

THE NEW COLD WAR: GEOSTRATEGIC RIVALRY AND A RETURN TO POLITICAL  
WARFARE

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## **DEDICATION**

Dedicated to my parents Robert and Sandra Shuya for their constant support for me to continue my education and to my advisers at the University of Texas at El Paso's National Security Studies Institute, Dr. Larry Valero and Mrs. Carmen Medellin, for being there with me every step of the way, from my time as an Undergraduate Sophomore to now, finishing my journey with them and the completion of my Master's degree. I couldn't have done this without the constant guidance of any of you.

PREVIEW

PREVIEW

THE NEW COLD WAR: GEOSTRATEGIC RIVALRY AND A RETURN TO POLITICAL  
WARFARE

by

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THESIS

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## **ABSTRACT**

The current geopolitical climate is one which has seen a renewed state of tensions in the relationship between the United States and the Russian Federation dating to 2014 and Russia's annexation of Ukrainian territory. This current state of geopolitical tensions has led many to question: are we in a state of New Cold War today? If so, today's Cold War may be defined by the advancement of cyber capabilities and the use of propaganda and misinformation. How will this be the defining factor in the New Cold War? Through a comprehensive DIME analysis of the Russian Federation, the United States, and American allies in the West, this thesis makes the argument that there is indeed a new Cold War and offers qualitative analysis and policy recommendations in the face of this new threat.



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PREVIEW

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Twentieth Century saw the ultimate level of violence by a multitude of actors in one half and then the threat of complete and utter destruction in the other. The first half witnessed the end of a system of imperial subjugation that had been in place for centuries. The second half observed the beginning and end of a system in which two competing powers, known as bipolarity, where one actor in the contest outlasted the other until existence was no longer physically feasible. This second half century has been known as the Cold War and was contested between the Soviet Union in the East and the United States in the West. The consequences of that conflict are still being felt today and have given rise to a new Cold War between the same actors, although under new names.

To understand how this conflict today is a Cold War, one must examine what exactly one means by that term as well as characteristics from the first Cold War between these actors. The Miriam Webster dictionary offers a denotative definition of: “a condition of rivalry, mistrust, and often open hostility short of violence especially between power groups (such as labor and management).”<sup>1</sup> The Cambridge University Press dictionary offers a similar denotative definition for cold war: “a continuing and dangerous unfriendly situation existing between countries that is expressed in political ways, often including threats of war.”<sup>2</sup> Yet what comes to mind whenever the term is used happens to be the Cold War as mentioned in the previous paragraph: the state of conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> “Cold War,” *Miriam Webster*, accessed September 10, 2019, available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cold%20war>.

<sup>2</sup> “Cold War,” *Cambridge University Press*, accessed September 10, 2019, available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/cold-war>.

While it is controversial to openly declare, one must only use one of the two definitions listed above to realize that the United States and the Russian Federation (Russia), the successor state to the Soviet Union, are locked in a new state of Cold War. While the previous Cold War was waged between the Americans and the Soviets for half a century, it is unclear how long this new Cold War will last. At present, this conflict has been ongoing since 2014, or nearly half a decade. It has also seen the ongoing presidential administration on one side reminiscent of strong Soviet leadership while two administrations on the other in the continued democratic traditions of abdication of power through constitutional term limits.

This new Cold War is being fought across the four main instruments of power: Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic known as DIME. Within the Diplomatic realm, the United States has maintained its relationship with previous Cold War era allies (mainly NATO) as well as Cold War era adversaries in former Warsaw Pact countries who have joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This has increased the size of power of what is generally known as 'the West'. The Russian Federation has also turned to new allies, chiefly those already in contention with the United States and the West: China, Iran, North Korea, and Syria.

Militarily speaking, the Russian Federation has set out on a campaign to revitalize and modernize its military. This has led to the establishment of new military brigades, advancements in technology, and even a renewed focus on its nuclear arsenal. NATO and the West have responded in similar fashion, repopulating Europe with large numbers of American and other allied forces for the first time since the previous Cold War. While there in response to the fear of escalations, such fears may be realized due to proxy wars between Russia and the West being fought in Ukraine and Syria.

