RUSSIAN POLITICS OF DECEPTION

The Kremlin's Reaction to the Revolutions of 2004 – 2014 and Information Warfare in Russia-Ukraine Relations

What theoretical framework can account for the Russian reaction to the revolutions of 2004 – 2014 in surrounding countries, especially in regard to the intensification of information warfare in the run up to the Russia-Ukraine crisis?

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Introduction

"Of course, it is easy to say that the events of the Arab Spring were no war, so we, military, have nothing to study there. Well, maybe the opposite is true and precisely this the typical 21st century war?"

Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, First Deputy Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation (Gerasimov 2013, 2)

Vladimir Putin was elected president of the Russian Federation in 2000 and reelected for the second term in 2004. He then served as a prime minister under president Dmitry Medvedev to take a break from his second consecutive term. During this 'interregnum' the presidential terms were extended from four to six years and in 2012 Putin became eligible to run for president again, with the next elections coming in 2018. He is now challenged by opposition activist Alexei Navalny:

"Nowadays in Russia one can achieve something only by the means of organized protest and demonstrations. Any problem has to be politicized. People, who claim that their protest is 'non-political' lose at that very instant." (Navalny, 2017)

Despite the rare protest actions organized by the opposition, Putin's support rating has reached its historical maximum and now exceeds 85%, according to the official estimates – quite tellingly, regardless of the fact whether this number is accurate (Politov 2016). However, the memory of color revolutions in neighboring countries, the Arab Spring and Ukrainian Euromaidan is still fresh and continues to throw a shadow on the Kremlin, as Putin had to deal with them throughout almost the entire period he has been in power. For the Russian elites, these revolutions formed a dual threat – both to their domestic power and Russian position on the international arena. Ever since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the confrontation between Russia and 'the West', that is the US, NATO, and less unambiguously EU, has been growing once again. Over these years, Russia has earned a reputation of an unpredictable, threatening and opportunistic actor, despite all the reasons it has to cooperate with the Western countries. This paper analyzes the Russian rationale behind its reaction to the revolutions of 2004 – 2014 and the instruments it is using in its information warfare.

In 1989, a series of peaceful revolutions took place throughout Eastern Europe, including the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia and Singing Revolution in the Baltics, which led to the overthrow of communist regimes and allowed these countries to make a swift transition to the Western-style liberal democracy. However, this was only the beginning of political turmoil in the region. The Belavezha Accords of 1991, which finalized the disintegration of the Soviet Union, did not systematically address its legal and administrative consequences, as many believed that the cooperation between the newly formed independent states would continue and eventually draw them back together. Russia naturally saw itself as a legitimate successor of the Soviet Union and felt committed to restore its former influence.

Ten years after the fall of the Soviet Union people took to the streets once again. Starting with the Bulldozer Revolution in Serbia in 2000, a wave of revolutions, now electoral, swept through Georgia (Rose Revolution, 2003), Ukraine (Orange Revolution 2004), Kyrgyzstan (Tulip Revolution, 2005) and few other countries in the region, including several failed attempts in Azerbaijan, Belarus and Armenia, with Moldova being probably the last country with a government that was almost displaced by a revolution of this type in 2009. During this period, Russia's geopolitical interests and ambitions began to clash with 'the

West', primarily the US, more and more openly. President Vladimir Putin, after being reelected for his second term, started to consolidate his power and the Kremlin grew more assertive, also in its foreign policy. In 2010 – 2011, there has been some civil unrest in neighboring Ukraine, but more importantly, the following couple of years have been marked by protests in Russia itself, including the Bolotnaya protest movement against the 2011 legislative election results when opposition rallies were held in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other major Russian cities.

The overarching term 'color revolutions' was coined when protesters in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan explicitly stated, that they were indebted to the Orange Revolution, which became a symbol of civil opposition in post-communist authoritarian states. In Russia, the term 'orange revolutions' is sometimes even being used instead of 'color revolutions' (Kara-Murza 2005, 9). The Orange Revolution of 2004 marked a turning point in Russia-Ukraine relations, which culminated in a dramatic crisis another ten years later during the Maidan of 2014, dubbed the Revolution of Dignity. This revolution concluded the series of 'square revolutions' which were brought about by the Arab Spring and took place in the main squares of big (usually capital) cities from Cairo in 2011 to Istanbul in 2013. Square revolutions, unlike the electoral color revolutions, are characterized by the absence of strong political leadership and greater role for 'the people' who stood up for their democratic freedoms. They also have ushered in more violence than the preceding revolutions.

During Vladimir Putin's second (2004 – 2008) and third (2012 – present) presidential terms, which coincided with the revolution waves, Russia got more heavy-handed in its foreign as well as domestic policy. These revolutions, despite their different origins and objectives, are viewed as one continuous period in this paper as it has already been shown that mass protests were a more or less constant feature of the post-Soviet political landscape since the early 2000's. From the perspective of Kremlin's reaction against them, both color and square revolutions can be seen as two stages of the same process, even though 'color revolutions' is a catchier and better known term, still widely used in Russia (Sivkov 2013; "Putin" 2014). To avoid repetition, I have labeled them together as the 'democratic revolutions'. The word 'democratic' refers here to democracy as a typically 'Western' value, increasingly seen by Russia as alien, threatening and opposed to its own traditions and culture. Moreover, this element is an important part of the Russian official discourse against the color and square revolutions.

Russian political elites have been quite straightforward and undivided in their reaction. They invariably describe the revolutions as regime change attempts, which lead to the overthrow of legitimate governments and their replacement with pro-Western regimes, and were thus ultimately meant as potential rehearsals of a *coup d' état* in Moscow itself staged by the 'Western actors'. The complex domestic structural causes of these revolutions are typically being overlooked (Khudoley 2016, 391-393). In his interview with the Bloomberg agency in 2009, Putin stated that 'what happened with Ukraine in recent years was the result to a significant degree of the activities of the previous US administration and the European Union, which supported it' ("Interview Vladimira Putina" 2009). Furthermore, Russia's chief foreign policy objective is to maintain its sphere of influence on the CIS member-states, as according to Dmitry Medvedev, 'there are regions in which Russia has privileged interests' (Wilson 2010, 32).

According to this logic, the Russian leadership had to take hard uncompromising measures in order to counter the security threat of democratic revolutions. During the Russian Federation Security Council meeting in 2014 Putin left no doubts about the Kremlin's position:

"In the modern world extremism is being used as a geopolitical instrument for the repartition of the spheres of influence. We all can see the tragic consequences of the so-called color revolutions and the damage they have inflicted on the people of the countries, which have undergone irresponsible covert and overt interventions in their lives. For us, it is a lesson and a warning and we will do everything for it to never happen in Russia." ("Putin" 2014)

The democratic revolutions have significantly influenced Russian foreign and domestic policy over the past decade. This paper provides a theoretical framework for the analysis of the Russian reaction to the revolutions of 2004 – 2014 in surrounding countries, focusing especially on the intensification of information warfare in the run up to the Russia-Ukraine crisis, which was partly the result of these revolutions. Under the umbrella of information warfare, this research combines methods, concepts and theories of Russian origin with traditional academic approaches from the field of International Relations in order to provide a theoretical framework for the analysis of domestic and foreign policy adjustments that have been made primarily during Vladimir Putin's second and third presidential terms. The Russia-Ukraine crisis is the most outspoken, clear-cut manifestation of these strategies and will be used as a case study to show their working while at the same time providing focus and delimitation for the study.

Information warfare is understood in this context as an ongoing activity that comprises different means of information influence for political goals, including primarily propaganda, rather than specific technological operations like cyber-attacks. The glossary of the Russian Military Academy of the General Staff draws a clear distinction between the narrow Western definition of information warfare, which limits it to tactical operations during military conflicts, and the broad Russian one, according to which it is waged constantly in peacetime on both domestic and international scale. In a sense, information warfare is the Russian answer to Western soft power, which is seen by the Kremlin as a weapon of US strategists used to undermine Russian power position (Sivkov 2013; Khudoley 2016, 390-391; Giles 2016, 41).

The democratic revolutions have shown, that many post-Soviet countries, for example, Ukraine with its 'European choice', are leaning towards the EU and show desire to join NATO . That is what Russia sees as an infringement into its own sphere of influence, which has to be countered at all costs (Sivkov 2013, 1). Information warfare has become a constant feature of Russian political and social life, not least because of the democratic revolutions threat (Giles 2016, 4, 17). For the analysis of manipulation techniques that are part of Russian information warfare, the first chapter provides a toolkit, which consists of grand theory framing and basic Security Studies concepts like *securitization* and *security dispositives* on the one hand, and the main principles of Russian military strategy with special attention for the new generation warfare and deception as embodied in the notion of *reflexive control* on the other. The assumption here is that this theoretical framework can explain why Russia behaves the way it does as it adds a new layer of understanding by and combining traditional academic approaches with practical ones that are being used by the Kremlin in order to reproduce the Russian way of thinking.

It is striking how the Russian leadership sees the world of international relations as a Hobbesian one. Even despite being openly against any large scale military conflicts, Russia still depicts every aspect of its relations with 'the West' in terms of war and rivalry, with the only difference that information is now being used instead of armed forces (Tretyakov 2016). Vladimir Putin, educated and trained to be a counter-insurgency officer, made a brilliant career from a KGB officer to Federal Security Service (FSB) Director to the president of the Russian Federation and is familiar with the military strategy and crucial to information warfare *reflexive control* theory, which is a part of the KGB 'school programme'. The same

goes for other *siloviki* from Putin's nearest entourage – people who are or have been involved with the 'power ministries' (like the Ministry of Defense or Internal Affairs) and security services, for example 'the hawk of Russian foreign policy' Dmitry Rogozin, Minister of Defense Sergey Shoygu, Secretary of the Security Council and former FSB Director Nikolai Patrushev and the Chief of General Staff Valery Gerasimov Duncan 2012, 1). This is by no means the only influential group in the Kremlin ("Za Krym" 2014), but it will be central to this research.

The information on Russia's actual information warfare is drawn from the Western academic literature (Giles 2016; Thomas 2015), Russian primary sources and, most importantly, Russian academic journals. *Military Thought* (*Военная мысль*) is the main official journal of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, virtually since 1918. Other influential military theoretic journals are *Military Historical Journal* (*Военно-исторический журнал*), *Military Industrial Courier* (*Военно-промышленный курьер*) and the *Journal of the Academy of Military Sciences* (*Вестник Академии военных наук*). Their significance – at least from the research perspective, is proved by the fact that influential *siloviki* like Patrushev and Gerasimov, along with other high-ranked officials, are among their frequent contributors. These publications are a quite reliable source of information as they link military theory with political practice and reveal about as much about the current Russian strategy trends, as it is possible to uncover for an outsider who does not have access to any special documentation.

