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The Surkov Leaks

The Inner Workings of Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine

Alya Shandra and Robert Seely

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Contents

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Executive Summary

THIS PAPER PROVIDES a guide to Russian subversive warfare by examining, in detail, three tranches of leaked emails apparently belonging to Kremlin officials – including, primarily and critically, Vladislav Surkov, the man known as President Vladimir Putin's 'Rasputin' – who have been closely involved with the Eastern Ukraine conflict, and in particular with the political and economic management of two statelets established by the Kremlin in Donetsk and Luhansk.[1] In addition, it examines the strategy and tactics of Russia's political subversion in the rest of Ukraine. Since the leaking of this information in the media, the emails have become known as 'The Surkov Leaks'.

Chronologically, the leaks capture the period when Russia was pursuing its 'Novorossiya' (New Russia) project, from 2014 onwards, aiming to break off southeastern Ukraine. When this failed, save for the statelets that had been established in Donetsk and Luhansk, the Kremlin switched to promoting a separatist movement within Ukraine, the end goal of which was its federalisation. This campaign continues today.

The end goal of the Kremlin's actions in Ukraine since 2013 has been to achieve political influence there and, ostensibly, to halt the country's movement westward – which could ultimately result in accession to NATO. On the overt level, this was done via the puppet statelets of Donetsk and Luhansk. At the covert level, Russia interfered in Ukrainian elections, organised and funded a pan-Ukrainian campaign for a 'soft federalisation' of the country, attempted to change Ukraine's constitution and establish an alternative centre of power, and created an illusion of widespread support for these activities. All of these activities were enabled by the intrinsic weaknesses of the Ukrainian state, aided by corruption and a collapse of state authority. The Kremlin also relied on two types of local actors: ideological allies and paid collaborators. The working frameworks for subversion were chiefly developed by Ukrainians, many of whom fled to Russia after Euromaidan. They had an insider's view of the Ukrainian mind and knew the 'weak spots' to aim for.

In effect, Russia's activity in Ukraine is a reinvention of 'active measures', a form of political warfare pioneered by the Soviet Union. The strategy for these active measures is closely linked to a concept known as 'reflexive control', a Soviet top-secret technique to manipulate an opponent into making decisions leading to their own defeat. For this, the Kremlin conducted painstaking research into the intricacies of Ukrainian daily life to understand the Ukrainian world view and identify vulnerabilities that could be exploited. Then, using media, front groups, provocateurs and paid rallies, it created a virtual reality designed to compel Ukraine into making decisions serving Russian objectives.

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1. The authors provide an assessment of the authenticity of these emails in Chapter I, outlining the reasons they believe that the emails are authentic.

This Occasional Paper is designed to be an aid for researchers, academics, journalists, campaigners, and all those interested in the structure of political subversion, which at times is also called 'hybrid warfare'. It has often been difficult to find hard evidence of Russian political manipulation, due to the covert nature of elements of this form of conflict. This paper presents leaked evidence, in a wealth of detail, to show a tactical snapshot of subversion, from the costs of demonstrations, to messaging lines, to the tactics of violent destabilisation.

The authors of this paper were not involved in the hacks that led to the leaking of emails allegedly belonging to Kremlin officials. However, the Russian toolkit of subversion is being used not only in Ukraine, but also in other former Soviet states seeking to leave Russia's sphere of interest, and in Western states too. Therefore, it is overwhelmingly in the public interest that these emails should be examined in detail. It is essential to the future of those former Soviet countries – and to Western democracy writ large – to highlight the covert methods of subversion and control that are being used by the Kremlin. The leaked emails are therefore a unique contribution to the international debate over how the Kremlin 'curates' its 'managed conflicts'. In analysing these emails, this paper also forms part of a wider debate about how authoritarian states use freedom to undermine free or partially free societies.

Introduction

THE MAJOR CONFLICTS of the 21st century have been marked by growing debate about a complex, multifaceted form of warfare known as 'hybrid warfare', which might more accurately be described as a full-spectrum form of conflict in which all the powers of the state, military and non-military, are brought together in a coherent role.

Although in use against Western forces operating in Afghanistan and Iraq, the term 'hybrid war' has come to be associated primarily with Russia, and in particular with the conflict in Ukraine. Although Russia is not the only state to use this complex form, it does so more effectively than other states and appears to have developed an intricate methodology for conducting hybrid warfare, which is transliterated as *gibridnaya voyna.*

The Russian Concept of Hybrid Warfare

The most useful documents for understanding the development of Russian thinking on hybrid warfare in the past five to 10 years are Russia's official doctrines and strategies. These are: the Military Doctrine;[1] the National Security Strategy;[2] the Foreign Policy Concept;[3] and the Information Security Concept.[4] These documents broadly articulate the Russian position that conflict of the present and future will combine military and non-military effects, and that these effects should be seen as part of an integrated whole. To these publications should be added a small number of military journal articles. Notably, these include a 2013 article by the Russian Chief of Staff, General Valery Gerasimov, which, although describing Russia's perception of 'Western wars', nevertheless signalled the Russian view that the nature of warfare may have changed and that, indeed, non-military tools may become more powerful than military ones in modern conflict.[5] The authors of this paper argue that the Gerasimov 'doctrine' is not a doctrine as such. Arguably, it was his

1. Russian Federation, 'Voennaya Doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii' ['The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation'], 25 December 2014, p. 4. English version, <https://www.offiziere.ch/wp-content/uploads-001/2015/08/Russia-s-2014-Military-Doctrine.pdf>, accessed 21 November 2018. Throughout this paper all translations are the authors' own, unless otherwise stated.
2. Russian Federation, 'Natsionalnoi Bezopasnosti Rossikoi Federatsii' ['Of the National Security of the Russian Federation'], 31 December 2017, Article 12, p. 4, <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/l8iXkR8XLAtxeilX7JK3XXy6Y0AsHD5v.pdf>, accessed 16 September 2017.
3. Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Foreign Policy Concept', 1 December 2016.
4. Russian Federation, *Doktrina Informatsionnoi Bezopasnosti Rossiskoi Federatsii [Information Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation]*, 5 December 2016, p. 6, <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201612060002?index=1&rangeSize=1>, accessed 26 February 2017.
5. Valery Gerasimov, 'Tsennost Nauki v Predvidenii' ['The Value of Science in Forecasting'], *Voenno-Promishlennii Kuryer* [*Military-Industrial Courier*], 27 February–5 March 2013, <http://vpk-news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK_08_476.pdf>, accessed 1 June 2015.

acceptance of a theory of conflict in which lethal and non-lethal as well as non-military forms of conflict are as important as conventional military force.

A 2012 article on soft power by Russian President Vladimir Putin is also useful, as it not only demonstrates his personal recognition of the importance of hybrid warfare, but also indicates his belief that Russia had itself been a victim of it.[6] Other valuable Russian works include those by S G Chekinov and S A Bogdanov, who have produced a number of articles on new-generation warfare, exploring some radical ideas, as well as suggesting a sequencing model for the phases of modern conflict.[7]

In the West, many authors have sought to articulate the Russian vision for creating complex and multiple effects through a combination of overt and covert, and military and non-military, means. Arguably the most significant of these is the 2016 article by Russian conflict and organised crime expert, Mark Galeotti, on hybridity.[8] Galeotti frames Russian hybrid warfare in terms of proxy warfare (a central element), criminality, information operations, and Special Forces operations. Far from being a Western import, Galeotti situates Russia's modern way of conflict in the country's Soviet and pre-Soviet experiences of warfare. Latvian academic Janis Bērziņš, however, argues that Russia's new-generation warfare is significantly different from previous iterations.[9] In another important contribution to the debate about the characteristics of Russian hybrid warfare, Andrew Monaghan, from the Changing Character of War Programme at Oxford University, argues that conventional force should not be underestimated when considering the balance of force in contemporary Russian conflict.[10] One of the authors of this paper, Robert Seely, has sought to develop a comprehensive understanding of all the tools and techniques used by Russia under the hybrid warfare model, recently producing the first Western definition of contemporary Russian conflict, which is set out in the next section.[11]