These proxy wars have also led to multiple rounds of international sanctioning by Western countries against Russia for its part in fomenting war in both Ukraine and Syria. The results of these sanctions have had mixed results but have led Russia to focus on new economic partnerships with countries already at odds with the West, which seems to further increase tensions and continuously drive the world into another East versus West confrontation. The final instrument of power used for this new Cold War is information, which might end up being the defining factor of this Cold War.

Reminiscent of the first Cold War, information and misinformation will play a pivotal role in the way that Russia and the West interact with one another. The West prides itself on the liberal access to information while Russia maintains a firm hold on what information is allowed to be published to its people. The advancements of technology that followed the end of the first Cold War led to the Internet and wide access to information at the press of the button. Today, those advancements have gone even further into “social media” whereby information can be gained or manipulated even faster than previously thought. It is in this realm, in conjunction with other cyber capabilities (such as cyber weapons and network penetration) that leads to this defining factor previously mentioned. In short, that as nuclear weapons were the defining weapons of the previous Cold War, so will cyber capabilities and information/disinformation be the defining weapons of this Cold War.

#### **THE ESCALATION LADDER**

In 1956, American military strategist Herman Khan wrote *On Escalation: Metaphors and Scenarios* to discuss the state of security during the Cold War between the United States and Soviet Union. The most important aspect from the work comes in Chapter Two, where Khan details what he calls “the Escalation Ladder”, or a visual and metaphorical representation of the

escalation of tensions between opposing powers.<sup>3</sup> Khan's ladder has 44 rungs and is broken up into seven subsections: "sub crisis maneuvering", "traditional crises", "intense crises", "bizarre crises", "exemplary central attacks", "military central wars", and "civilian central wars."<sup>4</sup> The escalation ladder is visualized in the figure on the following page.

Khan also states within this work that it is important to note that the rungs of the escalation ladder are fluid, being dynamic and allowing for simultaneous ascension and descension within the various subsections of the ladder. While the contest that Khan witnessed in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century ended with the complete dissolvment of the Soviet Union, the nuclear arsenal possessed by that power has been transferred to its successor state and his theoretical framework in an era of geothermal nuclear warfare remains as important today as it did when he was writing the theory. For this purpose, it feels appropriate to apply Khan's escalation ladder to the current conflict between the United States and the Russian Federation as various rungs in Khan's model have been crossed in escalation of the crisis between the two powers. In the following sections of this literature review, escalation of the various subsections and rungs of the escalation ladder will be mentioned and demonstrated.

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<sup>3</sup> Herman Khan, *On Escalation: Metaphors and Scenarios*, (NY: Praegar, 1965), 37-51.

<sup>4</sup> Khan, *On Escalation: Metaphors and Scenarios*, 39.



**FIGURE 3**  
**AN ESCALATION LADDER**  
A Generalized (or Abstract) Scenario



Figure 1.1: The Escalation Ladder

## **CHAPTER 2: DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS OVER THE COURSE OF THE CONFLICT**

### **THE UNITED STATES**

#### **The Obama Presidency**

The Obama Presidency saw tensions escalate and relations deteriorate. President Obama and his administration were responsible for punishing Russia following the events in Ukraine. This was a period where businesses and individuals associated with the Kremlin and President Putin were increasingly sanctioned by United States, further isolating Russia from the global community. These tensions, the actions in Ukraine, and international sanctions came to a forefront in 2014. As time went on, President Obama and President Putin had increasingly less contact. Both sides were also intent on reducing the level of communication channels between both nations. Rhetoric was becoming increasingly harsh, yet it was not until the end of 2016 when the Obama administration realized that it had directly been attacked by Russian agents in preparation for a new President.

Following the Presidential elections at the end of 2016, President Obama ordered the expulsion of several Russian diplomats ousted as Russian agents. President Obama also ordered two different Russian compounds on American soil to be raided and shut down by the FBI.

#### **The Trump Presidency**

President Trump has repeatedly stated that relations between the United States and the Russian Federation were the worst they have ever been. This has been supported by research from the Pew Center, which found that nearly 68% of Americans distrust Russians and President

Vladimir Putin.<sup>5</sup> President Trump has also publicly stated that he looks to rectify relations between the United States and Russia and justified doing so by reminding Americans that the two nations are the two largest nuclear powers. His sentiments are the antithesis to those of law makers on Capitol Hill.