In academic literature, there is considerable debate on whether the color and square revolutions have been successful or failed as a phenomenon as well as in particular cases (Åslund 2006; Cooley 2010; Hale 2006; Kurilla 2010; Kuzio 2017). However, regardless of their actual democratizing effect, the revolutions have undoubtedly destabilized the post-Soviet space and made Russia a possible candidate for the next one. Moreover, the new regimes were not as eager to cooperate with the Kremlin as before. The two revolutions in Ukraine were especially disturbing for Russia as they happened on its very doorstep and interfered with Russia's own strategic plans not only in regard to Ukraine, but the whole region. Ukraine's 'European choice' automatically harmed Russian-led integration projects, which were crucial for Russia in order to strengthen its power position on the international arena (Dragneva & Wolczuk 2016, 693).

The analysis and examples from the second and third chapters will show that the Russian leadership is indeed very 'technical' with its information warfare strategy and successfully applies theory in practice. Here, the focus is on theoretical explanation of grand strategy of the information warfare and official discourse which comes along with it. The purpose of this research is to demonstrate that understanding the reasons for Kremlin's unambiguously harsh reaction to the democratic revolutions requires knowledge of underlying ideas, perceptions and motives, which have shaped the 'coordinate system' inside of which the Russian leadership operates. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to have 'insider' insights and knowledge of traditional Russian strategic thought as well as be able to take distance from this perspective and reflect on it – hence the choice for a mix of academic approaches with more practical concepts, which form a joint analytical toolkit. The second chapter is written from a realist perspective and deals with the Russian foreign policy analyzed in terms of grand strategy in order to explain *why* Russia reacted to the democratic revolutions the way it did and what is the rationale behind information warfare. The third 'technical' chapter written from a constructivist perspective proceeds to analyze *how* information warfare is implemented, first through the lens of *securitization* and then by explaining Russian propagandist discourse in terms of *reflexive control*.

Chapter I: Analytical Toolkit

The subject and methodology of this research belong to the domain of International Relations (IR), which developed as a subdiscipline of Political Science in the modern sense in the US during the Cold War. It remains a hierarchical social science, which incorporates a multitude of diverging schools of thought and approaches, with the most authoritative academic journals concentrated in America and there is probably hardly another discipline that produces so much writing on itself and is torn by ongoing 'great debates' (Ole Wæver 2013, 313, 315). Neoliberalism, for example, is indeed well suited for explaining a world inhabited by international organizations and liberal democracies prevalent in the West (Anderson 2000, 17; Snyder 2009). However, the post-Soviet space dominated by Russia requires a different perspective. In its foreign policy, Russia emphatically operates within the realist paradigm, which can be traced back to the writings by Thucydides, Hobbbes and Machiavelli. It is dominated by perpetual conflict and the very life in it *is* war. They key assumption of realism is that in an anarchic world with no higher authority above the states, power is crucial to survival. Despite the fact that classical realists and neorealists have divergent opinions on whether power only matters as a means of survival or is a goal in itself, the difference is irrelevant to this study (Mearsheimer 2013, 78).

After a brief discussion on realism and constructivism, which form the general grand theory setting for further analysis, this chapter proceeds from general to more specific concepts. The first section deals with Security Studies, primarily as understood by the Copenhagen School, which combines both neorealist and constructivist elements. The next section is dedicated to military strategy, basic Strategic Studies concepts and academic debate within the field. Lastly, this chapter focuses on manipulation and deception from the theoretical perspective of reflexive control. It must be noted, that traditional academic approaches like grand theories or *securitization* can be applied 'from without' to assess state policies, while the actual strategy and manipulative techniques from the second and third sections are used by the Russian leadership itself. The next chapters will thus combine one academic and one 'practical' approach each.

A realist post-bipolar world is a perfect theoretical backdrop for president Putin's policy with his competitive logic, affinity for *Realpolitik* and a KGB past. This argument is backed by the fact, that Russian politicians, Putin in particular, operate within this paradigm themselves and use realist terms like 'spheres of influence' and 'balance of power' in their statements and speeches (Bonicelli 2015; "Putin" 2014). Moreover, it is an especially rewarding theoretical environment for explaining noticeable military strategy influences in Kremlin's policy without necessarily implying an actual war or conflict. Vladimir Putin officially has decisive influence on the Russian strategy and the last say over the Military Doctrine and Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, so that it is safe to argue that his personal competitive opportunist logic is reflected in Russian revanchist foreign policy and goes along the lines of *Realpolitik* (Thomas 2015, 460; Bonicelli 2015). This term is not synonymous to realism as grand theory, but rather fits into the realist way of thinking, especially as described by Machiavelli. *Realpolitik* denotes politics where decisions are based on pragmatic evaluation of the situation and given circumstances, instead of certain moral principles and ethics.

Moscow has gotten itself involved in a *zero-sum game*, where any potential gain for Russia's perceived adversaries would mean loss to Russia as well as Putin personally, and vice versa, so that this 'game of chess' cannot end without an absolute winner and a loser (Mearsheimer 2014). As a legal successor to the Soviet Union, Russia has also inherited the Soviet Cold War legacy and views eastward NATO expansion as a potential threat to its own position in the region. According to the same logic, the EU

integration initiatives are also increasingly being seen as a part of geopolitical balancing against Russia (Dragneva & Wolczuk 2014, 221; Kuzio 2017, 104). From this perspective, security tensions in the post-Soviet space can be explained in terms of *security dilemma* also known as the spiral model. According to it, most steps a state takes to enhance its security decrease that of other states so that just trying to preserve status quo does not work in certain situations or is even impossible at some point, which leads to constant military buildup and a threat of escalation (Mearsheimer 2013, 80). In this study, it will be argued, that for Russia, the color revolutions formed such point of no return, which became entrenched after the Russia-Ukraine crisis.

However, while Russian foreign policy in the region naturally lends itself to a realist interpretation, an analytical approach undertaken in this paper calls for additional framework with a focus on discourses and discursive practices suited for the analysis of information warfare, Russian 'political technologies' and propaganda. Such a framework is provided by the constructivist theory, which holds that major aspects of international relations are socially constructed rather than predetermined by human nature or structural features of a political system. This approach emphasizes the constructed character of discourses, identities, norms and ways of behavior in a fundamentally social context (Fierke 2013, 187-202). Constructivism started out as a critique of grand theories and is heavily influenced by the 'linguistic turn' in philosophy with its attention to language and the ways it is used as an instrument to shape and give meaning to the world we live in. Moreover, by highlighting the meaning-*making* aspect of any social relations, it provides a methodological toolkit for the analysis of power mechanisms in politics. From the constructivist point of view, any policy is first and foremost aimed at normative regime legitimization through construction of domestic national identity and external threats or enemies. Legitimacy sustained by such propagandist discourse is crucial for the regime to gain nationwide support in order to stay in power, while at the same time it is also capable of influencing the country's relationship with and the image of the 'Others', therefore justifying its foreign policy (Shakhrai 2015, 29). Concepts described in the first section are essentially constructivist, although they do have a realist backdrop.

Copenhagen School and *securitization*

Security is an important part of this framework as it forms a crucial link between the realist strife for power and survival on the one hand, and the underlying necessity to legitimize the regime on the other – were it for the elites to stay in power or for preserving the integrity of the entire state. It is defined as the anticipation of being unharmed in the future (De Graaf & Zwierlein 2013, 52). In here the temporal element, namely 'future', is crucial. The goal of any security policy is to create or assure such feeling for the citizens and the state itself. A tangible threat does not necessarily have to exist at a given moment – otherwise that would mean that a security policy is already failing. It is rather about *potential* dangers which can arise in the future, which makes security an elusive concept subject to manipulation. In practice therefore, security policies are not limited to finding and eliminating potential threats but can also be used to evoke them or create artificial ones in order to enable security policies that may be crucial for normative regime legitimation and consolidation of power (Shakhrai 2015).

Security Studies as an academic subfield of the IR developed in the course of the Cold War and used to focus primarily on nuclear deterrence. Overtime, however, the focus shifted to organized violence, so that Security Studies came to encompass virtually everything from individual conflicts and terrorism to crisis management and grand politics. Especially after 9/11, the discipline started to shift from studying actual conflicts to peacetime security issues under the influence of constructivism (Diskaya 2013).

Following the general development within IR, critical approaches and schools of thought started appearing, with Copenhagen School being the most prominent one among them.

Copenhagen School has its origin in Barry Buzan's book *People, States and Fear*. Most representatives of this school are connected with the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute. The two best-known scientists usually associated with this school are IR experts Jaap de Wilde and Ole Wæver. The main principles of Copenhagen School are laid down in the book *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde. Copenhagen School offers a solid methodological framework that provides new insights into long-term security developments through the *securitization* concept (De Graaf & Zwierlein 2013, 50-51). Its representatives take neorealism as a starting point and share a conventional military understanding of security with traditional security scholars. One of the key assumptions of this school of thought is that security is about survival. In the world of international relations, a security issue arises when something poses an existential threat to a certain object. Thus, issues can become *securitized,* which means that they require decisive measures to be taken immediately in order to counter the threat (Diskaya 2013).

This is where the essentially constructivist concept of *securitization* comes in. It has been developed by Ole Wæver in 1995 and implies that the crucial element of security is not the objective fact whether a threat is real or not, but the way in which certain phenomena, problems or groups can be *socially constructed* as a threat. Here, security is redefined as a socially embedded process of political 'meaning-making' instead of being limited to a mere rational response to an objective threat (De Graaf & Zwierlein 2013, 49). The actors, who deliberately choose to *securitize* certain issues, can get the opportunity to implement measures, which would never be accepted by the citizens in normal circumstances, if not for the intense threat image that arose as a result of *securitization* (Munster 2012). Therefore, by defining an issue as existential threat, the actor who does so acquires more power and can consolidate his authority in order to handle it effectively as now the very survival of a state has been put at stake. However, for the *securitization* to work, target audience needs to be convinced that the threat is grave enough before a security issue can be raised above the normal sphere of politics (Diskaya 2013).