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6. Vladimir Putin, 'Rossiya I Menyaushchiisya Mir' ['Russia and the Changing World'], *Moskovskie Novosti* [*Moscow News*], 27 February 2012.
7. See S G Chekinov and S A Bogdanov, 'The Strategy of Indirect Approach: Its Impact on Modern Warfare', *Military Thought* (Vol. 20, No. 3, 2011); S G Chekinov and S A Bogdanov, 'The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War', *Military Thought: A Russian Journal of Military Theory and Strategy* (No. 4, 2013), pp. 12–23; S G Chekinov and S A Bogdanov, 'O Kharaktere i Soderzhanii Voiny Novogo Pokoleniia' ['About the Character and Content of New Generation Warfare'], *Voennaya Mysl* [*Military Thought*] (No. 10, 2013).
8. Mark Galeotti, 'Hybrid, Ambiguous, and Non-Linear? How New is Russia's "New Way of War"?', *Small Wars and Insurgencies* (Vol. 27, No. 2, 2016), pp. 282–301.
9. Janis Bērziņš, 'Russian New Generation Warfare is Not Hybrid Warfare', in Artis Pabriks and Andis Kudors (eds), *The War in Ukraine: Lessons for Europe* (Riga: University of Latvia Press, 2015).
10. Andrew Monaghan, 'The "War" in Russia's "Hybrid Warfare"', *Parameters* (Vol. 45, No. 4, Winter 2015/2016), pp. 9–12.
11. Robert Seely, 'A Definition of Contemporary Russian Conflict: How Does the Kremlin Wage War?', Research Paper No. 15, Russia and Eurasia Studies Centre and Henry Jackson Society, June 2018, <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/publications/a-definition-of-contemporary-russian-conflict-how-does-the-kremlin-wage-war/>, accessed 24 June 2018; Robert Seely, 'Defining Contemporary Russian

Also of relevance to the debate is NATO's handbook on Russian information warfare, written by Keir Giles, a Senior Consulting Fellow at Chatham House.[12] Polish researcher Jolanta Darczewska has also produced an important study of Russian information operations before and during the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014,[13] demonstrating its remarkable complexity. Both the RAND Corporation and Chatham House have produced studies of Russian operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine.[14] Timothy Thomas, meanwhile, has led the investigation by Western experts of the psychologically manipulative Soviet art of 'reflexive control', designed to manipulate opponents into making decisions that are to Russia's advantage.[15]

Contemporary Russian Conflict

In effect, Russia's modern practice of political subversion can be understood as a reinvention of 'active measures', a form of political conflict pioneered by the Soviet Union. There were four stages in Soviet-era active measures: demoralisation; destabilisation; bringing the situation to crisis point; and renormalisation. Today, this appears to have evolved into a six-stage model under current Russian military thinking: Hidden Genesis; Escalation; Beginning of Conflict Actions; Crisis; Resolution; and Restoration. However, the basic principle remains the same.[16]

According to the research underpinning this paper, Russia's tools for contemporary political warfare include: information and disinformation campaigns; espionage; the use of fake documents and false evidence as part of a highly sophisticated form of psychological manipulation; support for paramilitary groups; the use of political fronts; assassination; and the collection of blackmail

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Warfare: Beyond the Hybrid Headline', *RUSI Journal* (Vol. 162, No. 1, 2017), pp 40–49; and other articles at <https://robertseely.academia.edu/research>.

12. Keir Giles, 'Handbook of Russian Information Warfare', Research Division, NATO Defense College, November 2016, <http://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=995>, accessed 23 June 2018.
13. Jolanta Darczewska, *The Anatomy of Russian Information Warfare, the Crimean Operation, a Case Study* (Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies, May 2014), <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/point-view/2014-05-22/anatomy-russian-information-warfare-crimean-operation-a-case-study>, accessed 31 August 2015.
14. Michael Kofman et al., *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017); Keir Giles et al., *The Russian Challenge* (London: Royal Institute for International Affairs, June 2015).
15. Timothy L Thomas, 'Russian Information-Psychological Actions: Implications for US PSYOP', *Special Warfare* (Vol. 10, No. 1, Winter 1997), pp. 12–19, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/fmso/psyop.htm>, accessed 20 December 2015; Timothy L Thomas, 'Dialectical Versus Empirical Thinking: Ten Key Elements of the Russian Understanding of Information Operations', *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* (Vol. 11, No. 1, 1998), pp. 40–62; Timothy L Thomas, 'Reflexive Control in Russia: Theory and Military Applications', *Reflexive Processes and Control* (Vol. 1, No. 2, July/December 2002); Timothy L Thomas, 'Russia's Reflexive Control Theory and the Military', *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* (Vol. 17, No. 2, 2004), pp. 237–56.
16. For more on the six-stage model, see Gerasimov, 'Tsennost Nauki v Predvidenii' ['The Value of Science in Forecasting'].

material – *kompromat*[17] – to name but a few. However, Russia has gone beyond the political subversion practised as part of Soviet active measures to create a more strategic, integrated approach to influencing and undermining other countries – one which draws on all the levers available to the state, not just the political ones. Indeed, it is possible to identify more than 50 tools of Russian influence, which can broadly be categorised in seven areas.

1. Politics and political violence: the tools formerly associated with active measures and updated for the 21st century, as outlined above.
2. Soft power and governance, including religion, culture, law and art.
3. Economics and energy, including transit fees, soft loans, gas supply, and seizure of assets.
4. Military power: everything from military exercises as a precursor to invasion, to the provision of logistics support to paramilitary groups, to special forces' operations and conventional military operations.
5. Diplomacy and public outreach, including state diplomacy, use of Western PR firms, and non-traditional public outreach.
6. Information and narrative warfare, including the use of Russian state outlets abroad, such as *Russia Today.*
7. Command and control (C2): the heart of the proposed framework.

While this framework of tools fits with Russia's 2015 Military Doctrine, which sees the leading characteristic of 'contemporary military conflict' as the integration of military and non-military tools, combined with 'people power' and special operations,[18] it is important to note that this is not simply a new military art, but a new strategic art to be tailored according to the target or countries. For example, against the West, the Kremlin pursues a limited range of activities largely centred on espionage, information operations and cyber attacks, as well as more high-risk options such as electoral manipulation.[19] It also carries out occasional murders, as shown by the assassination of former state security (KGB) agent Alexander Litvinenko in London in 2006,[20] and probably indicated by the suspected poisoning of Colonel Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in Salisbury in March 2018.

17. For definitions of active measures warfare, see US Congress Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, 'Soviet Covert Action (The Forgery Offensive): Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Oversight on the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, House of Representatives, Ninety-Sixth Congress, Second Session, February 6, 19, 1980', 1980; US Department of State, 'Soviet Influence Activities: A Report on Active Measures and Propaganda, 1986–87', August 1987, <http://jmw.typepad.com/files/state-department---a-report-on-active-measures-and-propaganda.pdf>, accessed 27 August 2015, p. viii; House Committee on Intelligence, 'Soviet Active Measures', 1982, p. 31.
18. Russian Federation, 'Voennaya Doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii' ['The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation'], pp. 7–8.
19. Grand Jury for the District of Columbia, 'Internet Research Agency Indictment', 16 February 2018, <https://www.justice.gov/file/1035477/download>, accessed 26 February 2018.
20. National Archives, 'The Litvinenko Inquiry', <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160613090305/https://www.litvinenkoinquiry.org/>, accessed 25 June 2018.