Since the inauguration of President Trump, lawmakers from the Democratic Party have stated that Russia and the United States are enemies, with this originating from their blatant attack on the U.S. Presidential Election (which resulted in the presidency of Donald Trump). Lawmakers from the Republican Party had fought this assertion early on. Yet following the U.S.-Russian Summit in Helsinki in July of 2018, Republican lawmakers on Capitol Hill joined their Democratic counterparts in protesting the President's moves to reestablish relations with Russia. While intended to amend relations between the two countries, the summit only fanned the flames of hostilities on the part of the American public and increased the distrust that the American public have in their president. What the summit achieved was a further delegitimization of President Trump and to turn the Congress against the President in response to his failure of holding President Putin and Russia accountable for meddling in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Elections.<sup>6</sup> Congressional lawmakers have voiced their concerns over President Trump and U.S.

relations with the Russian Federation to his administration as well. At the Senate confirmation hearing for Mike Pompeo to be Secretary of State, Senator Bob Menendez of New Jersey asked Mike Pompeo what the administration would do to curb, "an aggressive Russia who seeks to undermine the international order we helped create after World War II."<sup>7</sup> Mr. Pompeo responded by stating that, if confirmed, he would do everything in his power to push for the end of Russian aggression in Ukraine, and work to ensure the security of other countries from Russian aggression.<sup>8</sup> Months later, in July of 2018, Mike Pompeo faced similar concerns from the Senate and announced that the U.S. would be revealing the "Crimea Declaration", which formally announces the U.S.

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<sup>5</sup> Kristin Bialik, "Putin Remains Overwhelmingly Unpopular in the United States," *Pew Research Center*, March 26, 2018, available at: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/26/putin-remains-overwhelmingly-unpopular-in-the-united-states/>.

<sup>6</sup> Lauren Fox, "Top Republicans in Congress Break with Trump Over Putin Comments," *CNN*, July 16, 2018, available at: <https://www.cnn.com/2018/07/16/politics/congress-reaction-trump-putin-comments/index.html>. Jamie Ehrlich, "Republican Sen. Ben Sasse: Trump Should Declare Russia an 'Enemy of America,'" *CNN*, July 16, 2018, available at: <https://www.cnn.com/2018/07/16/politics/ben-sasse-putin-trump-russia-enemy/index.html>.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Nomination of Hon. Mike Pompeo to be Secretary of State*, 115th Cong., 2nd sess., 2018, 7. Available at: <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/S.%20HRG.%20115%20339%20Pompeo1.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, *Nomination of Mike Pompeo*, 104-133.

position of non-recognition of Russian control of Crimea.<sup>9</sup> The declaration itself specifically calls on the Russian Federation to, “end its occupation of Crimea” and respect the rules of the international order, under the auspices of the United Nations Charter, which Russia is an adherent to in, “pledging to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state.”<sup>10</sup> Beyond this act of refusing to recognize the legitimacy of Russian control of Crimea, the administration has broken cooperation with the Russian Federation in other arenas, such as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty). On February 2, 2019, amidst continued alleges of Russian violation of the treaty, Secretary Pompeo formally announced the U.S. withdrawal from the INF Treaty.<sup>11</sup>

## **THE EUROPEAN UNION**

The European Union has officially taken a similar stance to the U.S. in condemning the Russian annexation of Crimea and destabilizing Ukraine. One particular action taken by the European Union has been to enact “EU restrictive measures in response to the crisis in Ukraine.”<sup>12</sup> Specifically, the diplomatic measures have been to cancel the “EU-Russia summit”, choosing to no longer hold regular bilateral summits as well as move the G8 summit (scheduled in 2014 to be in Sochi, Russia) to Brussels, and renaming it the G7 summit, deciding to forego the summit of 8 leading world countries in favor of 7, which continues to this day. The legal basis for the partnership between the European Union and the Russian Federation has been the

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<sup>9</sup> *An Update on American Diplomacy to Advance our National Security Strategy*, 115th Cong. (2018) (statement of Mike Pompeo, Secretary of State). Available at:

[https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/072518\\_Pompeo\\_Testimony.pdf](https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/072518_Pompeo_Testimony.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> State Department Press Service, “Crimea Declaration,” published July 25, 2018, available at: <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/07/284508.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> State Department Press Service, “U.S. Intent to Withdraw from the INF Treaty February 2, 2019,” published February 2, 2019, available at: <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2019/02/288722.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> European Council, “EU Restrictive Measures in Response to the Crisis in Ukraine,” accessed September 9, 2019, available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/ukraine-crisis/>.