As it has already been mentioned, the act of *securitization* per definition requires persuading broad audience of an existing threat. One of Ole Wæver's early works, which probably lies at the root of *securitization* theory, is tellingly titled "Security, the Speech Act" and has been heavily influenced by the linguistic turn. Simply put, the main message of this work is that because of the fact that security issues arise as soon as something is *articulated* as a threat, security (or *securitization* as a process, for that matter) is first and foremost a speech act. The underlying assumption here is that the words are never on their own, but always directly refer to actions or developments in a social environment (Fierke 2013, 197). Therefore, *securitization* combines this particular understanding of 'security' and links it directly to discursive practice. In effect, *securitization* is an act of successfully attaching 'security' attributes to a particular case or process.

Yet another layer of analysis that is integral to the process of *securitization* is added by security *dispositives,* which have first been introduced by Michel Foucault in his lecture *Sécurité, territoire, population* in the seventies, made public only in 2004. Security *dispositives* are social structures that are also based on discursive practices and evoked in the name of a potential security threat. Foucault defines dispositive as a heterogenous entity that encompasses the interplay between lingual and non-lingual expressions of power relations at a given moment, such as discourses, institutions, laws and regulations or even architecture. (De Graaf & Zwierlein 2013, 51). Thus, while *securitization* helps to explain the

general development of security policy, *dispositives* describe the structure and characteristic features of these processes.

However, Foucault focused exclusively on internal security. Dutch security expert Beatrice de Graaf has given this concept another dimension. She added conspiracy *dispositives* to it and placed both into an international setting (Zwierlein & de Graaf 2013, 32-33). De Graaf outlines the most important elements of *dispositives*. Firstly, security *dispositives* always have a spatial dimension and are usually attached to a certain state. Secondly, security *dispositives* bring along a certain set of values, such as order, discipline and a sense of community. Thirdly, the citizens are both actors and objects of this interplay of power relations and security becomes an instrument of governing society. Therefore, security *dispositives* are bound to get politicized and demand political legitimation (De Graaf & Zwierlein 2013, 52-53).

International setting is an integral feature of conspiracy *dispositives*, which are subordinate to security *dispositives*. They can be used to ascribe a threat to a certain group or event and thus give it a face by identifying where the danger comes from and who the enemies are. It is only convenient, that conspiracies are intangible and their existence is very hard to prove in reality – so for a conspiracy *dispositive* to successfully perform its function, an actual conspiracy does not have to exist as this method is essentially about manipulating fear-driven ideas about it. An important by-product of *securitization* by the means of *dispositives* is that the line between internal and external security becomes blurred – so it becomes possible to implement hard measures and combine domestic repression with assertive foreign policy.

In the context of this paper, the notion of conspiracy is hardly applicable. However, the elements and main function of conspiracy *dispositives* help to illustrate how by pointing out an enemy one can legitimize own tougher policy and use a security threat as a unifying factor (De Graaf & Zwierlein 2013, 57). It should be possible to identify other sub-security *dispositives,* for example the revolution ones, as all of them share the same features and functions. In this case, revolution *dispositives* serve to identify democratic revolutions as an evil and tie them to a certain group of people (any protesters) or state (most prominently, Ukraine) in order to create an image which can then be used in the main security dispositive, which is primarily about the Russian sovereignty and legitimacy of the Russian government, contrasted against the countries which have had a revolution that resulted in a regime change. Dispositives will be used in the third chapter to show how the democratic revolutions came to be *securitized.*

New generation warfare

The discipline of Strategic Studies also deals with the issues of security and power, bridging the gap between the domains of politics and war. This interdisciplinary academic field has the same origins and dynamics as Security Studies. Just like the former, it used to focus on the nuclear threat during the Cold War, but has been transformed after 9/11. Strategic Studies received renewed attention as security environment started changing and irregular warfare, peacekeeping missions and revolutions have become more relevant than ever. Despite the interconnectedness with the Security Studies, Strategic Studies has an own intellectual tradition with deep historical roots. On the one hand, this tradition reaches back to Ancient China with its crown jewel the *Art of War* by Sun Tzu (544-496 BC) – probably the most iconic treatise on warfare ever written. On the other, it remains rooted in the European military thought heavily influenced by Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831) and his book *On War* (Lonsdale 2016, 22). Furthermore, the distinct Russian strategic tradition takes a special place in this research as it combines

both Eastern and Western military thought. This section first deals with the definitions, general features and levels of strategy. It then proceeds to examine Russian strategy, its main principles, basic theoretical assumptions and practical implications, including the discussion on the new generation of warfare, information- and 'hybrid' warfare.

There is no universal consensus on a single standard definition of strategy as it may refer to completely different, sometimes not even overlapping concepts – as in 'business strategy' or 'strategic management', that have nothing to do with the topic of his research. According to Colin Gray, strategy is 'the use that is made of force and the threat of force for the ends of policy' (Lonsdale 2016, 40). Here, the *threat* of force is key – especially in conjunction with security implications as outlined above. Despite its strong association with warfare, military force does not have to play a role in strategy, especially under the premise of a realist environment, which is per definition anarchic, hostile and characterized by a perpetual struggle for power. At this point, it is important to distinguish different levels of strategy. The lowest tactical level is indeed about disposing and maneuvering military units in the field, while military and operational strategy involves planning at higher levels of command. More relevant for this study, though, is the grand strategy, which overlaps with foreign policy and can employ many instruments, military force being only one of many options (Lonsdale 2016, 42-44). Strategy is thus highly adaptable and can always be scaled up or down (Lonsdale 2016, 40).

Furthermore, there are multiple ways to use military force without actually engaging in a war or any kind of direct confrontation. While offence and defense do imply actual use of physical force, deterrence, compellence and posturing are only indirectly founded thereupon. Deterrence is used for dissuading an adversary from taking action under a threat of force or punishment, while compellence refers to either pressuring an opponent into doing something he has not yet done or stopping him from doing what he has already started. Posturing, the display of military force, can serve to both ends and is often meant for making a general impression rather than achieving a specific objective. Moreover, there are other non-military uses of force, such as policing or humanitarian aid (Lonsdale 2016, 62-65).

One of the most prominent Russian strategists who has had a significant impact on the modern Russian military thought is Alexander Svechin (1878-1938), who defined strategy as follows:

> "*Strategy is the art of combining preparations for war and the grouping of operations for achieving the goal set by the war for the AF [armed forces]. Strategy decides issues associated with the employment of the Armed Forces and all the resources of a country for achieving ultimate war aims.*" (Svechin 1992, 69)

The core of this definition is outspokenly military. However, the Soviet military thought has undergone further refinement in recent years as his ideas have been combined with new insights and techniques. In Russia, there are several authoritative military- theoretic journals, like *Military Thought* and *Military Industrial Courier* that are part of this process. The main message of the modern Russian strategic thought is that wars are now fought in the information environment rather than on the battlefields (Thomas 2013, 454). Non-military and asymmetrical methods aimed at offsetting opponents' superiority and exploiting their weaknesses have become key in achieving strategic political goals for Russia as the Kremlin's military strategic focus has shifted towards unconventional irregular warfare, which implies avoidance of direct confrontation and is meant to be used against relatively more powerful opponents, with significantly different strategy and tactics. To be even more specific, according to Valery Gerasimov, non-military operations are to occur at a rate of 4:1 over the military ones (Thomas 2015, 455). This seems to be exactly what Putin is aiming at:

"*Our responses are to be based on intellectual superiority; they will be asymmetrical and less costly.*" (Chekinov & Bogdanov 2010, 21)

Consequently, Russian military strategy came to be typically described by Western experts as hybrid warfare (Banasik 2016), even though Russian officials and military do not use this term themselves too eagerly. Gerasimov has never mentioned hybrid warfare, even though the General Staff clearly prefers non-military methods to military ones and uses them in conjunction. However, in *Military Thought* one can find contradictory opinions. A few authors explicitly state that hybrid warfare 'is not exactly the right term and is slightly at odds with the glossary used in this country's military science' (Adrianov & Loyko 2015, 68). On the other hand, Sergey Chekinov, head of the Centre for Military Strategic Research of the Russian General Staff Academy, does use hybrid warfare as an alternative term in his prognosis on the future of wars and associates it directly with information warfare:

> "*Wars will be resolved by a skillful combination of military, nonmilitary, and special nonviolent measures that will be put through by a variety of forms and methods and a blend of political, economic, informational, technological, and environmental measures, primarily by taking advantage of information superiority. Information warfare in the new conditions will be the starting point of every action now called the new type of warfare, or hybrid war, in which broad use will be made of the mass media and, where feasible, global computer networks.*" (Chekinov & Bogdanov 2015, 44-45)

Thus, hybrid warfare might be a helpful, albeit not very 'authentic' analytical concept vis-à-vis the Russian new-generation warfare, which has accumulated ultra-traditional strategic notions and successfully adapted them to the recent developments in Russian policy, with the democratic revolutions being an important stimulus of these changes. Gerasimov states with reference to Svechin that 'it is necessary to work out a particular line of strategic conduct for each war, and each war represents a particular case, requiring the establishment of its own peculiar logic, and not the application of some sort of model' (Gerasimov 2013, 1; Thomas 2015, 453).

Reflexive control

The most basic assumption about war is that war is essentially about deception. It was coined by Sun Tzu in Ancient China about 2,500 years ago and has been the cornerstone of military thought ever since not only in the East, but in the West as well – consider Machiavelli's *Prince.* Another important postulate from the *Art of War* by Sun Tzu is that 'the supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting' (Smolyan 2013, 58). These two elements are reflected in *strategems* that have existed in China for over 3000 years and are recorded in the book *36 Strategems*, which also belongs to the 'obligatory reads' on strategy. The term is derived from a Greek word, which was used to describe military deception and refers to an algorithm or a calculated scheme aimed at achieving a hidden goal. It takes multiple factors into account, such as object's psychology, his situation and current circumstances (Smolyan 2013, 59). Another classic strategic notion is that of Clausewitzian friction according to which one should always reckon with the fact that he cannot foresee all of the countless minor accidents happen during a confrontation and should be able to adjust to the situation (Lonsdale 2016, 35).