By contrast, in the former Soviet republics − where the Kremlin's degrees of infiltration and opportunities for intervention are greater − it uses a broader range of tools, including aggressive political blackmail, economic threats, the manipulation of ethnic or other groups loyal to Moscow, and the use of violent proxy groups (as in the Donbas, where Russia's special forces have also been deployed and are training proxy groups). In Ukraine, Russia has used almost all the tools available to it, ranging from conventional and special forces military support (under a fig leaf of deniability), through to economic, political, informational, governmental, and diplomatic, and public outreach tools.[21] The situation in Ukraine clearly demonstrates that military activity is only one element of a spectrum of tools of Russia's grand strategy.

This paper uses Ukraine as its case study, focusing on the political aspects of Russia's 'managed conflict' there on the basis of emails allegedly belonging to senior Kremlin officials, which were leaked in 2016 and 2017.

21. For a fuller examination of these tools, see Robert Seely, 'Defining Contemporary Russian Warfare: Beyond the Hybrid Headline', *RUSI Journal* (Vol. 162, No. 1, 2017), pp. 50–59.

I. The Three Tranches of the Kremlin Leaks

IN 2016 AND 2017, thousands of emails allegedly from Russian officials were publicly released, providing a unique insight into the Kremlin's operations in Ukraine. (The authenticity of these emails is addressed later in this chapter.) The hacks by which these emails were obtained were carried out by a coalition of Ukrainian 'hacktivists' calling themselves the Cyber Alliance. They were then analysed by a second group, InformNapalm,[22] a Ukrainian open-source journalistic investigative group, before being placed in three tranches on the internet for public access.

The Kremlin Leaks: Tranches One and Two

The first two tranches of emails (referred to in this paper as 'Tranches One and Two' or 'the Surkov Leaks') are from two email accounts believed to belong to Vladislav Surkov, a highly influential aide to Putin who is sometimes described as 'Putin's Rasputin'. The first tranche (2,347 emails from mailbox prm_surkova@gov.ru) was published on the internet on 25 October 2016. The second tranche (435 emails from mailbox pochta_mg@mail.ru) was published on the internet on 3 November 2016. These tranches have received moderate media coverage. However, no detailed analysis has been conducted.

In terms of content, the emails contained in these tranches address:

- The higher levels of Russia's strategy of subversion in Ukraine and Georgia, which forms part of a pattern of Russian activity to undermine democratic countries – including the US[23] – and to discredit and damage Western liberal institutions and values.
- The funding and management of the occupying administrations in Ukraine and Georgia (the Luhansk and Donetsk 'People's Republics' in Ukraine, as well as Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia).
- The tactics used to destabilise the entire country of Ukraine as part of Russia's alleged plan for 'soft federalisation', in a further effort to prevent its 'westward movement' in light of the failure to instigate a series of uprisings in Ukraine's Russian-speaking districts in the southeast of the country beyond the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.
- The overall political situation and the media discourse in Ukraine, demonstrating the Kremlin's prioritisation of intelligence that both frames the situation and provides the basis for subversion.

22. InformNapalm, 'About Us', <http://informnapalm.rocks/>, accessed 25 October 2018.
23. Craig Timberg et al., 'Russian Ads, Now Publicly Released, Show Sophistication of Influence Campaign', *Washington Post,* 1 November 2017.

In Russian military and strategic behaviour, this manipulation is guided by a theory known as 'reflexive control'. The leading Western expert on the theory, Timothy Thomas, describes it as: 'a means of conveying to a partner or an opponent specially prepared information to incline him to voluntarily make the predetermined decision desired by the initiator of the action'.[24] According to Thomas, Russia's use of reflexive control in Ukraine 'appears to be extensive',[25] reflecting the Kremlin's emphasis on the overwhelming use of non-military methods (according to Gerasimov, Russia's Chief of General Staff, non-military measures in operations are used over military operations by a ratio of 4:1).[26]

It is important for Ukraine and the West to understand that these fundamental concepts underpin Russia's subversive operations against the West, as well as its tactics in Ukraine.[27]

The Kremlin Leaks: Tranche Three

The third tranche of emails came from the accounts used by two other senior officials:

- Surkov's first deputy, Inal Ardzinba (1,046 emails from viktor_vinogr@mail.ru), who 'curated' and financed projects targeting the soft federalisation of Ukraine.
- The Kharkiv Communist Party leader Alla Aleksandrovska and her son Oleksandr Aleksandrovskyi (337 emails from mailbox fedor_fedorov53@mail.ru), who corresponded with Ardzinba.

This third tranche was published and analysed by InformNapalm on 2 November 2017[28] and was initially reviewed by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty journalist Mark Krutov on 10 November 2017.[29]

The emails reveal the details of Russia's day-to-day operations to destabilise Ukraine. In particular, they describe how the Kremlin researched Ukraine's weaknesses, sought out 'insiders' who could help identify such weaknesses and local groups that would help to exploit them, and secretly funded programmes designed to fracture Ukraine. It supported local groups who had, in essence, submitted grant proposals for activity that would exacerbate existing conflicts and generate new ones, stimulate protests, spread fear, confusion and distrust, and create the illusion of Ukrainian

24. Thomas, 'Russia's Reflexive Control Theory and the Military', p. 237.
25. Timothy L Thomas, 'Russia's Military Strategy and Ukraine: Indirect, Asymmetric – and Putin-Led', *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* (Vol. 28, No. 3, 2015), pp. 445–61.
26. *Ibid*.
27. For more on this subject, see Fiona Hill and Clifford G Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2015).
28. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', 2 November 2017, <https://informnapalm.org/en/surkovleaks-part-3-analysis-correspondence-surkovs-first-deputy-inal-ardzinba/>, accessed 11 January 2018.
29. Mark Krutov, 'Oskolki Russkogo Mira' ['Shards of the Russian World'], *Svoboda,* 10 November 2017, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/28846639.html>, accessed 26 January 2018.

popular support for federalism and/or Russia under the guise of fake civic activity. The emails suggest that the Kremlin and its agents worked closely with its 'grantees', analysing the success of each event and modifying future plans as the situation evolved.

This tranche of emails is particularly valuable precisely because Russian efforts to subvert civic society have received minimal media attention, especially in comparison to its information-warfare activities. They reveal that Russian disinformation operations in Ukraine were only part of a larger strategy to simulate a reality that did not exist in the media spheres of Ukraine, Russia and beyond, and on the ground with local groups and politicians. This multifaceted approach was also evident in Russia's meddling in the US presidential elections of 2016, which was not limited to social media activity but spilled out into the streets, with Kremlin-funded rallies attended by genuine local actors.[30]

Authenticity of the Emails

The source and authenticity of the emails contained in Tranches One and Two were questioned immediately upon their publication. Some have suggested that the CIA lent a helping hand in the hack in retaliation for the 2016 Democratic National Committee hack.[31] There is no evidence for this. In addition, the hacktivists deny this, asserting their own capacity to conduct hacking operations.[32] Others have questioned whether the contents of the hacked email accounts are authentic.[33] This is a critical point worthy of examination. There are five factors that strongly point to the authenticity of the emails.

