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An aerial photograph showing a two-lane asphalt road winding through a dense forest. The trees are in various shades of green and yellow, suggesting autumn. A white car is driving on the road. The road has white dashed lines for lane markings.

Russian Information Influence Operations Towards Sweden

Martin Kragh
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Executive Summary

Under Vladimir Putin's leadership, Russia has reverted to Cold War-era information influence operations. Situated in the geopolitically important Baltic Sea region, Sweden has been one of the targets of Russian influence activities. Strategic issues, such as Swedish-NATO cooperation and military support for Ukraine, have arguably been key targets for Russian influence activities. To exploit societal cleavages, Russian campaigns have also inserted themselves into contentious areas, such as issues related to migration and crime. Despite these efforts, Russia's influence operations have been ineffective in preventing Sweden's NATO membership. Given ongoing regional tensions and Russia's war against Ukraine, Sweden may be a target of Russian influence operations also in the future. Campaigns can erupt quickly, and it is therefore crucial that different societal actors – from the government level to media, academia and civil society – have the tools necessary to manage and/or comprehend a potential threat.¹

¹ This text is an abridged version of a longer article published in NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, Russia's Information Influence Operations in the Nordic – Baltic Region, Riga, November 2024, <https://stratcomcoe.org/publications/russias-information-influence-operations-in-the-nordic-baltic-region/314>

Introduction

Russia, under its authoritarian leader Vladimir Putin, has reverted to its historical Cold War patterns of engaging in covert influence activities – behaviour historically referred to as ‘active measures’ in the Soviet KGB lexicon on political warfare. In this report I provide empirical evidence on how Russia moved towards a preference for active measures towards Sweden, a small country in a geopolitically important European region. I discuss the nature of such influence activities to help us understand Russian foreign policy strategy towards Sweden and the Baltic Sea region.²

The significance of covert influence activities as instruments of statecraft in global affairs, and the increased presence of Russia within this domain, has been discussed in the last decade by academics, journalists, and analysts in the wider expert community. Covert warfare and deception as such have ancient roots, and its specific iteration in the form of Soviet international propaganda was analysed already in the early post-war period and the Cold War. Although it is difficult to ascertain accurately the political effectiveness of Russian active measures, the phenomenon as such merits study: regardless of whether influence activities prove effective, marginal or counter-productive, they consume considerable resources and are indicative of intent at the highest political level.³ Russia takes a differentiated approach towards individual European states, also in the Baltic Sea region. Furthermore, a country-specific case study may still provide evidence on issues of wider geostrategic significance: for example, Swedish-NATO cooperation; military security in the Baltic Sea region; Baltic Sea energy infrastructure; the EU’s Eastern Partnership; EU policies toward Ukraine; and the sanctions regime against Russia – issues and policies which in different ways have had a divisive impact on EU/Sweden-Russia relations.

A few distinctions are in order. There are information influence operations which can be, within reasonable bounds, attributed to Russian state actors (i.e. state media outlets, and/or government and intelligence agencies). Other operations, however, remain ambiguous, and cannot always be easily attributed to any particular actor. Information influence operations, by design, thrive on uncertainty. Often, key pieces of the puzzle will remain obscure for the analyst. Furthermore, not all of them will share the exact same attributes, or be pursued with identical intensity by their senders. Indeed, there will always be cases where attribution is impossible, or only tentative conclusions can be drawn.

2 This article draws on previous research. I cite parts of previously published articles and reports, e.g. Martin Kragh and Sebastian Åsberg, “Russia’s Strategy for Influence through Public Diplomacy and Active Measures: The Swedish Case,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 40, no. 6 (2017), pp. 773–816; Martin Kragh, “Russian Influence Operations in Scandinavia: The Case of Sweden’s Largest Tabloid Aftonbladet”, in *Russian Active Measures: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, Olga Bertelsen (ed.), Ibidem/ Columbia University Press, 2021, pp. 309–50; Martin Kragh, ““Sweden Has Rejected the Fight against the Coronavirus”?”, *Centre for Democratic Initiative*, 13 April 2020.