Reflexive control can be seen as synonymous to psychological manipulation that has been used for strategic purposes intuitively for centuries (Смолян 2013, 54, 56). However, there is complex body of theory behind it. The basic objective of *reflexive control* is to trick an adversary, partner or a group of people into making a decision, which has been predetermined by the instigator. It can be achieved by provocative actions or controversial statements, which would puzzle the opponent and make him

abandon his initial plans or act irrationally. The instigator can also adjust his own consecutive actions according to this response. Information, carefully prepared and conveyed in a certain way, is a crucial means of *reflexive control* (Thomas 2015, 456). This concept gives insight into the main principles of Russian information warfare.

Reflexive control theory has been developed in Russia in the midst of the Cold War by Vladimir Lefebvre, a mathematician, who was working at a secret military institute at that time. He was fascinated by the game theory, which has only stared to make its way into the Soviet Union back then. Game theory studies mathematical models of conflict and cooperation between rational actors that allow to predict their decisions. However, Lefebvre found that it per definition ignores opponent's intellect, because the core assumption of game theory is that the players choose strategies, which will guarantee them minimum loss regardless of the intellectual level of the adversary. It inspired him to build a model, which would allow the player to reflect on himself and others during the decision-making process and be able to outsmart an opponent who follows game theory. Reflexive theory became the Soviet answer to the widely accepted and used by the US Ministry of Defense during the Cold War game theory. Lefebvre himself emigrated to the US later in the seventies and continued to work at various aspects of this comprehensive theory throughout his entire life (Karnaukh 2013).

However, Lefebvre's original theoretical model is rooted in Boolean algebra and is too complex to be applied here, so the emphasis will be primarily on deception and techniques or *strategems* that are used for establishing *reflexive control* over opponent. This particular application of the theory seems to be the focus of Russian military experts, who often refer to it without naming the term explicitly. Paradoxically, the conjunction '*reflexive control*' is often used in the Western sources to describe the Russian practice of predetermining opponents decisions in its favor, while Russian authors would in most cases take this notion for granted and proceed to its practical application (Giles 2016, 19).

In this sense, 'predetermining' is not exactly the right term here. The instigator might not know yet what he is aiming at, but by manipulating others, he will be able to decide what course of actions is best (Makhnin 2013, 46; Thomas 2015, 457). According to Chausov, *reflexive control* is a goal-oriented process of deliberate transfer of misleading information to the opponent aimed at affecting his decisions in own advantage. Therefore, it constantly needs updating and adjustment, while the initiator should also be able to anticipate the adversary's actions and be able to reflect on his response (Smolyan 2013, 57). In order to successfully achieve it, one needs to use diverse deceptive techniques interchangeably, otherwise the opponent will easily uncover that he is being manipulated. Sergey Komov known in the US as one of the most influential information warfare theorists described this in *Military Thought* as what he called an 'intellectual approach' to information warfare (Smolyan 2013, 57). In a conflict that involves *reflexive control,* the side that is better able to imitate the opponent's way of thinking or foresee his behavior, and thus has a higher level of reflection, has the most chances to win. Once the *reflexive control* is established, it allows to influence the opponent's plans, his vision of the situation and the way he is going to act.

Lefebvre gives examples of *reflexive control* application in personal relationships, military decision-making, justice, social processes, international relations – in short, any situations with more than two intelligent actors involved, so that the theory is especially well fitted for political conflicts (Karnaukh 2013). In this regard, he builds on Robert Putnam's 'two level games', which explain the interaction of domestic and foreign policy levels in decision-making process. In order to successfully implement any decision, policy makers have to reckon with the constituencies on both levels, as the interests of domestic

audience do not always align with the state's foreign policy. *Reflexive control* allows to differentiate between the two and take interests of all sides involved into account (Kriger 2007).

Another important Russian concept, which has been influenced by the classical military thought and came about during the Second World War, is that of *strategic maskirovka*. It literally translates as 'camouflage', 'masking' or 'disguise' and can refer to any complex of measures aimed at concealment of own plans, intentions, capacities and armed forces from the opponent(s) (Thomas 2015, 458). Operational and tactical *maskirovka* will not be considered in this research as it is primarily used during military operations. *Strategic maskirovka* though is an integral feature of traditional Russian military deception on a grand political scale. The annexation of Crimea by Russia in spring 2014 is an example of its brilliant execution in combination with other non-military asymmetrical methods of warfare in modern circumstances as has been discussed in this section (Lindley-French 2015). In an information environment, *maskirovka* equals disinformation and often accompanies *reflexive control* measures (Smolyan 2013, 59).

However, this approach is far broader than just 'smart' disinformation, even though deception plays a crucial role in it. *Reflexive control* involves comprehensive measures, which target as many factors that can influence opponents decision-making as possible. Because of its complexity, it allows for theoretical overlaps between various techniques which are being used interchangeably:

"*Traditionally the Russian military mind, as embodied in the General Staff, looks further ahead than its Western counterpart, on the basis that 'foresight implies control.' Having made the 'decision,' the military mind works backwards from the selected objective to its present position. Subsidiary goals are identified for achieving the objective. Control of an opponent's decision is achieved by means of providing him with the grounds by which he is able logically to derive his own decision, but one that is predetermined by the other side.*" (Blandy 2009, 2)

Chapter II: The Grand Scheme

The wave of democratic revolutions coincided with Russia's reassertion of regional hegemony, which virtually started when Vladimir Putin came to power. From the onset, his political agenda was affected by the fact that since the fall of the Soviet Union Russia has been suffering from the 'lost empire syndrome' due to its loss of power and a sense of humiliation that came from that – once a world superpower, it undoubtedly was hurt to no longer be in such a privileged position. Unresolved border security issues added a rational element to this feeling, which was intensified by the revolutions in neighboring countries. The realization that such regime changes can be contagious has been there probably already since the Velvet and Singing Revolutions. It was perhaps for a reason that democratization came to be seen as synonymous to destabilization and thus formed a serious security threat for Russia according to the Kremlin (Silitski 2010, 340; Thomas 2015, 458).

Color revolutions of the early 2000's were widely welcomed in the post-Soviet countries as a prospect of democracy and prosperity. It was the period of civil society awakening as NGO's modelled after the Serbian Otpor, which has initiated the Bulldozer Revolution, started to appear in other countries – for example, Pora! In Ukraine, Kmara in Georgia and Zubr in Belarus. Civic activism became a norm and people started to share typically Western liberal democratic values, look up to the EU as an ideal to strive towards. At the same time, quite predictably, these democratic revolutions led to a backlash across Eurasia. Authoritarian regimes in countries like Belarus, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan started to converge and consolidate their power. There immediately came restrictions on civic activism and NGO's, opposition parties became subject to political repression and independent election monitoring was consistently being disrupted, which signified a high degree of electoral corruption (Silitski 2010, 339-340). These countries almost per definition aligned with Russia as it became their guardian in a sense and stimulated the rapprochement with heavy subsidies and profitable trade deals in order to reinforce own sphere of influence (Khudoley 2016, 398; Cooley 2010). These processes were only further accelerated by the Arab Spring and Maidan of 2014 in neighboring Ukraine. Just like with Georgia before, Russia sought to destabilize Ukraine through economic pressure and later military force – now taking it a step further (Silitski 2010, 339).

From the Russian official perspective, these revolutions were thus neither a result of structural problems and internal tensions in the post-Soviet countries nor a mere coincidental 'cross-contamination':

> "*Revolutions toppled the regimes loyal to Russia one after another. Could it be a coincidence? Maybe someone has created an effective system of constant revolutions – 'rose', 'orange' and others, and this someone completely disregards the laws of these countries?*" (Zuev 2009)

In short, they were all invariably ascribed to the subversive influence of Western soft power (Sivkov 2013; Khudoley 2016, 390-391; Giles 2016, 41). The Kremlin claimed that Otpor, Pora and Kmara were all sponsored and 'curated' by the US strategists – as these NGO's indeed accepted financial support from the US and publicly took credit for their role in the color revolutions (Cooley 2010, 64). Gene Sharp's 'handbooks' on nonviolent action and democratic revolutions, which inspired many protesters, served as a proof of Western intervention. However, during the square revolutions, the emphasis shifted away from NGO's as by that time many have already perished to the role of social media, which according to Moscow, were controlled by the US (Sivkov 2013, 1; Giles 2016). It is remarkable, how technical this vision is. Soft power is not seen just as vague economic or cultural appeal, but a strategy, consciously and

purposefully implemented by 'the West' against Russia, with the NGO's and social media being its instruments. Of course, these unapologetic accusations are not based on objective facts or even Kremlin's sincere beliefs but rather provide justification for own response. The underlying discourse will be discussed in the last chapter. This chapter first explains Russian foreign policy in realist terms from an academic perspective and then proceeds to its military strategic implications, as grand strategy overlaps with the foreign policy or even equals it at the highest level of command (Lonsdale 2016, 42).

Russian foreign policy

In Russian understanding, the US, NATO and EU are inseparably connected. This has been the case during the Cold War period and this image is now revived in accordance with the realist logic of ongoing competition in a hostile anarchic environment with no higher power above the states, which could guarantee stability and safety. However, that has not always been so. The Yeltsin presidencies and Vladimir Putin's first term with the anti-terrorist coalition of September 2001 are seen as the 'honeymoon' of Russia-West relations, as well as the Medvedev interregnum of 2008 – 2012 (Khudoley 2016, 389). It is striking how these periods coincided with the absence of revolutions, and how much harsher Russian policy became during the color revolutions during the Putin's second presidential term (2004 – 2008) and square revolutions, during his current term (2012 – present) respectively. Overall, these periods of rapprochement resulted in a huge disappointment for the Kremlin as Russia took the democratic revolutions as a 'personal offense'.

For Russia, maintaining stability in the CIS region is key, not only for geopolitical reasons and 'balance of power', but also because it is closely intertwined with the domestic situation. Any social unrest or regime changes in the region, especially when they are not in Russia's favor, undermine it. When the color revolutions started breaking out, Moscow shifted its domestic policy priority to enhancing state control over virtually all spheres of life, abandoning its plans to implement comprehensive social and economic reform during Putin's second presidency (Petrov 2010, 69). At the same time, Russian increasingly assertive foreign policy in 2004 – 2008 led to more and more open clashes with the West (Duncan 2012, 2). The post-Soviet states felt 'sandwiched' in between the two and faced the problem of making a choice in favor of either Russian-led or European integration (Korosteleva 2011, 9). Needless to say, their choice for the latter was not welcomed by Russia.