1. The volume of emails was significant. Forging this amount of data is practically unfeasible, if technically possible. In addition, the database of emails overwhelmingly comprises daily briefs and media-monitoring summaries, while the amount of revelatory information is modest. If these emails were fake, it would be reasonable to expect that the ratio would be

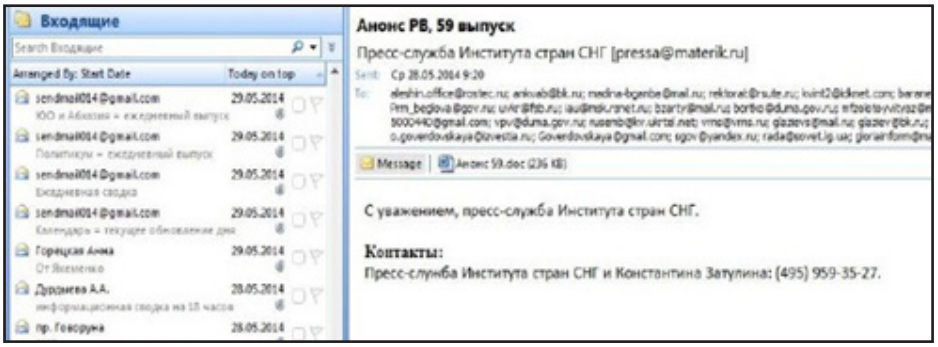
30. Grand Jury for the District of Columbia, 'Internet Research Agency Indictment'.
31. Shaun Walker, 'Kremlin Puppet Master's Leaked Emails are Price of Return to Political Frontline', *The Guardian,* 26 October 2016.
32. Alya Shandra, '"We Have No Need for CIA Help", Ukrainian Hackers of #SurkovLeaks: Exclusive Interview', *Euromaidan Press,* 2 November 2016.
33. Following the publication of Tranches One and Two, the Ukrainian media debated the separate publication of a screenshot of a document reportedly leaked as part of the tranches. Hosted on CyberHunta's website, the screenshot outlined a plan called *shatun* ('swayer' – someone who sways) to destabilise Ukraine's government. It has since been concluded that this document was a fake, leading some analysts to reason that none of the emails in Tranches One and Two could be trusted. The *shatun* document was not found in the dumps of Surkov's two inboxes, which are analysed in this paper. It is impossible to independently verify the origins of the document, and consequently, the document is not considered as part of this paper. Although the *shatun* document may have been fake, the five factors pointing to the authenticity of the emails lead the authors to conclude that the emails published in all three tranches are genuine.

reversed, as the forgers are unlikely to spend time on generating overwhelming amounts of data which would not contribute to an 'explosive' story.

2. Those whose email correspondence was leaked as part of the two tranches, such as the Russian businessman Yevgeny Chichvarkin,[34] or *Reuters,*[35] confirmed that these communications were genuine.
3. Events mentioned in the emails actually took place, such as British pop star Robbie Williams's performance for Surkov.[36]
4. Investigative journalists at the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab, who specialise in forensic research, have stated that the headers of those emails that they analysed both appear to be authentic and would be difficult to forge in such quantities.[37]
5. In January 2017, the Russian security service, the FSB, arrested the notorious Russian hacking group Shaltai-Boltai, along with government officials who were accused of collaborating with them, for hacking private correspondence[38] – a charge which Shaltai-Boltai denied.[39] Representatives of the Cyber Alliance have observed that the Kremlin prefers to see the theft as an internal matter, rather than credit Ukrainian hackers with the theft.[40]

34. Yevgeny Chichvarkin's Facebook page, 26 October 2016, <http://archive.is/Lk31s>, accessed 29 March 2017.
35. Alessandra Prentice and Margaryta Chornokondratenko, 'Ukrainian Hackers Promise Leaks on Putin Spokesman', *Reuters,* 4 November 2016.
36. Maxim Tucker, 'Email Leak Reveals Robbie Entertained Top Putin Aide', *The Times,* 28 October 2016.
37. Digital Forensic Research Lab, 'Putin's Email Scandal Continues: Ukrainian Hackers Leak Key Kremlin Aide's Email … Again', 3 November 2016, <https://medium.com/@DFRLab/putins-email-scandal-continues-d5954df23c43>, accessed 29 March 2017.
38. Oleg Yegorov, 'The FSB Breaks up Russia's Most Notorious Hacker Group', *Russia Beyond,* 2 February 2017, <http://rbth.com/science_and_tech/2017/02/02/the-fsb-breaks-up-russias-most-notorious-hacker-group_693923>, accessed 29 March 2017.
39. Andrei Soshnikov, 'Shaltai – ne Boltai; kak Sviazany Aresty Hakerov i Sotrudnikov FSB?' ['Shaltai – Not Boltai; How are the Arrests of the Hackers and FSB Operatives Connected?'], *BBC News,* 3 February 2017.
40. InformNapalm, 'Hacker Behind the Looking Glass: The Reasons Behind the Arrests in FSB and the Hunt for Humpty Dumpty', 31 January 2017, <https://informnapalm.org/en/hacker-behind-the-looking-glass-the-reasons-behind-the-arrests-in-fsb-and-the-hunt-for-humpty-dumpty/>, accessed 29 March 2017.

Figure 1: Example Email from the Leaks Sent from the Press Service of the Institute of CIS Countries, Pressa@materik.ru, to Surkov



Source: InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', 25 October 2016, <https://informnapalm.org/en/surkovleaksLetter> from pressa@materik.ru to prm_surkova@gov.ru, accessed 28 May 2014.

Figure 2: An Example of a Fragment of the Header of the Email Above Sent to Surkov's Prm_surkova@gov.ru Address from Pressa@materik.ru

> Return-path: <pressa@materik.ru> Envelope-to: prm_surkova@gov.ru
> Delivery-date: Wed, 28 May 2014 10:20:46 +0400 Received: from [172.16.1.53] (helo=mx3.gov.ru) by ipaccess.gov.ru with esmtp (Exim 4.80.1 (FreeBSD)) (envelope-from <pressa@materik.ru>) id 1WpXEE-000LGF-9e; Wed, 28 May 2014 10:20:46 +0400eceived-SPF: Pass (mx3.gov.ru: domain of pressa@materik.ru designates 92.53.117.39 as permitted sender) identity=mailfrom; client-ip=92.53.117.39

Source: InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists'.

The verification of the emails released in Tranche Three, purportedly from accounts used by Inal Ardzinba, viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, and Alla Aleksandrovska, fedor_fedorov53@mail.ru, was more difficult. The emails do not mention Inal Ardzinba by name; moreover, he is referred to as 'Ivan' in Aleksandrovska's email account. It is suggested that the correspondents concealed their identities deliberately. However, evidence accepted by a Ukrainian court in a case successfully brought against the pro-Russian journalist Artem Buzila in 2015 stated that the address viktor_vinogr@mail.ru belonged to Inal Ardzinba.[41]

41. Krutov, 'Oskolki Russkogo Mira' ['Shards of the Russian World'].

Regarding the email account fedor_fedorov53@mail.ru, an invitation forwarded to Ardzinba on 22 July 2015 mentions Alla Aleksandrovska by name.[42] However, it is likely that the account was also used by others, and at least by her son − as seen in an email sent on 15 September 2015, a biography written from the name of Oleksandr Aleksandrovskyi was sent from it to an unknown recipient.[43] An analysis of the correspondence sent to and from the email account suggests that both Alla and Oleksandr Aleksandrovskys were involved in the Kremlin's project, whose goal was the 'soft federalisation' of Ukraine, in this case working to advance the idea of expanded powers for the Kharkiv Oblast (County).

The emails in both the accounts of Ardzinba and the Aleksandrovskys contain a large number of photographic and video reports showing events on the ground, which further supports their authenticity. Nevertheless, it is important to note that they contain fewer analytical briefs than the two Surkov accounts, which might be explained by their respective roles: Surkov, as the more senior, dealt with overarching strategy and broader political analysis, while Ardzinba managed practical affairs and the Aleksandrovskys were simply 'project managers'. However, Ardzinba did receive several briefs from the address of the Russian consulate in Odesa, genconrfodessa@mail.ru, which consisted largely of media-monitoring overviews similar to those which Surkov received regularly.

Importantly, the Cyber Alliance hacktivists were not able to open several files from the Tranche Three emails, as these were password-protected. The only password-protected document that they did manage to open contained a plan, codenamed *Troy,* to overthrow the authorities in the southeastern Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia (discussed in detail in Chapter II).

42. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
43. *Ibid*.

II. The People Behind Russia's Hybrid War Against Ukraine

ANALYSIS OF THE three tranches of emails reveals a number of Russian and Ukrainian political figures who appear to have been important to the Kremlin's grip on Ukraine. The evidence suggests that these individuals worked closely with Surkov's office. Some of them were paid by the Kremlin. This chapter outlines the most prominent of these figures, using information drawn by Ukrainian journalist Andrei Santarovich,[44] additional fact-checked information from the leaked emails, and other open-source material.