3 Max Holland, ‘The Propagation and Power of Communist Security Services Dezinformatsiya’, *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 19/1 (2006) 1-31; Herbert Romerstein, ‘Disinformation as a KGB Weapon in the Cold War’, *Journal of Intelligence History*, 1/1 (2001) 54-67; Ladislav Bittman, ‘The Use of Disinformation by Democracies’, *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 4/2 (1990) 243-61.

Historical background

Behavioural patterns in Russia's foreign policy towards Sweden have precedents in the Cold War period, when the military balance in the Baltic region was different from the present era. After the Second World War, Moscow dominated politically and militarily the territories from Vyborg in the east to Rostock in the south: The Baltic States were occupied and incorporated as Soviet republics; Polish borders were shifted westwards; and East Germany was founded as a Soviet satellite state. Finland and Sweden reaffirmed their military non-alignment, while Norway and Denmark became cofounding members of NATO in 1949. The geostrategic position of Finland and Sweden was not lost on Moscow, and by the 1980s Soviet and Warsaw Pact states are believed to have operated somewhere about 160 intelligence officers on Swedish territory, engaged primarily in the systematic illegal collection of information and recruitment of local and foreign agents. Although Moscow always rejected this allegation, testimonies from Soviet defectors confirmed Sweden as one of the highest priorities in Soviet and Warsaw Pact espionage activities.⁴

Historical evidence affirms the efficiency of Soviet security services. In the Nordic states, the Soviet security agency, the KGB, recruited Norwegian political secretary Arne Treholt in the 1970s, whose responsibility included high-level negotiations with Moscow on the demarcation of the Norwegian-Soviet border in the Barents Sea. In Sweden, the KGB recruited Stig Bergling, an officer in the Security Police, and Stig Wennerström, a military attaché stationed at different points in time at the Swedish embassies in both Moscow and Washington. Leaking information to Moscow on defectors from the KGB, Bergling paralyzed for many years Swedish counterintelligence. Wennerström provided his Soviet counterparts details on Swedish military planning and defence industry, information which allegedly enabled the shooting down of Swedish aircraft carrying out radio and radar signals intelligence-gathering by Soviet fighter jets over international waters in the Baltic Sea in 1952 (the 'Catalina Affair').⁵

As elsewhere in Europe, it has been discussed to what extent Moscow was able to infiltrate parts of the wider political, economic and media climate also in Sweden.⁶ One early case of possible Soviet disinformation relates to the Soviet kidnapping of Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg in Budapest in 1945. The Soviets initially provided the Swedish government misleading information on Wallenberg's real whereabouts. One historian has argued that the KGB furthermore planted disinformation in the US journal *Reader's Digest* that Wallenberg upon his arrest had been in possession of jewellery and gold hidden in the gasoline tank of his car, although no firm evidence exists to corroborate this claim. The campaign to discredit Wallenberg, however, fell flat in the post-war period.⁷

4 Geoffrey R. Weller, 'Scandinavian Security and Intelligence: The European Union, the WEU, and NATO', *Scandinavian Studies*, 70/1 (1998) 69-86.

5 J. J. Widen, 'The Wennerström Spy Case: A Western Perspective', *Intelligence and National Security*, 21/6 (2006) 931-958; Petter Wulff, 'The Impact of a High-Tech Spy', *Intelligence and National Security*, 28/2 (2013) 159-180; Weller, 'Scandinavian', 69-86.

6 Lars Björlin and Morten Thing, *Guldet fra Moskva: finansieringen af de nordiske kommunistpartier 1917-1990* (Copenhagen: Informations forl. 2012).

7 Johan Matz, 'Did Raoul Wallenberg Try to Leave Budapest in January 1945 with Jewelry and 15-20 kg of Gold Hidden in the Gasoline Tank of his Car? On Sensationalism in Popular History and Soviet Disinformation', *Journal of Intelligence History*, 15/1 (2016) 17-41.

