



Russia's strategies and practices of influence

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Published on 21/03/2018

Relations internationales

This study is the first step in a reflection on the sources and modalities of Russian influence. It begins with a comparative analysis of the notion of influence at the political and military level and defines the Russian conception of "information warfare" and "irregular warfare".

It then seeks to capture changes in threat perception and hierarchy through a review of statements by senior military representatives and a comparative analysis of several recently promulgated doctrine documents: the Russian Federation's foreign policy concepts of February 2013 and November 2016, the military doctrine of December 2014 and the national security strategy of December 2015.

It continues with a reflection on the representations that underpin the strategic posture of the Russian leadership. Starting from the principle that security is the absence of threats, real or perceived, it assesses their relationship to the world and their analysis of the international situation by studying official discourse and practices. In particular, it is interested in how they perceive their strategic environment and how they interpret the intentions of the actors within it.

Finally, it shows the practices to which this assessment of threats gives rise by identifying the targets and vectors of Russian influence. The study shows that Russia's strategies of influence are defensive in nature, although the resulting practices are very offensive.

These strategies of influence are part of an overall plan to protect the Russian regime from threats posed by the "information war" that Western countries, particularly the United States, would deliver to it. Three dangers are highlighted in the doctrine documents:

Western military activism with NATO in the spotlight;

the destabilization or overthrow of the regime with the United States in sight;

the Islamist, terrorist and separatist threat posed by Islamists in the Caucasus and Daesh.

Some changes in the order of priority of threats can be detected in 2015-2016. After the start of Russian military intervention in Syria in October 2015, the logic of confrontation with the Western countries, which reached its peak when the war in Ukraine broke out in the spring of 2014, faded but did not disappear; the Islamist threat gradually replaced it.

However, the National Security Strategy of December 2015 still lends to Russia's external adversaries the intention of undermining the internal order and stability of the regime through manipulation and disinformation, two levers of influence.

Conceived as a reaction to perceived hostility, these strategies of influence complement other initiatives to mobilise society and assert power, such as military reform and the rearmament programme¹. Influencing practices, on the other hand, are hybrid in nature.

On the one hand, they borrow Western methods of soft power and public diplomacy and take advantage of the most modern information and communication media. On the other hand, they draw on the Soviet Cold War experience and political culture and are largely based on the principles and methods of Soviet subversion....

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Release date 20/03/2018

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