Surkov's Right-Hand Man: Inal Ardzinba

Inal Ardzinba, born in 1990 in Abkhazia, is the chief adviser to the President's Administration for CIS Affairs (the part of the Russian government which is responsible for managing the CIS) and Surkov's deputy. In October 2015, Ardzinba was placed on an international 'wanted' list by Ukraine, and on 6 November 2015, the Prosecutor's Office in Odesa Oblast charged him in absentia in connection with the crime of 'preparing to change the state border of Ukraine and violating the order established by the Constitution of Ukraine'.[45] Emails from Tranche Three appear to provide evidence to support these accusations, as well as Ardzinba's rumoured status as an unofficial 'curator',[46] along with his supervisor, of the Russian presidential administration's direction in Ukraine.

These emails include reports from demonstrations held by pro-Russian activists in cities in southeastern Ukraine and events held to promote separatism. They also contain other documents showing how the Kremlin attempted to influence elections in the Kharkiv Oblast and destabilise other Ukrainian regions, with the objective of changing Ukraine's constitutional status from unitary state to federation, thereby enabling the country's gradual dismemberment.

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44. Andrei Santarovich, 'Kogo Seryi Kardinal Kremlya Podryadil na Voynu s Ukrainoi' ['Who the Gray Cardinal of the Kremlin Deployed to the War Against Ukraine'], *Realist*, 3 November 2016, <https://realist.online/article/kogo-seryj-kardinal-kremlya-surkov-podryadil-na-vojnu-s-ukraino>, accessed 29 March 2017.
45. *LB,* 'Sakvarelidze Povidomyv pro Pidozru Pomichnyka Surkova' ['Sakvarelidze Informed Surkov's Helper About the Notice of Suspicion'], 6 November 2015, <https://ukr.lb.ua/news/2015/11/06/320324_sakvarelidze_povidomiv_pro_pidozru.html>, accessed 29 January 2018.
46. UNIAN, 'Kremlivskyi Kurator Proektu "Bessarabiia" Ardzinba Provodyt Zustrichi z Deiakymy Ukrainskymy Politykamy' ['The Kremlin Curator of the "Besarabia" Project Ardzinba Conducts Meetings with Ukrainian Politicians'], 4 November 2016, <https://www.unian.ua/politics/1607251-kremlivskiy-kurator-proektu-bessarabiya-ardzinba-provodit-zustrichi-z-deyakimi-ukrajinskimi-politikami-sbu.html>, accessed 21 November 2018.

Political Pundits

The bulk of the emails from Tranches One and Two is composed of news reports and analytical briefs on the situation in Ukraine. Most of them were provided by two organisations: the Center for Current Policy; and the Centre for CIS Countries Studies. The depth of the analysis contained in these emails demonstrates the emphasis placed on intelligence gathering and understanding the situation in Ukraine, through which vulnerabilities might be identified and exercise influenced.

Here are the people behind those reports and briefs.

Aleksei Chesnakov

Aleksei Chesnakov is a former deputy secretary of the General Council of the ruling United Russia party, which supports Putin, and Director of the Russian Centre for Current Policy, considered by the Russian media to be one of the principal think tanks working for the Kremlin.[47]

According to the Russian newspaper *Gazeta.ru,*[48] Chesnakov has overseen the press centres of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LNR), recruiting Ukrainian opinion leaders to help him shape Russian and foreign media coverage of events in Donbas, and to prepare breaking news stories and sociological studies.[49] Chesnakov has refuted these media rumours, stating that the Centre for Current Policy simply monitored the political and economic situation in Ukraine, and was not involved in developing the ideology of 'Novorossiya'[50] (literally, 'New Russia', a reference to the eponymous governorate of the Russian Empire).

Surkov has been sent, via his pochta_mg@mail.ru email address, summaries of articles by Chesnakov's pool of experts in the Russian-language media that echo the Kremlin line on Ukraine and Russia's proxy republics in Ukraine. These were sent several times a week from ask1@digitalsafe.com, which is reported by the pro-Russian Odesa separatist Artem Buzila to belong to Ukrainian influencer Oleg Bondarenko[51] (who is discussed in more detail later in this chapter). It also appears likely that emails to Surkov from the addresses a704814@gmail.com and chesnaa@icloud.com, signed ACh or Aleksei Chesn, are from Chesnakov. They contain decrees of the President of Ukraine, decisions of the Ukrainian National Security and Defence Council,

47. Santarovich, 'Kogo Seryi Kardinal Kremlya Podryadil na Voynu s Ukrainoi' ['Who the Gray Cardinal of the Kremlin Deployed to the War Against Ukraine'].
48. Vladimir Dergachov, 'Kto Vliyaet na Sudbu Novorossii?' ['Who Influences the Fate of Novorossiya?'], *Gazeta.ru,* 28 January 2015, <https:/www.gazeta.ru/politics/2015/01/22_a_ 6383481.shtml>, accessed 19 August 2017.
49. As can be seen by their appearance on Chesnakov's website, <https:/www.actualcomment.ru>.
50. Dergachov, 'Kto Vliyaet na Sudbu Novorossii?' ['Who Influences the Fate of Novorossiya?'].
51. InformNapalm, 'BuzilaLeaks: Porochnyie Svyazi i Sekretyi Podryivnoy Deyatelnosti Free Buzila' ['Vicious Connections and Secrets of Free Buzila's Subversive Activities'], 14 December 2016, <https://informnapalm.org/30614-buzilaleaks-buzila/>, accessed 19 August 2017.

statements of LNR–DNR representatives, lists of all Ukrainian political parties, and analysis of statements in the English-language media relating to the 'republics'.

Andrey Ashkerov

Andrey Ashkerov, a philosopher and protégé of Surkov's, published a book in 2013 entitled *Surkov's Propaganda: A Brief Course,*[52] in which he analysed Surkov's propaganda. The leaked emails reveal Ashkerov's philosophical vision for how Russia should handle Ukraine's westward movement, concluding in one email dated 22 January 2014 that Russia 'should perceive Ukraine as "another Russia … as the second head of the two-headed eagle, eternally looking to the West"'.[53] Intervention in Ukraine, an integral part of Russia, might therefore be legitimised by the need to protect the welfare of the whole 'organism'. Such intellectual concepts have proved important to the Kremlin's full spectrum of operations and its use of manipulative techniques, such as reflexive control, targeting both domestic and international audiences. An example of the fake reality it has created for the Russian population is the narrative that fascist Ukrainians are attacking Russians in the Donbas region.[54] This narrative has proved powerful in mobilising Russian popular support and also in making it extremely difficult for Russians to oppose the Kremlin's actions without being seen as pro-fascist or pro-Nazi.

Konstantin Zatulin

Konstantin Zatulin is another well-known Russian political scientist whom the Ukrainian security agencies declared persona non grata before the Russo-Ukrainian war for statements and activities perceived to be fuelling separatism in Crimea.[55] Surkov received summaries of the content of Zatulin's TV show, which promoted the Kremlin narrative, and which was broadcast in Russia by the state-run channel TV-Tsentr, as well as in Ukraine and Belarus via cable TV.

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52. Andrey Ashkerov, *Surkov's Propaganda: A Brief Course* (Skimen Institute of Power, 2013), <https://www.ozon.ru/context/detail/id/21843048/>, accessed 21 November 2018.
53. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', 25 October 2016, <https://informnapalm.org/en/surkovleaks>, accessed 10 November 2016, converted to pdf on 19 August 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Украина.pdf>.
54. *Euromaidan Press*, 'Misled by Russian Propaganda on Ukrainian Fascists, Kyrgyz Mercenary Leaves Separatists Ranks', 20 March 2015, <http://euromaidanpress.com/2015/03/20/misled-by-russian-propaganda-kyrgyz-mercenary-leaves-separatists-ranks/>, accessed 21 November 2018.
55. Zatulin has been declared persona non grata several times by the Ukrainian authorities. His statements perceived to be infringing on Ukraine's territorial integrity include declarations about Sevastopol being 'historically Russian', that Crimea's existence as part of Ukraine is a 'result of a historical compromise between two countries', and his veiled threat of Russia using force if Ukraine were to reconsider Crimea's status as an autonomous region. *BBC,* 'Zatulina Nepokoit Status Krymu ta Sevastopolia' ['Zatulin is Preoccupied with the Status of Crimea and Sevastopol'], 16 October 2010.