Russia was determined to prevent further spread of the color revolutions, as they threatened its power in the CIS region considerably:

"*Based on the experience of the collapse of the Soviet Union and of Yugoslavia, and on the examples of the color revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, and elsewhere, one can clearly see that major threats do objectively exist and are implemented not only by military means, but primarily by covert and overt methods of political and diplomatic, economic, and information influence, various subversive actions and interference in the internal affairs of other countries. In this regard, Russian security interests require not only to assess these threats but also to determine appropriate measures to respond to them.*" (Yuriy Baluyevsky, former First Deputy Minister of Defense and Chief of the General Staff in 2004-2008, cited in Giles 2016, 41)*

Thus, the eastward expansion of NATO has been identified as one of such threats. Moreover, it became increasingly associated with the EU integration and the two became synonymous as the countries which have had successful revolutions, for example Georgia and Ukraine, showed desire to join both the NATO and EU (Wilson 2010, 29; Dragneva & Wolczuk 2014, 221; Kuzio 2017, 104). Once having established this perspective, Moscow found itself caught up in a *security dilemma,* where it could no longer not react to the NATO expansion and EU integration initiatives in the region and felt threatened by

these processes (Mearsheimer 2013, 80). Layer after layer, Russian responses to every action of the West, which in Kremlin's opinion had to do with its own sphere of influence, were adding up until they indeed started to pose a real threat of conflict escalation, even if this has not been so from the onset.

The decisive turn in Russian foreign policy came in 2012, when Putin reassumed presidency. According to the Kremlin's quite realist reasoning, when the Cold War ended, the world became unipolar with the US remaining the only superpower. However, its power has been dwindling ever since. In the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation of 2013, it was stated that the balance of power has definitely shifted from the 'historical West' to the East and the world has now become multipolar again. New players were entering the international arena, so Russia had to seize the opportunity and make itself one of the centers of this new multipolar world while at the same time turning to the East and making new alliances with the countries of the Asia-Pacific region (although this particular foreign policy aspect has not proven successful) (Khudoley 2016, 388).

Color revolutions have been one of the reasons for Russia's renewed assertiveness and especially the Orange Revolution deserves special attention as a crucial point in this policy change. Russia regarded Ukraine as the most important strategic partner in the post-Soviet space. Compared to its rather passive role during the Georgian Revolution of Roses, the Kremlin took Ukrainian case much further (Wilson 2010, 29). Ukrainian participation was necessary for any of the Russian-led integration projects to succeed, but Ukraine was quite reluctant to commit to any of these initiatives out to fear that it could compromise its own sovereignty. Thus, Russia started getting more and more cynical in its attempts to get Ukraine onboard, especially given the rent-seeking behavior of Ukrainian political elites. After the Orange Revolution, Ukraine's 'European choice' had become evident and the Kremlin started to exploit the existing economic and power asymmetry between the two states openly in order to obtain coercive power over its unaccommodating neighbor (Dragneva & Wolczuk 2016, 680-681, 693). Energy resources, or gas, to be more precise, has always been one of the main manipulation instruments in Russia's negotiations with other countries. In this case, it worked even better as Ukraine was the biggest consumer of Russian gas and the history of disputes over gas prices long predated the Orange Revolution. In 2009, Russia even cut off gas exports to Ukraine as Putin sought to discredit the Ukrainian leadership internationally by exposing it as an untrustworthy partner for the EU and NATO (Wilson 2010, 30-31; "Interview Vladimira Putina" 2009).

Eurasian Economic Union (EaEU), initially modelled after the EU and formed in 2014 is one of Russia's most recent major integration projects, which required participation of Ukraine. However, Ukraine was more inclined to accept the Association Agreement offer form the EU as it had great symbolic meaning for the population. The protests on Maidan broke out in the end of 2013, when president Yanukovych refused to sign the agreement in Vilnius due to the last minute CIS FTA deal from Putin (Kuzio 2017, 106). Yanukovych then proved to be incapable of managing the situation and reacted to it inadequately. His decision to use violence against the protesters ushered in the second radicalized stage of the revolution and in February, he fled the country. By the spring, Russia has annexed Crimea and the conflict in Donbas region has started (Portnov 2015, 726). The Kremlin regarded this revolution as *coup d'état* and at first referred to the new government as 'Kiev junta'. Moreover, Russia has never openly acknowledged its military presence in Eastern Ukraine.

The square revolutions have thus finalized Russia's 'ideological' break with the West and reaffirmed its strategic foreign policy choice to struggle for more power. The Kremlin's position on the Arab spring and square revolutions was just as unambiguous as before:

"Look at the situation that has unfolded in the Middle East and the Arab world. It is extremely bad. There are major difficulties ahead... We need to look the truth in the eyes. This is the kind of scenario that they were preparing for us, and now they will be trying even harder to bring it about." ("Dmitry Medvedev" 2011)

It has intensified the *security dilemma* as now every following step by the Kremlin had to be more radical than the previous one, otherwise it would be perceived as a step back. In one of his interviews, Vladimir Lefebvre perfectly explained this Russian *two-level game*. In 1986, he cooperated with the US administration in preparation of the Reagan-Gorbachev conference in Reykjavik. Lefebvre pointed out how the Soviet leader was dependent not only on the reaction of his interlocutor, but on that of the domestic population as well, so it was agreed that there would be two official declarations. Reagan announced a compromise, while Gorbachev was still able to present the reduction of tension as a unilateral step of the USSR, meaning to show that he was strong enough to afford to turn back. Likewise, Putin too cannot afford to turn back now, and that is why he must saber-rattle, fly in a jet fighter and pretend to be a superman. For him, this is a *zero-sum* situation, where both sides cannot end conflict without one of them losing face. There has to be a loser and a winner (Кригер 2007).

'Use that is made of force'

Many high-ranked officials from Putin's nearest surrounding, including Putin himself, have a background in military or security services. These *siloviki* allegedly became the dominant power group during his second presidential term – that is when the color revolutions were breaking out (Duncan 2012, 1). However, the term itself should be used with caution as it can also have negative connotations. Russian media sometimes use the word '*siloviki*' to indicate dictatorial or illegitimate regimes in other countries. For example, 'Ukrainian *siloviki*' often refers to Ukrainian armed forces that take part in the Anti-terrorist Operation in Donbas region in order to avoid calling them an army, which would automatically imply a war.

The former Chief of General Staff Nikolai Makarov, Gerasimov's predecessor, described modern warfare as 'the use of political, economic and information pressure and subversive actions, followed by the unleashing of armed conflicts or local wars, that result in relatively little bloodshed' (Giles 2016, 42). As it has already been noted, military actions play quite a modest role in this grand scheme, although they do form its most visible part. Considering the comment by Valery Gerasimov on the operational ratio of 4:1 between non-military and military measures, the focus is definitely on information warfare. It has become especially relevant since 2014, when it really drew the attention of Western experts and Russian media started to speak of information warfare openly, of course accusing the West of waging it against Russia (Tretyakov 2016; Giles 2016, 3). This shift to asymmetrical strategy is the Russian answer to soft power, which is from the Russian perspective per definition Western and destructive:

"The Arab Spring and color revolutions have demonstrated the effectiveness of soft power, which exceeds the impact of traditional armed forces. Only the West, or the US to be more precise, could stage these operations, as only Washington has the necessary instruments for this." (Sivkov 2013, 1)

However, despite the fact that information warfare is quite new as phenomenon and much more narrowly defined in the West, it has become an integral feature of Russian political life years before the Maidan. Information warfare has in fact been around in Russian strategic thinking since the early years of the Soviet Union, when the notions like 'ideology' or 'propaganda' bore no negative connotations and were an object of lively theoretical inquiry (Giles 2016, 17). In 2014, it has definitely made a comeback. Now having explained why this has been the case in the first section, the second section deals with the 1

part of the Russian strategy that according to Gerasimov does involve the use of armed forces and serves as an auxiliary means for the remaining 4 parts of the actual information warfare, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Information warfare is in essence non-military, but the theory does originate from military strategy, so it is logical to start with the base. In this section, it has been narrowed down to a case study of the escalation during the Russia-Ukraine crisis relations as they are most relevant in regard to the Russia's response to democratic revolutions and as a backdrop for the current information war.

Frequent accusations of the US, NATO and Ukraine in military preparations against Russia coincided with Russia's own buildup and served as an excuse for it. However, Russia's concerns were not entirely unfounded. The eastward expansion of NATO did involve moving its military infrastructure closer to the Russian border, which can arguably be seen as a real security threat (Harding 2016). Besides, numerous border issues have been lingering since the disintegration of the Soviet Union and were never thoroughly addressed in the past, so that NATO's proximity to Russia and a prospect of a direct border between Russia and a NATO country – Russia's worst nightmare, automatically brought these issues to the surface. As it has already been noted, the democratic revolutions in the post-Soviet countries were per definition pro-European and almost per definition brought along the desire of these countries to join the NATO. During the Orange Revolution, it became clear that Ukraine is leaning towards the EU and NATO. After the Revolution of Dignity, this choice became definite. Despite all the prognoses that Ukraine will not join the EU or NATO in the nearest 10-20 years (Kuzio 2017, 104), the intention is there and it will undoubtedly be followed by further cooperation, so that Russia does have reasons to be concerned about its neighbour.

Crimea kept coming back onto Russian political agenda since the early nineties, along with the Black Sea Fleet status problem. In 1995, the fleet was split between Russia and Ukraine and in order to be able to keep it in Crimea, Russia had to lease the naval bases from Ukraine. Obviously, the Russian leadership saw this solution as temporary and strategically unsatisfactory. There were no guarantees that the Russian Black Sea Fleet will be able to stay there in the future and the loss of Crimea would have been a huge blow for Russia, especially combined with the NATO expansion in the region. Hence, when the political situation in Ukraine definitely destabilized during the Maidan revolution of 2014, Putin decided to take the chance he otherwise would not have had. Besides, before Vilnius Russia still had hope to get Ukraine committed to participation in one of the Russian-led integration projects, but when the Euromaidan broke out, this hope had waned.

The annexation of Crimea is a clear-cut example of the Kremlin's 'own peculiar logic' shaped along the principles of *Realpolitik*. In this case, it was meant to secure the Black Sea Fleet and Russia's own geostrategic position in the region. Moreover, it is also a perfect execution of *maskirovka*, when the whole peninsula was overtaken very swiftly, with no armies on the march, no shots fired and almost no victims save for a few minor incidents with Ukrainian border guards. Crimea was then heavily militarized by Russia and the build-up continues still (Harding 2016; Thomas 2015, 447). This political reality is however entirely different from the official discourse that was presented to the domestic public. Here all the emphasis was on historical continuity of Russian presence in Crimea, illegitimacy of its transfer to Ukraine by Khrushchev and respectively, the legitimacy of Russian claims (Morozova & van Meurs 2015, 37-42).