“Partnership and Cooperation Agreement”, which was signed in 1997 and meant for renewal every ten years.

The European Parliament admits that in 2014, the European Council froze cooperation with Russia, “except on cross-border cooperation and people-to-people contacts.”<sup>13</sup> The Russian Federation, when announcing the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the agreement, acknowledged that “Bilateral sectoral dialogues became bogged down that used to provide effective mechanisms for direct cooperation between Russian federal executive bodies and relevant branches of the European Commission. A great number of channels of cooperation were frozen.”<sup>14</sup> The Russian mission to the European continued its statement by remaining hopeful that long-term goals will thaw these channels and cooperation may continue.

## **NATO**

In 2017, NATO Secretary Jen Stoltenberg unequivocally stated, “We do not want to isolate Russia. NATO does not want a new Cold War.”<sup>15</sup> That being said, NATO has taken the same actions as the European Union (of which the majority of member states are also EU members) and the United States in condemning Russia’s actions in Ukraine. NATO officially has stated, “All practical civilian and military cooperation under the NRC with Russia has been suspended since April 2014, in response to Russia’s military intervention and aggressive actions in Ukraine, and its illegal occupation and annexation of Crimea.”<sup>16</sup> The NRC, in the aforementioned quote, is the NATO-Russia Council, which is its diplomatic delegation to the Russian Federation. The alliance

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<sup>13</sup> European Parliament, “Relations Beyond the Neighborhood: Russia,” accessed September 9, 2019, available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/177/russia>.

<sup>14</sup> Foreign Ministry Press Service, “Russia-EU Partnership and Cooperation Agreement Turns 20,” published December 1, 2017, available at: <https://russiaeu.ru/en/news/russia-eu-partnership-and-cooperation-agreement-turns-20>.

<sup>15</sup> NATO Press Service, “Speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Plenary session at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Bucharest,” published October 9, 2017, available at: [https://www.nato.int/cps/ra/natohq/opinions\\_147635.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/ra/natohq/opinions_147635.htm?selectedLocale=en).

<sup>16</sup> “Relations with Russia,” *NATO*, August 5, 2019, available at: [https://www.nato.int/cps/ra/natohq/topics\\_50090.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/ra/natohq/topics_50090.htm).

has also publicly condemned Russia for a chemical attack on British soil in 2018 as well as voiced its collective judgement that Russia has violated the terms of the INF Treaty in 2019, supporting the U.S. decision to withdraw from the agreement in retaliation.<sup>17</sup> NATO's official policy is that relations with Russia cannot return to their former amiable state until Russia returns to "compliance with international law and its international obligations and responsibilities."<sup>18</sup>

## **THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

At the 2016 Munich Security Conference, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev stated, "speaking bluntly, we are rapidly rolling into a period of a new cold war."<sup>19</sup> Prime Minister Medvedev's declaration of a "New Cold War" was in realization of the current state of geo-politics. Since the actions of Russia in 2014, cooperation between the Russian Federation and its adversaries in the West have come to a halt. Another facet of this realization came in 2014 when President Putin approved a revised military doctrine which takes the official stance that NATO is the greatest existential threat to the Russian state.<sup>20</sup> Having faced international isolation from the West, Russia has opted to turn to the East for international cooperation.

In a bid to turn to the East, Russia announced interest in increasing bilateral relations and cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2014.<sup>21</sup> Also, in 2014, Russia was able to successfully implement its goal of a Eurasian Economic Union of former Soviet states and Eurasian countries. Russia has also been focused on increasing its bilateral relationship with

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<sup>17</sup> "Relations with Russia," *NATO*, 2019.

<sup>18</sup> NATO Press Service, "Warsaw Summit Communiqué," published July 9, 2016, available at: [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm).

<sup>19</sup> Kremlin Press Service. "Dmitry Medvedev's Speech at the Panel Discussion," published February 14, 2016, available at: <http://government.ru/en/news/21784/>.

<sup>20</sup> Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, article 12, sub a, sec. 2. Available at: <https://rusemb.org.uk/press/2029>.