Zatulin is also the head of the Centre for CIS Countries Studies, whose analytical briefs on Ukraine and the Russian-occupied regions of Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia Surkov also received. Examples include a 30 October 2013 report which concluded that the pro-Russian Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych would likely sign the EU Association Agreement in Vilnius during the summit of 28–29 November 2013.[56] This analysis may have been influential in the subsequent, and secret, meeting between Yanukovych and Putin which led to Ukraine pulling out of the deal amid accusations of Russian political blackmail. If so, this would demonstrate the link between highly detailed research and political outcomes.

Analysis was sent to Surkov on 19 September 2014 of two laws adopted by the Ukrainian parliament three days earlier regarding the political status of the Donbas region.[57] The analysis concluded that these laws might eventually prove to be beneficial to Russia because they would enable the Kremlin to 'unfreeze' the conflict through another round of violence at a time of its choosing. This is one example of the Centre's analysis of Ukraine's political landscape which could be used by Russia to identify opportunities to intervene and retain leverage over Ukraine's internal stability.

On 6 February 2014, days before Yanukovych fled Ukraine, Surkov also received a press monitoring report which described a meeting organised by Zatulin with pro-Russian Cossack militants, during which he sought their support and discussed what actions they and Russia would take should the Euromaidan protestors win.[58] These discussions might well be understood as preliminary planning for the impending annexation of the peninsula, which culminated in the referendum on 16 March 2014.

The PR Squad

Pavlo Broyde

Pavlo Broyde was a PR expert who corresponded both with Surkov and Ardzinba. Broyde's CV, which was sent to Surkov on 9 July 2014,[59] outlined his professional involvement in, and close knowledge of, life in the eastern Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia. Previous roles and experience included work with an archpriest of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP), the

56. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', <https://informnapalm.org/en/surkovleaks>, accessed 10 November 2016, converted to pdf on 19 August 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/готовность-Украины-к....pdf>.
57. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', <https://informnapalm.org/en/surkovleaks>, accessed 10 November 2016, converted to pdf on 19 August 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Законы-для-Донбасса.pdf>.
58. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', https://informnapalm.org/en/surkovleaks, accessed 10 November 2016, converted to pdf on 26 January 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Мониторинг-Встреча-Затулина-с-казаками.pdf>.
59. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', <https://informnapalm.org/en/surkovleaks>, accessed 10 November 2016, converted to pdf on 2 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Бройде.pdf>.

youth sector of the UOC MP (albeit in Kyiv), and local pro-Russian organisations, including the youth organisations *Nashi* (Ours) and *Molodaya Gvardiya* (Young Guard). Most notably, in 2012 he headed the 'shadow technological centre' of Yanukovych's Party of Regions in Zaporizhzhia, which was, in effect, the headquarters of the president's shadow power base in media, law enforcement and government. The local press also linked Broyde to the local businessman Yevhen Anisimov, a key figure in the unofficial power structures which allowed oligarchs to preserve their power in the city.[60]

After Anisimov was arrested in 2013, Broyde appears to have left for Moscow in search of benefactors.[61] Using his knowledge of the Zaporizhzhian political landscape, Broyde managed the Kremlin's plans for destabilising the region. His extensive communication with Ardzinba, outlined later in this chapter, reveals how the Kremlin directly supervised the generation of local support for Broyde's suggestion that Zaporizhzhia be granted special administrative status to facilitate wider federalisation across Ukraine. In July 2014, Broyde asked Surkov to pay for an assistant, Oleksandr Slabiyev, his long-time acquaintance from Zaporizhzhia, together with whom he had worked for Anisimov.

Oleksandr Slabiyev

Oleksandr Slabiyev, director of a PR agency, became an active leader of the Zaporizhzhia separatists in March and April 2014 during a series of Kremlin-coordinated protests aimed at separating the Russophonic southeast region from Ukraine. In May 2014, when it became clear that the Kremlin's 'Novorossiya' plan was failing, Slabiyev escaped to occupied Crimea, fearing arrest.[62] Local media reports suggest he later joined the Zarya battalion, one of the largest illegal armed groups of the LNR.[63]

In an email to Surkov's account on 24 July 2017,[64] Broyde cites Slabiyev's contacts with the pro-Russian law enforcers in Zaporizhzhia, developed over the preceding decade, as one of his strong points, and recommends that the Kremlin work with Zarya to destabilise Ukraine. Local Zaporizhzhian media has also reported that Slabiyev would be involved in preparing the

60. 061.ua, '"Chernyi" Piarshchik Anisimova Pavel Broyde Ofitsialno Schitaetsa Propavshym bez Vesti (FOTO)' [Anisimov's "Black" PR Guy Broyde Considered Officially Missing'], 23 October 2013, <https://www.061.ua/news/403679/cernyj-piarsik-anisimova-pavel-brojde-oficialno-scitaetsa-propavsim-bez-vesti-foto>, accessed 28 November 2018.
61. Santarovich, 'Kogo Seryi Kardinal Kremlya Podryadil na Voynu s Ukrainoi' ['Who the Gray Cardinal of the Kremlin Deployed to the War Against Ukraine'].
62. *Ibid.*
63. *Zp.comments.ua,* 'Gotovit "Smotriashchego" v Zaporozhzhie Budet Piarshchik Anisimova' ['Anisimov's PR Technologist will Prepare the "Overseer" for Zaporizhzhia'], 3 November 2016, <http://zp.comments.ua/news/2016/11/03/130352.html>, accessed 29 March 2017.
64. See snapshot of email forwarded to Surkov's mailbox prm_surkova@gov.ru from brusovg@mail.ru on 24 July 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/bryusov.jpg>, accessed 28 January 2018.

'information ground' for Anisimov's return to the city.[65] Should this happen, it would be reasonable to assume that this PR role would be one of Slabiyev's responsibilities, in collaboration with Surkov.

The Chekist: Dmitry Soin

Born in Tiraspol in Moldova 1969, Dmitry Soin has been actively involved in efforts by pro-Moscow separatists for the eastern Moldova area of Transnistria to secede, first by participating in the Transnistrian war of 1992, then by reportedly serving the KGB of the unrecognised Transnistrian republic during the 'frozen conflict' that followed, being elected as a deputy (member of parliament) to the Transnistrian 'parliament' in 2010, and founding the 'Union of Transnistrians of Ukraine' in 2013. Moldova placed Soin on the Interpol list on 2004, and in 2014, Ukrainian authorities arrested him in Odesa; however, Soin managed to escape from custody.[66] In 2016, Russian media reported his appointment as the rector of the JUSTO European Studies Institute, based in Moscow.

Although Soin concealed his identity in his correspondence with Ardzinba (revealed in Tranche Three), referring to himself as 'Anedrey Gold' and emailing from goldabxazia@mail.ru, it has been possible to confirm his identity due to an email that he sent to Ardzinba on 1 June 2015.[67] In it, he refers to the 10-year anniversary of his brainchild, the International Youth Organization 'PRORYV!',[68] which was established to encourage pro-Russian sentiment among young people in Transnistria, but which was also reportedly used as a blueprint for fuelling separatism in Ukraine and Georgia.[69] Commenting on the need to find qualified young cadres for the Kremlin's separatist projects in Odesa, 'Gold' says that 'there are graduates of the School left, which we prepared for *ukropiya* [a derogatory term for Ukraine]'. This is further indirect proof that the Kremlin had coordinated its actions to fuel separatism in Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine from 2005.