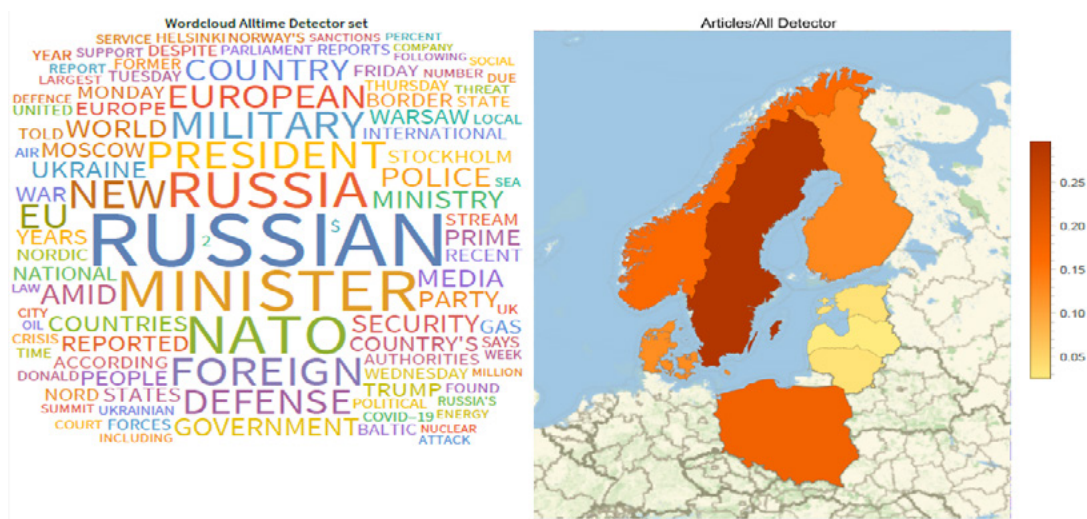
When the Soviet submarine S-363 ran aground in 1981 on the south coast of Sweden, a forged telegram soon appeared in media purportedly written by the Swedish ambassador to Washington, Wilhelm Wachtmeister. The telegram expresses the ambassador's profound disappointment over a secret agreement between Stockholm and Washington, providing US submarines access to Swedish military bases in wartime. The telegram was immediately revealed as a Soviet forgery, but its content also raised interesting questions from the point of view of intelligence analysis.⁸ Notably, the forgery contained an important – but for the Swedish public unknown – kernel of truth: Sweden maintained, in the Cold War, a secret security agreement with the US. The agreement was known, due to the espionage by Wennerström, to the KGB. Disinformation and forged telegrams with similar narratives began to appear again in 2014 in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine War, a renewed Swedish NATO-debate, and (contested) observations that foreign submarines may have intruded the Stockholm archipelago. As illustrated by the Cold War patterns of Soviet-Swedish interactions, Russian influence operations share several features from the original KGB handbook on political warfare. The main difference being, notably, the presence of the cyber domain in today's information landscape.

Russian information influence operations towards Sweden

To the extent that Russian state media reflects the interests of its government is it also possible to draw inferences about Russia's strategic goals through an analysis of its main narratives. Figure 1 below shows mentions of seven Baltic Sea states in the English language version of Sputnik, from 2016 to April 2024. Sweden, in this time period, is mentioned 3,464 times, or 29.7 percent of all mentions. In second place is Poland, with 18.5 percent of all mentions, followed in descending order by Norway (16.7 percent), Finland (13.0 percent), and Denmark (12.5 percent). Sweden, in other words, has attracted a relatively large interest in comparison to its neighbours. The word cloud shows the most common words for all articles in the chosen time period, i.e. articles discussing Russia's president Vladimir Putin, security, NATO. A more fine-grained analysis of the data could show more specific themes, and their changes over time, for example ahead of an election or any other similar event. For the purposes of this article, it suffices to note how the focus on Sweden – in combination with themes related to NATO and security – has been congenial with the themes prevalent in Russia's use of other tools of influence, such as forgeries and disinformation.

