem; O. Fridman, op. cit.

and independent analysts can play a crucial role in exposing, educating on, and mitigating the impact of information warfare. Germany, Europe, and the broader liberal West should not abolish their foundational values, but they should develop a heightened awareness of their respective vulnerabilities in the face of modern threats. The ideological fault lines explored in this work directly affect security and the resilience of democratic institutions. The extensive mediatisation of the public discourse and fundamental democratic processes creates vulnerabilities. Recognising and critically reflecting on the arising challenges is not only wise – it is imperative for the defence of open societies.

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Streszczenie

W ostatnim czasie Rosja znacząco rozszerzyła wykorzystanie kampanii dezinformacyjnych oraz innych form wojny hybrydowej jako integralnych elementów swoich operacji militarnych i strategicznych. Coraz częściej są one wymierzone w państwa europejskie, zwłaszcza w Niemcy, w ramach przestrzeni politycznej transatlantyckiej. Niniejsze opracowanie analizuje praktyki wojny informacyjnej, koncentrując się na rosyjskich kampaniach dezinformacyjnych, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem operacji „Doppelgänger" prowadzonej w Niemczech. Kampanie te mają na celu manipulowanie opinią publiczną, destabilizowanie instytucji demokratycznych oraz osłabianie pozycji Niemiec w ramach sojuszy międzynarodowych. Wykorzystując szeroki arsenał technik, Rosja dąży nie tylko do promowania własnych narracji, lecz także do wywoływania powszechnego zamętu i podważania zaufania do polityki, mediów i samych faktów. Niemieckie postrzeganie tych trwających ataków pozostaje niespójne z ich rzeczywistym oddziaływaniem, ujawniając fundamentalną lukę między strategicznymi celami Rosji a reakcją Niemiec. Autor artykułu argumentuje, że kampanie dezinformacyjne należy postrzegać jako formę bezpośredniej agresji – mniej fizycznie destrukcyjną, lecz w skutkach dla stabilności państwa porównywalną z konwencjonalną wojną. Opracowanie ukazuje także ideologiczne rozbieżności między rosyjską strategią geopolityczną – zakorzenioną w antagonistycznym, siłowym pojmowaniu świata – a powojenną tradycją liberalnego instytucjonalizmu i multilateralizmu Niemiec oraz Europy. Wyniki wskazują na pilną potrzebę zwiększenia świadomości, refleksji i działań przeciwdziałających rosnącemu wpływowi wojny informacyjnej na kluczowe procesy demokratyczne i bezpieczeństwo narodowe.

Abstract

Recently, Russia substantially expanded its deployment of disinformation campaigns and other hybrid warfare as integral components of its military and strategic operations. These increasingly target European nations, especially Germany, within the transatlantic political sphere. This study explores the practice of information warfare, analysing Russia's disinformation campaigns with a focus on the 'Doppelgänger' operation conducted in Germany. These campaigns are designed to manipulate public opinion, destabilise democratic institutions, and weaken Germany's position within international alliances. Relying on a vast arsenal of practices, Russia aims not just to promote its own narratives but also to create widespread confusion and undermine trust in politics, media, and facts per se. Germany's perception of these ongoing attacks remains inconsistent with their actual impact, revealing a fundamental gap between Russia's strategic objectives and Germany's response. The study argues that disinformation campaigns should be understood as a form of direct aggression, while less physically destructive, nevertheless akin to conventional warfare in their consequences for national stability. It further explores the ideological divergence between Russian geopolitical strategy – rooted in an antagonistic, power-driven worldview – in contrast with Germany's and Europe's post-war tradition of liberal institutionalist multilateralism. The findings highlight the urgent need for increased awareness, reflection, and countermeasures to combat the growing influence of information warfare on essential democratic processes and national security.