Conflict in the East of Ukraine was next. Russia keeps denying its military presence there and the military insignia, munition and identities of its soldiers remain masked. Putin has also signed an act according to which the list of classified information has been extended and now includes the information

about Russian military losses in peacetime and during special operations. Of course, in the era of information it is impossible to entirely control the information flows and conceal all 'unwished' information, but the tactical and strategic *maskirovka* measures the Kremlin takes do appear to work as Russia is rarely directly accused of aggression against Ukraine (Denisenko 2015). Here, paradoxically enough, military force is being used for compellence to prove that Ukraine will not achieve anything by using military force itself and pressure it into giving up on Crimea and Donbas and taking a more moderate position (Lonsdale 2016, 63). This conflict has become one of the 'local wars, that result in relatively little bloodshed' (for Russia) mentioned by Makarov unleashed out of strategic considerations (Giles 2016, 42). However, this conflict is only a part of Russian asymmetrical approach.

While the Ossetia conflict between Russia and Georgia in 2008 has been largely ignored by the West, this time the international community stood up against Russia, although it did not go further than open disapproval, non-recognition and sanctions, against which Kremlin held out quite well (Khudoley 2016, 397; Thomas 2015, 449). Russia still has close ties with big European economies, some supporters among European politicians, including a strong lobby in Germany, and is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, with a say in the Syrian conflict, Iranian nuclear talks and other crucial global security issues. Moreover, it always can play the gas card (Thomas 2015, 448-450). All of this allows Putin to continue his military game in the region without completely cutting ties with the West.

There is a comprehensive military reform underway in Russia, in what Sergey Shoygu calls the 'southwestern strategic direction' – that is the Southern and Western military districts. It has been officially announced for 2008 – 2020. Currently, Russia is deploying troops and forming new divisions along the previously almost unmanned Ukrainian border, as according to Shoygu, the threat from Ukraine and the NATO is growing. The military build-up intensified in late summer 2016, when Russia held the largest Southern District military exercises of the year, with the Black Sea Fleet maneuvers in Sevastopol and tank drills in Transnistria. Despite being previously announced, these exercises were primarily seen as a provocation and made many Western experts wonder whether Russia is preparing for war (Radziwinowicz & Andrusieczko 2016; Ramani 2016).

By this display of military force, Russia definitely went beyond the Ukrainian crisis and made a statement to the NATO. In military terms, this case of posturing served a purpose to contain NATO but paradoxically led to the biggest NATO build-up in the Eastern Europe since the Cold War. The 'Enhanced Forward Presence' programme has been the result of the 2016 Warsaw Summit and is now being implemented in the Baltic states and Poland for defense purposes (Harding 2016; "Boosting NATO's" 2017). Thus, while both sides aim at deterrence of each other, they are caught up in a vicious circle of action and reaction as explained by the spiral model or *security dilemma*. In fact, in the early 2000's, during the honeymoon of Russia-West relations, there was even a discussion on whether Russia should join the NATO. However, the color revolutions marked a considerable crack in these relations, while the Arab Spring and the Euromaidan in Kiev, which resulted in the Russia-Ukraine crisis, have finalized the break and the saber-rattling has only become louder ever since.

Chapter III: Technical Implementation

The Kremlin's new foreign policy received support of the popular majority contributing to the sky-high official presidential rating of 86% and is unlikely to change in the near future (Khudoley 2016, 388; Politov 2016). It was brought about by the democratic revolutions, which undoubtedly posed a security threat for Russia and had to be dealt with immediately. The revolutions called the legitimacy of Kremlin's authority in question, but at the same time, Putin was able to pose himself as a strong leader and win broad public support by responding to them the way he did. It has already been discussed how the Kremlin blamed the revolutions on the Western actors, who were using soft power against Russia. However, the fact that the structural domestic causes were typically being overlooked in the official discourse does not mean that they were completely disregarded, on the contrary:

> *"Understanding of the ways soft power can be used against a state is crucial for its security. Its use is only possible if there are necessary social prerequisites inside this state. The most important ones, judging from the experience of the revolutions in the post-Soviet space and the Arab world, are strong income inequality, reduced social mobility, isolation of the ruling elites, flourishing corruption and lawlessness. In modern Russia almost all of these prerequisites do exist, which means that the probability of external forces attempting to initiate a regime change in our country is high."* (Sivkov 2013, 10)

According to the *securitization* theory, framing the democratic revolutions as such a threat allowed for extra harsh measures to be taken so that the Russian leadership could reassert its position and claim even more power. These measures were not directed at solving the structural problems, which made Russia susceptible to a next revolution as that would require a great deal of time, effort and resources. Instead, the Kremlin resorted to the proven methods of propaganda that can be defined as a deliberate attempt to shape public opinion in order to achieve desirable response by means of manipulating information (Shakhrai 2015, 30). The political turmoil in neighboring countries served as an external stimulus to detract the people from domestic issues, while the NATO expansion and military activity in Eastern Europe was used to justify the Kremlin's own revanchist sentiment (Harding 2016).

These processes were accompanied by the rise of the so-called 'political technologies' (*политтехнологии*), a Russian term that indicates an instrumental approach to propaganda and ideology. It refers to the methods, procedures and tactics used by the politicians for achieving political goals and solving political or administrative issues. Political technologies are aimed at influencing people's opinions and therefore include methods of psychological manipulation for shaping public perceptions and imposing certain norms and values as desired by the initiator(s). This term is widely being used in the Russian media and strangely enough only bears negative connotations when it is applied to 'the Western political technologies' (or 'technologists') in order to justify Russian propagandist response (Wilson 2011; "Ponyatie politicheskih" 2017). Moreover, the term 'orange technologies' denotes precisely the use of political technologies by foreign actors during the color revolutions against Russia and refers directly to the Orange Revolution in particular (Wilson 2010, 26). At the same time, it also serves as an overarching term for a vast array of techniques and methods used by Russia in its information warfare against the West, as for now there are no doubts that this war is real for Kremlin:

> *"Is it possible to stay aside of an information war if it has been unleased against you? Yes, it is. But then you will most definitely lose and you will have to capitulate sooner or later. Therefore, a refusal to participate in an information war that has already started against your country is a treason."* (Tretyakov 2016)

This chapter, again, combines an academic approach for general analysis and a practical one for a more detailed assessment of the information warfare techniques. It is founded on the realist premises of a zero-sum game and security dilemma as explained in the previous chapter. This is where the democratic revolutions as a security threat come in. They indeed posed a vital threat for the regime's existence, as is clear from the official discourse and frequent accusations of the West in actions against Russia, which is also a clear sign that Putin is in a position of weakness. At the same time, the democratic revolutions became crucial for the renewed consolidation of power as the Russian leadership was able to exploit them its own advantage and create an illusion of strength and stability. The first chapter explains this process of ideologization through the concepts of *securitization* and *dispositives*. Here, revolution *dispositive* applies to particular cases of revolutions and their framing in official discourse, while the main security *dispositive*, which is founded thereupon, focuses primarily on the reassertion of state sovereignty and regime legitimation. The second section analyzes the application of *reflexive control* techniques in the ongoing information war that is fought in peacetime and against own population, with propaganda being one of its main aspects (Makhnin 2013, 337-40; Thomas 2015, 456-457).

State and ideology

In the official discourse, which in essence is aimed at *securitization* of the democratic revolutions by articulating them as a security threat, Moscow especially emphasizes the notion of legitimacy of the ruling governments, unlawfulness of their deposition and thus illegitimacy of any popular revolution by default. It goes hand in hand with the distinct Russian understanding of sovereignty. According to Putin, 'respect for sovereignty means no tolerance for *coup d états*, anti-constitutional actions or unlawful deposition of legitimate authorities' (Khudoley 2016, 393). The so-called 'controlled chaos' theory developed by US foreign policy expert Steven Mann has been regarded by Russian strategists as an instrument of the Western soft power used during the democratic revolutions to provoke regime change and a means of furthering US national interests, which involves implanting Western ideology in the post-Soviet space.

In correspondence with the realist notion of anarchy, Steven Mann argues that the world is chaotic, because political actors have divergent objectives and values, hence the ever-present potential for conflict. These conflicts always involve a change in status quo and reorganization of power relations. Nevertheless, the change is not always negative and the conflicts are not entirely uncontrollable. It is possible to bring a political system into a state of 'political criticality' in order to provoke chaos, which will bring about the desired reorganization and transformation. Given globalization and the advantage US has in communication technology, it can use the controlled chaos technology in other countries to stimulate regime change in accordance with its own national interests (Prav 2016; Lepsky 2010; Bartosh 2014).

From the Russian perspective, this is a self-replicating ideological virus meant to undermine Russian power position. Quite notably, an 'accelerated promotion of liberal democracy, support for market reforms, call to increase the living standard and open disregard for the established values and ideology' are not perceived as signs of positive changes, but as a direct proof of the Western attempts to create controlled chaos in the post-Soviet countries, including Russia, which culminated in the 'orange revolutions' (Lepsky 2010, 8). The revolutions in Ukraine serve in this case as the most outspoken example of controlled chaos, as Putin warned against 'Ukrainization of Russian politics' pointing out the instability of pluralist democratic systems ("Putin" 2010). Surprisingly, in Russian thinking, seemingly positive changes are described as extremely bad because of their connection with the democratic revolutions:

"This creates a specific environment of weakened national spirit and state decay, where all sorts of extremist movements begin to flourish. Deideologization, pluralism, disregard for traditional norms and values, sharp increase in material demands, loss of control over economy and unruliness of supposedly independent democratic movements – all of this indicates deliberate attempts to implant controlled chaos with a single goal to dismantle the existing national states, their culture and traditions and create a society of people with erased historical memory. This is a global information war." (Lepsky 2010, 8)

It is noteworthy that for the phrase 'independent democratic movements' the author deliberately picked a Ukrainian word *samostiyny* (*самостійний*, or in this case *самостийный* spelled in Russian) instead of the Russian equivalent *samostoyatelny* (*самостоятельный*). This tiniest detail has a very charged meaning and brings along quite obvious connotations. Firstly, it links all of the said above to a particular case, namely the Orange Revolution in Ukraine therefore providing extra empirical proof for the argument, and secondly, independence and freedom are described as negative phenomena, pointing in the direction of democratic revolutions and civic activism as a whole. Moreover, it has been made clear that these movements were nothing else but the result of efforts by the Western actors.