⁸ Martin Kragh, 'Media Warfare, a Russian Specialty' (Medial krigföring en rysk paradgren), *Svenska Dagbladet*, 14 Apr. 2016, <<http://www.svd.se/medial-krigforing-en-rysk-paradgren/av/martin-kragh>>.

Figure 1. Mentions of seven countries in Sputnik International, 2016–24.



Source: Ongoing research project, data collection not yet completed and fully analysed. For more information, please contact author. Note: The data represented here does not cover the total amount of influence Russia is conducting against the region. For example, Russian-language sources targeting the Baltic states, if included here, would alter the picture of Russian priorities.

A short-lived attempt to reach the Nordic countries was made by Russia in 2015, with the launch of Sputnik websites in several local languages, including Swedish.⁹ Sputnik International, which replaced Voice of Russia on 10 November 2014, launched its Swedish language version on 15 April 2015. Before its termination in spring 2016, the website published 3,963 news items.¹⁰ Its most common themes were ‘Crisis in the West’ (705 articles), ‘Positive image of Russia’ (643), and ‘Western aggressiveness’ (499). These pervasive categories were followed, in descending order, by the themes ‘Negative image of countries perceived to be in the West’s sphere of influence’ (424), ‘West is malicious’ (309), ‘International sympathy and cooperation with Russia’ (304), ‘Western policy failures’ (112) and ‘Divisions within the Western alliance’ (72). Thematically, the continuity with Soviet mass communication themes was quite strong, with a general emphasis on anti-Western narratives.

Unsurprisingly, the most frequently appearing targets in Swedish Sputnik reporting were the EU (698 articles), NATO (321) and the United States (1,018). The EU was depicted as an organisation in terminal decline, beset by major crises such as the Greek economic crisis and the influx of migrants to Europe from the Middle East and Africa. European bureaucrats and decision-makers were described as incompetent and puppets of the US government.¹¹ NATO was described as both a US instrument of war and the chief architect of Western

9 This section draws partially on Martin Kragh & Sebastian Åsberg, “Russia’s Strategy”.

10 By Spring 2016, all Nordic language Sputniks had been terminated. Sputnik International has never provided any explanation for its decision.

11 Examples of articles critical of the West include: ‘The Crisis of the American Dream’, ‘Sweden in Flames’, ‘EU Cannot Cope with Refugee Flows’, ‘EU Waiting for Armageddon’.

policy towards Russia. The encirclement hypothesis, which argues that the US and its allies are threatening Russian security with the instalment of military bases near Russian borders, dominated as the analytical framework.¹² The narrative of a Russia under siege, needless to say, was not a novel one, as it recalled the Soviet critique of capitalist states encircling the ‘Socialist Fatherland.’¹³

The attempt to establish different Sputnik website for the Nordic countries coincided with other documented cases of active measures towards Sweden: for example, disinformation campaigns, the circulation of various forgeries, and fake news items, surfacing in the country’s information landscape. In conjunction with these efforts, Russian politicians and diplomats openly began to intervene in Swedish domestic political affairs on NATO and Baltic Sea security. Not least, several public statements around 2015–16 targeted the agenda of the Swedish government to push forward with the so-called NATO Host Agreement, deepening Sweden’s cooperation with the military alliance. ‘Sweden’s accession to #NATO’, tweeted the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 10 September 2015, ‘would have military & political implications requiring #Russia to take retaliatory steps.’ On Russian state TV, Swedish politicians were castigated as agents of Washington and falsified interviews with Swedish citizens were produced. Furthermore, Swedish journalists and diplomats working in Russia became targets of harassment and espionage activities, including smear campaigns on Russian state television.¹⁴ In spring 2024, following Sweden’s accession to NATO, an anonymous group of people threw manure over the fence to the Swedish embassy in Moscow. Predictably, Russian politicians and pundits had also thundered against Sweden’s decision in 2022 to apply for NATO membership.¹⁵