<sup>21</sup> Foreign Ministry Press Service, "Remarks and Answers to Questions from the Media by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov During a Joint News Conference with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran Mohammad Javad Zarif, Moscow, 29 August 2014," published August 29, 2014 available at: [http://www.mid.ru/en/maps/ir/-/asset\\_publisher/HUPBmpXjn4Ob/content/id/672783](http://www.mid.ru/en/maps/ir/-/asset_publisher/HUPBmpXjn4Ob/content/id/672783).

China.<sup>22</sup> In 2018, at a press conference with Chinese President Xi Jinping, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated, “We consider the strengthening of direct ties between Russian regions and Chinese provinces to be especially important.”<sup>23</sup>

## **CHAPTER 3: WEAPONIZATION OF INFORMATION**

### **STATE CONTROL OF INFORMATION**

In Russia, there is no foreign ownership of mass media allowed.<sup>24</sup> This law was furthered in November of 2017 when President Putin signed into law criminal penalties for breaking this law, which include prison time and fiscal penalties of up to 5 million Rubles, or roughly \$85,000.<sup>25</sup> The State Department protested this move by the Russian government, but as mentioned previously, has had the difficulty of dealing with a Russia that maintains the worst diplomatic relationship with the United States since the height of the Cold War.

### **STATE PROPAGANDA**

#### **RT**

RT, formerly known as Russia Today, is a Russian state-run propaganda machine. This is a unified view throughout the United States government, ranging from the Intelligence and Law Enforcement Communities to Congress and the State Department. In one of the last reports under the leadership of James Clapper, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) stated,

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<sup>22</sup> Kremlin Press Service, “Treaty on Eurasian Economic Union Signed,” published May 29, 2014, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/45787>.

<sup>23</sup> Kremlin Press Service, “Press Statements Following Talks with President of China Xi Jinping,” published September 11, 2018, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58528>.

<sup>24</sup> Kremlin Press Service, “Law Limiting Foreign Shareholders’ Stakes in Russian Media Outlets,” published October 15, 2014, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46796>.

<sup>25</sup> Kremlin Press Service, “Amendments to the Law on Information and the Law on the Media,” published November 25, 2017, available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/acts/news/56179>. “Russian State Duma Eyeing Fines as High as \$85,000 for Violating Foreign Agent Media Law,” *TASS*, November 29, 2017, available at: <http://tass.com/politics/977957>.

“The Kremlin’s principal international propaganda outlet is RT.”<sup>26</sup> This assertion that RT is a Russian state-run organization was supported by the U.S. Department of Justice, who pressured T&R Productions to register as a foreign agent working on behalf of ANO TV-Novosti (the Russian government entity behind RT) in November of 2017.<sup>27</sup> Acting Assistant Attorney General Boente declared, “Americans have a right to know who is acting in the United States to influence the U.S. government or public on behalf of foreign principals,” when announcing the registration of T&R Productions under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA).

### **The Troll Factory**

Just as vital to the information war has been the use of propaganda through online “trolls” at Russia’s online “troll factory”. In 2015, British newspaper *The Daily Mail* reported that the Russian government was sponsoring the fabrication of stories on online social media to draw more attention to Putin and increase his popularity.<sup>28</sup> The article explained that the factory would be open 24 hours a day and teams would operate in groups of three, working 12-hour shifts and fabricating over 100 stories per shift, with the aim of spreading Anti-Americanism and Anti-Western sentiments. Later in that year, *The Guardian* had reported that a Russian court recognized the existence of the troll factory when a free-lance journalist, who worked for the

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<sup>26</sup> Office of the Director of National Intelligence, National Intelligence Council, *Background to “Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections”*: *The Analytic Process and Cyber Incident Attribution* (Washington D.C., 2017), 3, [https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA\\_2017\\_01.pdf](https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Department of Justice Press Service, “Production Company Registers Under the Foreign Agent Registration Act as Agent for the Russian Government Entity Responsible for Broadcasting RT,” published November 13, 2017, available at: <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/production-company-registers-under-foreign-agent-registration-act-agent-russian-government>.

<sup>28</sup> Sam Matthew, “Revealed: How Russia’s ‘Troll Factory’ Runs Thousands of Fake Twitter and Facebook Accounts to Flood Social Media with Pro-Putin Propaganda”, *The Daily Mail*, March 28, 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3015996/How-Russia-s-troll-factory-runs-thousands-fake-Twitter-Facebook-accounts-flood-social-media-pro-Putin-propaganda.html>.