By continuously presenting the democratic revolutions in the post-Soviet countries as a security threat, the Kremlin has created a security *dispositive* around them. This *dispositive* applies to Russia itself, where such revolution has to be prevented at all costs and is based on a revolution sub-*dispositive*, which is tied primarily to the Orange Revolution. It describes its utterly negative consequences and points out who exactly is to blame for that. In this way, the features of external security, which is the domain of foreign policy, are transferred onto internal security and thus become a domestic issue as well (De Graaf & Zwierlein 2013, 52-53). One the one hand, this was happening because the revolutions indeed formed an existential threat to the regime, especially as the Russian leadership did realize that all the preconditions were present in their country as well – hence such desperate unconcealed rhetoric against democratization, which even goes as far as interpreting calls for a higher standard of living as something negative (Sivkov 2013, 10; Khudoley 2016, 393). On the other, precisely because this issue was serious enough it was possible to link democratic revolutions to such crucial notions as sovereignty and legitimacy, and thus acquire emergency powers in order to protect the integrity of the state by taking measures against any form of political protest, which can potentially become a revolution in the future:

"No political system in world history is without any structural problems or serious drawbacks. Such a system does not exist and never will. In Russia, we always assumed that we need a stable system, sensitive to changes happening in the world and our own country, which would ensure our sovereignty." ("Putin" 2010)

It was after the Orange Revolution that the Russian leadership started to systematically work at creating a viable ideology, which included renewed emphasis on patriarchic religious and family values, negative assessment of civic activism, especially if it involved participation in any form of protest, and a highly critical attitude towards the alien Western culture (Kurilla 2010, 74-75). Its introduction has been heralded by the Putin's speech of 5 September 2005 – quite literally a *speech act*, and the launch of the Sovereign Democracy doctrine shortly thereafter (Kara-Murza 2005, 9; Wilson 2010, 22). Moreover, the fact that it is indeed connected to the color revolutions has been openly acknowledged, which further proves the hypothesis on *securitization*:

"It is possible to avoid a revolution explosion in Russia by building a powerful state based on social principles." (Sivkov 2013, 1)

This powerful state has been embodied in the concept of Sovereign Democracy, Russian variant to the Western liberal democratic model developed by one of the Kremlin's main ideologists Vladislav Surkov,

First Deputy Chief of the Presidential Administration (1999 – 2011). He identified the color revolutions as one of the three main security threats, with the other ones being international terrorism and Russia's 'economic non-competitiveness'. According to Surkov, 'orange technologies' were meant to discredit the Russian leadership, undermine traditional values and provoke domestic unrest in Russia. Therefore, Sovereign Democracy was called to counter the negative effects that were ascribed to the democratic revolutions in surrounding countries. In order to create, legitimize and maintain a stable centralized political system, referred to as the 'vertical of power', Sovereign Democracy reinterpreted Russian patriarchal culture, as embodied in family values and religion, in political terms of national identity and specifically defined it as opposed to the West.

The next issue that was addressed by this doctrine is that of civic activism because of the role NGO's played during the color revolutions. According to Moscow, the US government has set up these 'puppet' organizations and was constantly providing them with 'political technological support' (Petrov 2010, 70). One of the key objectives of Sovereign Democracy was the creation of state controlled hierarchical civil society embodied by various semi-governmental organizations and youth movements, which would be capable of substituting independent NGO's (Wilson 2010, 26; Casula 2013, 3). This process went hand in hand with the deconstruction of existing independent civil society networks through tougher legislation, bureaucratic pyramids and a more complicated registration procedure (Petrov 2010, 72).

The number of political parties has declined drastically ever since. Thanks to the existing revolution *dispositive*, virtually any social or political movement, especially the opposition, could be labelled as bad, unpatriotic and treacherous, because according to the main security *dispositive*, stability of the existing political system was to be valued above all. As soon as this label is put on any opposition party, leader or organization, it automatically becomes an absolute evil within the new normative system. By referring back to the constructed image of devastating impact of the revolutions – and thus the negative effects of pluralism as a whole, which is seen as a threat to political stability and state sovereignty, the regime is able to reassert its own legitimacy at the cost of its perceived enemies. However, this also means that for the Kremlin such threat is real, so that it has to defend itself and take the drastic measures it has increasingly been taking since the revolutions started breaking out in the post-Soviet states.

The Ukrainian Orange Revolution of 2004 has initiated the process of ideologization in Russia and brought back the notion of ongoing information war that involves extensive propaganda campaigns targeted at both domestic and international audiences accompanied by populism and retraditionalization (Casula 2013, 3). This information effort became more intense over the years and peaked when the Revolution of Dignity broke out in Ukraine. During the square revolutions, emphasis has shifted from NGO's, which have long perished by that time, to media, social media in particular (hence the name 'facebook revolutions') proving that information has become key to power.

Propaganda

Reflexive control can be used in almost every sphere of politics, military strategy or human communication and is well applicable to the previously discussed aspects of Russian information warfare. However, this topic is quite complex and would require a separate research, so the *reflexive control* techniques are understood here as *strategems* rather than elements of Lefebvre's reflexive theory itself. This section is about manipulative information strategies and focuses specifically on domestic propaganda as one of the main aspects of information warfare. If we assume the Russian point of view that Western actors are using soft power against Russia and the controlled chaos model is one of its

weapons, *reflexive control* can be seen as one of the Kremlin's main weapons in its information war against the West. Both strategies are suited for a non-military confrontation and imply a hidden ability to control the situation from 'behind the scenes', but in Russia's case, deception is key.

It must be noted however, that although this section primarily deals with domestic propaganda, Russian information campaigns are multilingual and target Russian-speaking audiences all over the world as well as international public. They do not just involve the mass media backed by the state, but also fake independent news outlets and so-called 'information throw-in's' (*информационные вбросы*) or simply disinformation placed on reputable websites. This comprehensive approach to information warfare ties in with the Putin's statement about asymmetrical and less costly measures based on intellectual superiority quoted earlier as manipulating information indeed requires much less material resources than developing a soft power appeal (Chekinov & Bogdanov 2010, 21). However, winning popular support inside the country remains vital for the regime to stay in power and the Russian international propaganda discourse goes along the same lines as the domestic one (Giles 2016, 47-48). After a brief discussion on the role of the Russian media as a means of information warfare, this final section will proceed to summarize the key elements and techniques of *reflexive control* and then take a closer look at their application during the Russia-Ukraine crisis.

The main message conveyed through the state-controlled Russian media is that Russia is surrounded by the enemies, so the people should unite around their leader and prepare for hardship (Yarmush 2017a). Moreover, while it seems that there are enough alternative sources of information, which offer divergent perspectives or have nothing to do with politics at all, the scope of state control over the mass media in Russia has been most likely underestimated. According to the research done by the team of Russia's most prominent opposition activist Alexei Navalny, Russians are offered but an illusion of choice. Almost all Russian mass media are linked to Yuri Kovalchuk – Putin's close acquaintance and the Chairman of the Bank of Russia Directors' Board. In 2006, allegedly on the money received from the state, he bought the management company called Leader (*Лидер*), which is the owner of the country's largest media holding Gazprom Media (*Газпром медиа*) via the Gazfond (*Газфонд*) and Gazprombank (*Газпромбанк*). Moreover, Kovalchuk also owns the National Media Group (*Национальная медиа группа*), including the Channel One Russia (*Первый канал*), and virtually controls STS Media (*СТС Медиа*) as well. Taken together, this means that he fully or partially controls all of the major Russian television channels, radio stations, newspapers and online news agencies, but also a vast array of minor leisure media, like television channels about gardening or science fiction where one would never expect to find propaganda or be manipulated in any way (Yarmysh 2017a; Milov 2012).

So on the one hand, some media are officially state-backed, like the Channel One Russia, and openly propagandist as they primarily cover Russian politics. Russia Today is probably the most notorious one among them, launched by a former media group and now one of the world's biggest information agencies RIA Novosti (*РИА Новости*) in 2005 – again, this was the same year when the Kremlin openly started working at a state ideology and taking decisive measures in reaction to the Orange Revolution. However, these are only the most visible platforms used in information warfare. There is a wide range of media that seem to have nothing to do with politics and do not avowedly support the government. Nevertheless, they are not free to publish or broadcast whatever they wish to and their output is carefully crafted to conform to the public expectations, while they have to strictly stay within the lines of the Kremlin's official discourse (Yarmush 2017a). The Kremlin's information campaigns were thus able to adopt and combine a number of approaches and apply them interchangeably in accordance with the

circumstances, particular audiences and types of media, ranging from sophisticated arguments and confusing information, to half-truths and outright fabrications (Giles 2016, 46-47).

These highly adjustable and complicated information-psychological strategies are precisely what *reflexive control* is about. It is important to bear in mind that summing up all of them is virtually impossible, as the number of their possible combinations is inexhaustible, so it is more about grasping the general idea of *reflexive control*. There is a substantial body of theory behind it, which implies thorough knowledge of the opponent along with advanced analytics of the possible strategies and their outcomes based on a mathematical model.

Military theorist Mikhail Ionov argued that it is necessary to combine different deceptive techniques in order to make them indistinguishable from one another (Smolyan 2013, 56). He identified four different elements of *reflexive control*. The first one is power pressure and demonstration of superior force, which can range from military posturing as discussed in the previous chapter, to psychological attacks, chauvinism, threats and ultimatums. The second method comprises diverse ways of providing false information by the means of disinformation (*maskirovka*), manipulation and deception in order to influence the opponent's assessment of current situation and shape his objectives (Denisenko 2013). The third one is about influencing decision-making process of the opponent, for example by provoking him so that he would panic and undertake useless actions. Providing false comfort, on the contrary, can help make sure that he does not undertake anything, like in the case with the military build-up in the summer 2016, when the Russian command assured everyone that military drills right across the border are completely normal and so there is nothing to worry about. The last important element of *reflexive control* is timing and the ways instigator can use it to amplify all of the above mentioned measures (Smolyan 2013, 56). Following repetitive patterns in decision-making can help create an illusion of predictability, so that the effect of an unexpected last-minute move will be even greater than it would normally have been, in which case the opponent(s) or broad audience will not be able to react adequately when something really does happen. It might simply be too late, like it happened with the annexation of Crimea. Successful information operations should therefore combine several or all of these elements.