Furthermore, there have been cases of *hack-and-leak* operations. In 2017 and 2018, Sweden’s Sports Confederation was the victim of a cyber-attack later attributed to ‘Fancy Bear’, a group within Russia’s military intelligence, the GRU. Through repeated and comprehensive breaches, the GRU had been able to access personal details of Swedish athletes, such as medical records, which were subsequently published.¹⁶ On at least one occasion, in 2014, Russian TV channel RT lobbied a group of local youth in a Stockholm suburb to perform acts of vandalism in front of camera – to generate and amplify content on Sweden’s problems of migration-related crime. In 2015, Russian military vessels interfered with and tried to obstruct the laying of an electric cable between Sweden and Lithuania in the Baltic Sea. In other words, increasing tensions between Russia and the outside world – following Russia’s war against Ukraine in 2014 – was being reflected in several different domains.

Although Sweden has been far from a high-priority target for Russian foreign policy, it has been possible to document several information influence operations of various size and intensity towards the country. In spring 2017, following an ISIS terrorist attack in central Stockholm, an alleged screenshot from the conversation between the terrorist and his handler appeared on the Russian propaganda website www.politonline.ru only one day after

12 Examples of articles on a Western threat against Russia include: ‘US Actions Provoke Tensions in South China Sea’, ‘NATO Missile Tests an Attempt to Scare Russia’, ‘The US is Placing Attack Jets in Estonia’, ‘NATO Forces Near the Border Threaten Russia’.

13 Lasswell, ‘Soviet Propaganda’, 75.

14 *Expressen*, ‘Espionage towards Swedish Television in Moscow’ (Avlyssning mot SVT i Moskva – Säpo utreder), 15 Oct. 2014, <<http://www.expressen.se/nyheter/avlyssning-mot-svt-i-moskva---sapo-utreder>>.

15 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/29/russia-condemns-nato-invitation-finland-sweden>

16 <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN2C01V5/>

the event. Referencing a Twitter account created to vaguely resemble a cooperation between the Russian independent TV station Dozhd and Kavkaz Center, but with an alleged sympathy for Islamist jihad (<https://twitter.com/tvjihad>), the article provided original information on the terrorist and his organisational ties to a terrorist cell in Dagestan.¹⁷ Although the screenshot's origin has never been established, it was later confirmed through a technical analysis of the terrorist's mobile phone that the conversation was indeed authentic. Some operations have also targeted Sweden indirectly. In 2018, documents belonging to the Institute of Statecraft, a think-tank based in the United Kingdom, were hacked and subsequently leaked by Russian cyber intruders. Following this, dozens of Russian media channels, in several different languages, initiated a large-scale information campaign arguing that the think-tank was a covert MI6 network intended to undermine Russian security and regime stability. Although no evidence for this claim was ever presented, the information gained traction in a handful of Swedish media outlets. The country's largest newspaper, *Aftonbladet*, used the information to accuse the author of this text of being a British agent. As their only apparent source was Russian disinformation, *Aftonbladet* was subsequently criticized by the Swedish Media Ombudsman, an independent self-disciplinary body, handling complaints on the editorial content of newspapers and other media outlets. For some reason, however, *Aftonbladet* has defended the criticized publications.¹⁸