65. *Zp.comments.ua,* 'Gotovit "Smotriashchego" v Zaporozhzhie Budet Piarshchik Anisimova' ['Anisimov's PR Technologist Will Prepare the "Overseer" for Zaporizhzhia'].
66. *Prestupnosti.net [Criminality.net],* 'Pridnestrovskiy Deputat, Razyskivaiemyi Interpolom, Sbezhal iz-pod Konvoya SBU v' ['The Transnistrian MP Wanted by Interpol Escaped from the SBU's Convoy'], 1 December 2014, <https://news.pn/ru/criminal/119841>, accessed 26 February 2018.
67. Further proof that it was Soin writing as 'Anedrey Gold' is in an email he sent to Ardzinba on 2 May 2015, where login and password 'soin.1969' and 'dsoin_781969lama' are provided.
68. *Tiras,* 'Pridnestrovskiy "PRORYV!" Otmechaet 10 let so dnia Obrazovania' ['Transnistria's "PRORYV" Marks 10 Years Since its Foundation'], 1 June 2015, <https://tiras.ru/obshhestvo/43240-pridnestrovskiy-proryv-otmechaet-10-let-so-dnya-obrazovaniya.html>, accessed 30 January 2018.
69. Andrei Datsiuk, 'Istoriya Povtoriaetsa – on Pridnestrovia k Novorossii' ['History is Repeating Itself: From Transnistria to Novorossii'], *112.ua,* 30 September 2014, <https://112.ua/statji/istoriya-povtoryaetsya-kremlevskie-plany-ot-pridnestrovya-k-novorossii-122424.html>, accessed 30 January 2018.

In another email to Ardzinba on 4 May 2015,[70] Soin suggested resorting to terrorist attacks on infrastructure, transport and communications. Indeed, the strategic plans and forecasts set out in his emails to Ardzinba testify to Soin's experience in developing pro-Russian separatist movements in Ukraine's neighbouring countries. (Soin's role is described in detail in Chapter V.)

The Communist: Alla Aleksandrovska

As discussed in Chapter V, Alla Aleksandrovska, the first secretary of the Kharkiv Oblast Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, appears to have been the organiser of the Kremlin's plans to encourage separatism in the Kharkiv Oblast and secure changes in the Ukrainian constitution that would lead to the federalisation of Ukraine. She was supported in this work by her son, Oleksandr Aleksandrovskyi. They appear to have corresponded with Ardzinba from the email account fedor_fedorov53@mail.ru. It appears that Aleksandrovska, a veteran of Ukrainian politics, obtained funding from Ardzinba to help get seats for former Communist party members during local elections, representing a new (puppet) political party (the Communist party had been banned in 2015). She also supervised the implementation of various Kremlin-directed measures aimed at establishing a 'special status' for a number of Ukrainian regions and, ultimately, a federalised Ukraine.

The Russian Politicians

Aleksei Muratov

Aleksei Muratov, a former deputy in the Russian city of Kurchatov, near the Ukrainian Kharkiv Oblast, is a member of the 'United Russia' party and an official representative of the self-proclaimed DNR in Russia. He communicated with Ardzinba using the email address kursk18@gmail.com.

Muratov worked with networks of proxy groups to advance the interests of the 'Russian world', publicly criticise the post-Euromaidan local governments in Kharkiv, Odesa, Dnipro, and Kherson, and conduct pro-Russian rallies in Ukraine. One plan, for a month of rallies in Kharkiv,[71] was priced at $19,200,[72] for instance. Other proposals put forward by Muratov appear to be criminal in nature. For example, on 20 October 2014, he forwarded to Ardzinba a proposal from a 'Comrade Vitaliy' to hack email accounts, Skype accounts, websites and WhatsApp accounts, and to conduct denial of service attacks for fees of between $50 and $2,000 per attack, bugging smartphones and computers.[73] On 4 November 2014, Muratov sent Ardzinba a password-protected archive,

70. Email from goldabxazia@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru on 4 May 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
71. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to pdf on 1 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Мероприятия-в-Харькове-октябрь.xls>.
72. Throughout the paper, the sum in US dollars was based on the currency exchange rate of the day: US$1 = €0.86 = £0.75.
73. Email from kursk18@gmail.com to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru on 20 October 2014, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.

originally from Vladimir Novikov, the DNR commander of the Operation *Troy* special forces detachment (this is the only password-protected file that Ukrainian activists have been able to open so far).[74] The file contained a plan, codenamed *Troy,* to overthrow the Ukrainian authorities in the Zaporizhzhia Oblast in Eastern Ukraine,[75] using existing agent networks and new proxy civic groups and at an estimated cost of $179,000.[76]

Sargis Mirzakhanyan

Sargis Mirzakhanyan is an assistant to Igor Zotov, a deputy from the political party A Just Russia, and an organiser within the international department of the Union of Russian Volunteers. Mirzakhanyan's email correspondence with Ardzinba, sent from the email account mir-sargis@yandex.ru, suggests he was responsible for ensuring the support of several internationals for Russia's projects to federalise Ukraine. For example:

- It appears Mirzakhanyan organised a rally in support of the Kremlin's 'People's Council of Besarabia' in Bulgaria, of which he sent photos to Ardzinba on 18 May 2015.
- On 7 June 2015 he suggested holding a rally in Warsaw, in conjunction with the Polish pro-Russian left-wing party Zmiana, in support of proposed changes to Ukraine's constitution and the release of the Ukrainian separatist journalist Artem Buzila.[77] The rally was to involve between 200 and 250 people at an estimated cost of $20,000. It appears the rally did not go ahead.
- Mirzakhanyan sent a press release to Ardzinba on 27 May 2015 which expressed support for 'Porto Franco', the Kremlin's federalisation project in Odesa, and mentioned Italian nationals Giacomo Bezzi and Giuriato Luigi.[78] The press release referred to them as members of the Italian parliament, but Bezzi's tenure as an MP ended in 2008, while Luigi does not appear to be a politician.

The Kharkiv Diaspora Coordinator: Petr Gorbunov

Petr Gorbunov was chairman of an organisation of Ukrainians who came from Kharkiv Oblast but were living just over the border in Russia. Using the email address gorbunovpetr@inbox.ru,

74. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
75. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to pdf on 1 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/План-компании-ТРОЯ.pdf>.
76. *Ibid.*
77. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 1 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Акт.pdf>.
78. Email from mailbox mir-sargis@yandex.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru on 27 May 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.

he appears to have kept Ardzinba informed of the social problems and tensions in Kharkiv – as reported by his 'informers' working in Kharkiv businesses – and he sent plans and prices for rallies, some of which did take place. He was also involved in a pro-Russian Kharkiv media forum, which produced a draft resolution calling on current Ukraine President Petro Poroshenko to end the war and the economic blockade of the Russian-occupied Donbas region, to preserve business relations with the neighbouring Belgorod Oblast in Russia, and to expand the powers of the Kharkiv Oblast – demands which all played into Russia's influence campaign in Ukraine. Gorbunov sent Ardzinba the draft resolution on 5 February 2015.[79]

The Activist: Anton Davidchenko

Odesa activist Anton Davidchenko appears to have been closely involved in Russian provocations in Odesa, Zaporizhzhia, Dnipropetrovsk, Mykolayiv and Kyiv. In February and March 2014, Davidchenko led protests against the Euromaidan revolution and called for the federalisation of Ukraine and for the secession of its Odesa Oblast. On 17 March 2014, he was detained by Ukraine's Security Service and, having admitted his guilt, was sentenced to five years' imprisonment. However, when he was released from custody on a three-year probation period, Davidchenko left for Russia.[80] He was again declared wanted by Ukraine on 14 November 2014 for evading the authorities.[81]

Ardzinba's email account contains 461 messages from the account kolokol_2008@mail.ru, starting from 2 November 2014. The emails are signed by Davidchenko, and show him: coordinating street action against the Ukrainian authorities and identifying potential leaders in support of the Kremlin's 'Porto Franco' separatist project in Odesa; creating memes, trolling on social media and spreading disinformation; organising press conferences; and offering money to journalists in Ukrainian media outlets to feature pro-Russian and pro-separatist activities. Frequently these emails included salary notes and costings for the activities, indicating that the Kremlin was financing this movement to create an illusion of popular support for its projects in Ukraine. Davidchenko's correspondence with Ardzinba suggests that he coordinated these activities from outside Odesa, a view supported by the fact that local media has never reported on his return to Ukraine.