Here, the term 'opponent' or 'opponents' originates from military strategic uses of *reflexive control.* However, it does not have to refer to an actual enemy and can be applied to any subject or audience targeted by the instigator, who wants to establish *reflexive control.* Needless to say, 'the instigator' is not a person and refers in this case rather to the whole Kremlin apparatus. Moreover, this comprehensive strategy is not just multi applicable, but actually has to be used on several levels simultaneously for best results and can always be tailored to a situation. Thus, propaganda in the news can serve as a smokescreen for military operations, or vice-versa – military operations can make a propaganda discourse more persuasive by equally deceitfully backing up words with deeds.

One of *reflexive control* techniques frequently used in Russian propaganda is distortion of information, for example, when Russia is blaming Ukraine for military aggression while supporting the separatists in Donbas region and deploying troops to the Russian-Ukrainian border (Thomas 2015, 457; Smolyan 2013, 57). Another similar form of distortion is the usage of analogies for creating strong emotional or psychological links, like that between the Nazi's and Ukrainian nationalists. The 9th of May, Victory Day, is without exaggeration one of Russia's main holidays and the memories of the Great Patriotic War (1941 – 1945) are being kept as 'live' and touching as possible. It is not hard to imagine then, that once Ukrainian nationalists have been compared to the Nazi's, especially involving actual historical arguments, the

connection becomes extremely powerful to the degree that it incites sincere hatred. *Argumenty i Fakty*, one of the Russia's biggest weekly newspapers called the Euromaidan a 'brown revolt':

> "*If any liberal will try to persuade you, that peaceful protesters in Kyiv are violently trying to protect their 'European choice', you can be sure that this person is a liar without honor or conscience. Last week's events have left no illusions: the mob in Kyiv is attempting a fascist coup.*" (Sidorchyk 2014)

While this message targets the Russian domestic audience, similar information effort has been undertaken in Ukraine (Shakhrai 2015, 29) and has been surprisingly successful, as in fact many Ukrainians believe that Putin was right to annex Crimea:

> "*It so happened that the majority of the Crimean population consists of Russian speakers, Tatars and people of many other nationalities. These people have ancient traditions, history and cultural values of their own. They cannot throw everything at the feet of those, who choose Bandera as their leader and preach Nazism. Our grandfathers fought Nazis and shed their blood in order for us not to put their memory to shame.*" ("Yanukovych-mladshiy" 2014)

In general, such 'historical' emphasis represents the main pro-Russian line in eastern Ukraine as well as elsewhere. However, such arguments are often reduced to a propaganda instrument, as both sides have enough valid reasons to claim the disputed territories for themselves. Similar analogies and accusations are increasingly being used to unify Russians against the NATO, EU or US (Thomas 2015, 456). Moreover, it is a psychological fact that people perceive negative information more easily than positive (Kuleshov 2014, 107), so that news about how bad Europe and America are doing and reports that discredit the governments of other countries are most welcome, especially when contrasted to the Russian realities. At the same time, this kind of easy to understand information that appeals to public is used to bury really valuable information in 'white noise', as it is not possible to control all of the information flows and conceal everything that should remain unknown, so that *maskirovka* in this sense closely overlaps with *reflexive control* (Denisenko 2015; Kuleshov 2014, 107).

Epilogue and Conclusion

On 26 March, the biggest demonstrations since Bolotnaya movement of 2011 – 2013 took place in Russia. However, the Russian media kept remarkably silent on this day and none of the state-backed channels or websites mentioned the protests with tens of thousands participants in major cities and thousands of people arrested all over Russia, including Alexei Navalny himself (Higgins 2017). The demonstrations were addressed later on. Artyom Sheynin, the host of Studio One (*Первая студия*) talk show on Channel One Russia, urged the audience to think about the possible consequences of protest, as according to him, 'that is why we are discussing Ukraine here every day in order to provide you with examples'. A day later, on the same talk show leader of the Communist Party Gennady Zyuganov called protesters the 'new orange provocateurs' (Yarmush 2017b).

The second wave of protests organized by Navalny in 145 Russian cities is planned for 12 June, on Russia Day. Of course, it is not announced in the media either. However, the address posted on the website of one of St. Petersburg's renown universities by the rectorate sums up the working of propaganda, which has penetrated almost every level and sphere of Russian daily life, quite aptly:

"The 12th of June is a national holiday – the day of Russian sovereignty. In our beloved and most beautiful city in the world, St. Petersburg, various festivities will take place. Official (legally allowed) events will be taking place in various locations – their aim is to show support for the unwavering policy of president V. V. Putin to develop democracy, overcome economic hardship and cultivate civil society in our Motherland. You, Russian citizens, are the future of our country. You are politically active young people involved in solving pressing tasks and challenges that Russia is facing today. At the same time, according to reliable sources of information, among you there are supporters of opposition activist Alexei Navalny, who is planning to set up a number of provocations during the festivities by making use of the current difficult situation and students' dissatisfaction with it. Mass riots and violations of public order are illegal actions that can have uncontrollable consequences. What influence might this have on you? Would it not harm your future, the realization of your goals and your future career?! Think how harmful it can be for the prestige of our country, our city and the university you are studying at! Is it possible to bring about positive changes in the country? Yes, it is! In a lawful and democratic way! By studying and working hard! Do not give in to the provocations! Do not let the riots happen! Be prudent and be persistent! Rectorate of the Mechnikov North-West National Medical University." ("Obrashchenie" 2017)

Thus, democratic revolutions clearly continue to form a serious threat to the Russian leadership and are posed as a national security issue. It is remarkable how significant the influence of the color revolutions, especially the Orange Revolution, has been even despite that the recent events of 2013-2014 caused much more turmoil and were greater in scope. It can probably be explained by the fact that in Russia the square revolutions are seen as a continuation of the process, which has been jumpstarted by the Western-instigated color revolutions. Putin spoke of the threat of an 'orange revolution' that has to be prevented at all costs as late as in 2017, especially relevant now with the presidential elections coming in 2018 (Malik 2017).

In the meantime, as the regime felt threatened and therefore needed to reassert its legitimacy and power, information warfare has become a constant feature of Russian political life (Denisenko 2015). The launch of a new extensive propaganda campaign, which forms its significant part, has been justified by the Kremlin in terms of countering the subversive influence of Western soft power (Sivkov 2013; Giles 2016, 41). This rhetoric surprisingly reminds of that during the Cold War, even though the current situation is not indisputably comparable with it. However, the Cold War has significantly influenced and

indeed to a large extent shaped the discipline of IR, its subdisciplines, the Security and Strategic Studies, and the grand theories. The practical concepts and strategies used in information warfare by Russia, like that of *reflexive control*, came about under the circumstances of rivalry between Russia (the Soviet Union) and the West as well, so the bias is present in the very way of thinking about Russian foreign policy even from the theoretical point of view.

Moreover, Russia still views the post-Soviet countries as its own legitimate sphere of influence and gets automatically involved with any political changes in the region for practical reasons too in order to maintain stability and power. The democratic revolutions brought the perennial issue of Russia-West relations to the fore once again (Wilson 2010, 33). The Russian leadership, in fact, found itself in a weak position, as it had to reassert both own legitimacy as well as Russian place on the international arena. At the same time, however, it was able to use the threat of democratic revolutions to consolidate own power and distract the population from domestic problems and make it unify against the external threats and enemies. As Russian opposition politician Grigory Yavlinsky has bitterly noted:

"*You think the ruling elite has no strategy? Wrong. It does have an unwritten strategy. Not a security or economy one, but the one for them to stay in power permanently. It is precisely this strategy that is being implemented right before your eyes.*" (Yavlinsky, 2017)

This research offers an outline of a theoretical framework that can account for the Russian reaction to the democratic revolutions that can be used for the analysis of Russian information warfare and its evolution between the Orange Revolution and the Russia-Ukraine crisis. Firstly, the realist notions of security dilemma and zero sum games help to explain the constant threat of conflict escalation and military build-up during the Russia-Ukraine crisis, which has been provoked by the Revolution of Dignity, but has been brewing already since the Orange Revolution. As Patrushev once stated, 'the strong ones never get attacked' (Patrushev 2013, 1), so if Putin would allow NATO to have the upper hand, he will show weakness and therefore lose. Moreover, he has to play this game on two levels simultaneously and demonstrate power to both international as well as domestic public.

Secondly, the *securitization* theory shows how the democratic revolutions were put down as a security threat in the Russian official discourse by the means of *dispositives.* For the sake of argument, the revolution *dispositive*, which is subordinate to the main security *dispositive*, has been introduced based on the notion of conspiracies by Beatrice de Graaf. These *dispositives* describe the discourse used by the Kremlin to legitimize and justify tough *securitization* measures by identifying the democratic revolutions as an absolute evil and blaming them on the Western actors (De Graaf & Zwierlein 2013, 57).

Thirdly, it has been proved that the use of military strategy does not imply an actual war or conflict and has significantly influenced the Kremlin's foreign policy. Warfare in Russian understanding is more of an art of deception rather than a military act and can be used on multiple levels of policy or adjusted to any particular situation. Moreover, Russian military science itself is being transformed to better suit peacetime conditions and has shifted towards asymmetrical measures:

"*During the recent conflicts, new non-military forms of warfare have emerged. We must admit that despite we do have a thorough understanding of the essence of traditional military confrontation between the armed forces, our knowledge of asymmetrical strategies is quite limited. In this regard, the role of military science has become especially significant, as it now must come up with a coherent theory of this form of warfare.* (Gerasimov 2013, 2)

Lastly, the concept of *reflexive control* gives insight into these strategies. It allows to predetermine or predict opponents' decisions and manipulate public opinion. If these techniques are applied right, it is

almost impossible to uncover and identify them because of the interplay and overlaps between different *reflexive control* elements. This might be what Putin called an intellectual asymmetrical approach as information effort does not necessarily require undertaking 'real' actions, although it can help prepare ground for them or create a smokescreen around the instigator's actual capacities and objectives (Giles 2016, 46). It must be noted, however, that the asymmetrical approach is meant for situations in which a weaker opponent has to face a stronger one.

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