The Russian MFAs has regularly accused Sweden of 'blatant Russophobia', as it has many other western countries deemed 'unfriendly'. In later September 2023 its spokesperson, Maria Zakharova, argued that this Russophobia on September 27 the same year had led to 'an act of vandalism' against a monument to Soviet prisoners of war outside of Luleå, in north-west Sweden. Notably, no mentions of the vandalism had appeared in Swedish media before her statement was made. Similar accusations have been raised against Sweden concerning the status of the Russian Orthodox Church, deemed the victim of bias and negative treatment by Swedish society.¹⁹ Russian media reporting describing Swedish society as Russophobic intensified following the country's formal application for NATO membership in the spring of 2022. One example of this was in the run-up to the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine when the Russian ambassador to Sweden made a statement about the increasing Russophobia in Sweden.²⁰ Such coverage appeared in 2023, following a sequence of Quran burnings in Sweden by an Iraqi asylum seeker and a Swedish-Danish far right activist. 'Did they not have enough by Peter the Great', quipped Vladimir Putin, using the burnings to deflect attention from an anti-Jewish pogrom in Dagestan.²¹ Similar Quran burnings in Russia have also been blamed on people receiving 'inspiration' from Sweden, including in the UN, where Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands were accused by Russia of fomenting a 'war' against religion. Lastly, in 2023, the Quran burnings were tied to Sweden's application for membership in NATO. An activist allegedly burning the NATO statues – a non-event, unnoticed in Swedish media – was used as a pretext to claim that 'they' [Swedes] did not want to join NATO.²² Furthermore, several Russian-language media outlets, such as INO-TV, Regnum, Krasnaya Vesna, and Ruletko, have had regular – and typically critical – coverage of Swedish domestic

17 <https://www.politonline.ru/interpretation/22889936.html#>

18 For a larger analysis of the Aftonbladet case, see Martin Kragh, "Russian Influence Operations".

19 See the full statement here: <https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1907013/>, accessed on 18 April, 2024.

20 Russian embassy in Stockholm Facebook. January 19 2022: <https://archive.is/YGUvz>

21 Full statement available here: <<https://tass.com/politics/1640391>>, accessed on 18 April, 2024.

22 See <<https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/64af16069a79478558477fd8>>, accessed on 18 April, 2014.

and foreign affairs. The news site Lenta, for a while, provided in depth coverage of Swedish parliamentary activities, including events not covered in Swedish media.

Lastly, it is worth noting a change in Russia-narratives targeting Sweden in relation to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Prior to the invasion, the main narratives depicted Sweden as a country witnessing a societal collapse due to non-European immigration²³ and moral decay.²⁴ After the invasion, during 2022, most of the narratives were related to a potential Swedish membership in NATO and support to Ukraine. The narratives stated for example that Sweden is a vassal state, which is being used by US and NATO25, that the membership in the alliance would mean a depletion of the Swedish economy and that it would lead to a worsened security situation for Sweden and the whole Baltic Sea region.²⁶ After the formalisation of Sweden's NATO application later in 2022, Russian actors started to focus more on depicting Sweden as a non-reliable NATO-ally, a state that is weak and a hub for terrorism.²⁷ After the finalisation of Sweden's membership in NATO in March 2024, it is possible to observe a considerable decline in reporting related to Sweden's membership in NATO (although it still continues); meanwhile the narratives that were prevalent prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine have increased again.

Concluding discussion

There exists a strong continuity in the foreign policy goals of Russia towards Sweden. Since the early days of Cold War, maintaining Sweden's military non-alignment ('neutrality' as it was called in Moscow) was a key strategic interest. The largest information influence operation conducted by Russia towards Sweden in recent years was also connected to the question of Swedish-NATO cooperation (through the NATO Host Agreement) and further NATO integration. The application by the Swedish government to join NATO in spring 2022, followed by formal membership on 7 March, 2024, can be regarded as a clear Russian strategic failure. In this regard, Russian information influence operations have proven ineffectual and potentially counter-productive – as they contributed to raising public awareness in Sweden regarding Russian foreign policy conduct. Whatever the potential merit of Russian information influence operations, Russian actions in other areas and domains have muted their effectiveness. Different societal strengths in Sweden, such as media literacy and strong situational awareness, are typically mentioned as the main factors contributing to the

23 Language Barriers Endanger Elderly Swedes' Lives – Report, Sputnik, 13 June 2018, accessed on July 4, 2024 <https://sputnikglobe.com/20180613/sweden-elderly-care-migrants-1065359375.html>

24 'Russia-Friendly' Swedish Right-Winger Backs Down Amid Smear Campaign, Sputnik, 23 October 2018, <https://sputnikglobe.com/20181023/sweden-democrats-russia-1069131660.html> **Главком армии Швеции возглавил парад однополых извращенцев (ФОТО)**, Tsargrad.Tv, 4 August, 2019, accessed on 4 July, 2024. https://tsargrad.tv/news/shvedy-i-finny-poterjali-sovest-dengi-a-teper-i-son-govorit-budut-russkie-rakety_968669 <https://https://tsargrad.tv/news/shvedy-i-finny-poterjali-sovest-dengi-a-teper-i-son-govorit-budut-russkie-rakety_968669

25 **Военный эксперт объяснил нежелание Швеции размещать базы НАТО**, Izvestya, 12 March, 2024, <https://iz.ru/1663787/2024-03-12/voennyi-ekspert-obiasnil-nezhelanie-shvetcii-razmeshchat-bazy-nato>, Accessed on 10 July, 2024.

26 **ШВЕДЫ И ФИННЫ ПОТЕРЯЛИ СОВЕСТЬ, ДЕНЬГИ, А ТЕПЕРЬ И СОН. ГОВОРИТЬ БУДУТ РУССКИЕ РАКЕТЫ**, Tsargrad.Tv, 4 March, 2024, accessed on 4 July, 2024. https://tsargrad.tv/news/shvedy-i-finny-poterjali-sovest-dengi-a-teper-i-son-govorit-budut-russkie-rakety_968669 <https://https://tsargrad.tv/news/shvedy-i-finny-poterjali-sovest-dengi-a-teper-i-son-govorit-budut-russkie-rakety_968669

27 Украина через посольства за рубежом вербует наемников для ВСУ, RIA Novosti, 7 April, 2024, Accessed on 4 July, 2024. <https://ria.ru/20240325/ukraina-1935664843.html>

country's resilience (one could also add the fact that Sweden is a relatively small country, and the Swedish language a small language group).

Russian setbacks in the military or diplomatic arena are no reason for complacency. The continuation of military hostilities in the Russo-Ukrainian War, and the subsequent increase in tensions in the Baltic Sea region, suggests that Sweden could be the target of Russian influence activities also in the future. Their relatively low cost, in combination with plausible denial, makes the use of influence activities an attractive option. The historical cleavage in Swedish domestic politics regarding NATO could be one potential vector of attack, although a strong parliamentary majority in favour of membership emerged following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Other societal cleavages, such as the issue of problems connected to crime and/or migration in Sweden, have already been favourite targets of Russian state media and could be so also in the future. Notably, domestic and foreign policy dimensions can overlap, as in the case of Quran burnings, Swedish-Turkish negotiations on NATO, and anti-Swedish protests in the Middle East. Another area which Russia may have an incentive to target is foreign policy, such as military support for Ukraine or sanctions towards Russia. As always, Russian state media and their various offshoots in troll factories, useful idiots and agents of influence can easily amplify campaigns initiated by other actors also, for various reasons. Often, the exact origin of a campaign will be difficult to determine with certainty.

In assessing the potential influence of Russian information influence operations, it is important to remember how they can also be potentially amplified for three different target groups: a Russian domestic audience, a Swedish domestic audience, and/or an international audience. A response to Russian influence activities must therefore be flexible enough to reach not only a Swedish audience, but also audiences in other geographical areas, depending on the character of the particular campaign. The attacks against Swedish diplomatic missions in the Middle East, following the news about Quran burnings in Sweden, are a case in point. Campaigns can erupt quickly, and with little forewarning. In such instances, it is crucial that different societal actors – from the government level to media, academia and civil society – have the tools necessary to manage and/or comprehend a potential threat.



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