Assessing the Cast

These are only a selection of Surkov and Ardzinba's principal correspondents. The emails suggest that others, writing under code names, also played key roles in coordinating Russia's actions in Ukraine, but have yet to be identified – for example, 'Luisa Mamedova' appears to have managed

79. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 1 February 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/rezolyutsia.pdf>.
80. *Dumskaya.net*, 'Anton Davidchenko', <http://dumskaya.net/tag/anton-davidchenko/>, accessed 18 November 2018.
81. *Dumskaya.net*, 'Anton Davidchenko ob'javlen v Rozysk' ['Anton Davidchenko is Declared Wanted'], 14 November 2014, <http://dumskaya.net/news/anton-davidchenko-obyavlen-v-rozysk-040897/>, accessed 18 November 2018.

press activity and Russian-sponsored provocations in Odesa, while 'Rou Kin' apparently worked closely with the Aleksandrovskys. Both appeared in Tranche Three of the leaked emails.

Nevertheless, the leaked emails belonging to Surkov and Ardzinba demonstrate the emphasis on creating a convincing picture of genuine local and even international support for Russian ideas for Ukraine – an essential step under the Russian non-conventional forms of conflict. They reveal some key features of Russia's modus operandi in Ukraine:

- **Use of intelligence and networks**: With the help of networks of Russian and Ukrainian agents and analytical centres, the Kremlin studied every nook and cranny of the Ukrainian political and social landscape to identify and exploit its weaknesses. The intelligence was also used to shape the Russian popular perception of events in Ukraine as well as decisions about open interventions in Ukrainian affairs.
- **Covert influence**: The Kremlin relied on exiled Ukrainians who were ideologically aligned with its values but at the same time had an insider's view of the weaknesses of Ukrainian society. These Ukrainians advanced a 'soft federalisation' of Ukraine and managed groups of 'foot soldiers' who imitated genuine grassroots support for Russian narratives.
- **Direct influence**: The Kremlin attempted to gain direct influence over Ukrainian politics by financing the local electoral campaign of a political party composed of former Communists. The Kremlin also considered the use of hackers and the violent takeover of an administrative region in Ukraine.
- **Coordinated intervention across target countries**: One Kremlin project to destabilise Ukraine was developed by a Transnistrian KGB officer whose techniques were also used to advance Russian interests in Moldova and Georgia.

III. Ukrainian Vulnerabilities Exploited by Russia's Hybrid War

IT MUST BE noted here that Russia's use of hybrid warfare against Ukraine was possible in large part due to Ukraine's internal weaknesses. Principal among these were the weak and enfeebled state institutions that allowed corruption, organised crime and a shadow power structure to flourish. On 10 July 2014, Surkov was emailed proposals by Pavlo Broyde – the PR expert from the Eastern Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia – about how the systematic and organised 'racket' created by President Yanukovych's Party of Regions might be used to Russia's advantage.[82]

Under Yanukovych, those state and regional organs responsible for controlling or monitoring political processes – including the secret services, parts of local government, police and local political parties, which had already fallen under the de facto control of business groups and clans after Ukrainian independence – were corralled further into 'shadow verticals of power', tying them even more closely to the criminal world and shadow economy in Ukraine. In return for such opportunities to enrich themselves and exert control over an institution or, indeed, a region, Yanukovych's cronies were tasked with: preserving political power over the regions and generating support for the Party of Regions, with the help of PR specialists who helped discredit and damage political opponents, disloyal business individuals and groups; ensuring that the media remained compliant; and ensuring that electoral campaigns were successful.

The weakness and corruption of the state acted as a barrier for civic activism and even basic loyalty, making it vulnerable to destabilisation campaigns (and it is this entrenched system of corruption and criminal fiefdoms that the current Ukrainian state is attempting to reform, with mixed success). Broyde commented that after Yanukovych fled from Ukraine following the Euromaidan revolution, some of these 'shadow verticals of power' were disbanded. However, he observed that some supporters remained and could be used to advance Russian interests.

Tranche Three of the leaked emails highlights another key, and related, vulnerability of Ukraine that was exploited by the Kremlin: the willingness of some Ukrainians, whether for ideological or pragmatic reasons, to advance Russian interests and support Russian soft-power operations in their country. Ideological collaborators were often sympathetic to the ideas of the 'Russkiy Mir': the expansion of the 'Russian World', in conflict with the decadent Western civilisation known as

82. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 1 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/28.06.14.-В-отношении-возможностей-структур-и-групп.pdf>.

'Gay Europa', beyond Russia's borders to wherever Russian speakers may live. While the relative success of these ideas in southeastern Ukraine can be partially attributed to the operations of Russian agents, such as Dmitry Soin, they fell on fertile ground that had been prepared through the soft-power influence of Russian culture projects and arguably Ukraine's status as the junior partner in its relationship with Russia.[83] Had Ukraine pursued a more vigorous state-building policy during the 23 years between gaining independence and the outbreak of war, the covert operations conducted against it might have been considerably less effective.

Costings sent by email to Ardzinba suggest that payment was a common factor for pragmatic collaborators. Expenditure by proxy groups included: bribes to local media – a phenomenon called *dzhynsa* (literally 'jeans'); bribes to law enforcers; payment for mobs of 'sportsmen' and young men trained in martial arts to provide unofficial security at the overtly pro-Russian propagandist events; and rented 'audiences' to create an illusion of mass support for Russia's public events with the objective of undermining Ukraine's sovereignty. Explanations for the willingness of some Ukrainians to participate in such activities include poverty, divided loyalties, and the failure by the state to inculcate loyalty to the country.

Russia's use of disinformation to create simulacrums – fake reality – is well known; however, the leaked emails demonstrate how it masterfully exploited the functional weaknesses of Ukraine's political life – which are not dissimilar to other post-Soviet countries, including Russia itself – to its own advantage, using real-life events held by pro-Russia agents to create a false image of widespread grassroots support in Ukraine for pro-Russian policies. It is also important to acknowledge that Ukraine is not the only country that is subject to state decay, corruption and organised crime.

83. For more on this, see Alexander Bogomolov and Oleksandr Lytvynenko, 'A Ghost in the Mirror: Russian Soft Power in Ukraine', Briefing Paper, Chatham House, January 2012, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Russia%20and%20Eurasia/0112bp_bogomolov_lytvynenko.pdf>, accessed 26 October 2018; UK Home Office, 'Country Information and Guidance. Ukraine: Fear of Organised Criminal Gangs', May 2016, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/566605/CIG_-_Ukraine_-_Organised_crime.pdf>, accessed 24 June 2018; Antoaneta Dimitrova et al., 'The Elements of Russia's Soft Power: Channels, Tools, and Actors Promoting Russian Influence in the Eastern Partnership Countries', EU-STRAT Working Paper Series No. 04, July 2017, <http://eu-strat.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/WP4.pdf>, accessed 24 June 2018.

IV. The 'People's Republics' in the Donbas Region

THE FACT THAT each of Russia's reform-minded neighbours is plagued by separatism is no coincidence. There is a hard link between the desire for democracy and the desire to move out of the Russian sphere of influence – and these desires have been countered, on the Kremlin's part, by the use of 'managed conflicts'.

The Russian-backed regimes of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia and the Donetsk and Luhansk 'People's Republics' in Ukraine serve similar goals: to create zones of permanent turbulence and instability inside those countries; to distract their respective governments from pursuing broadly reformist and democratic agendas; and therefore to disrupt these countries' political, economic and social development – and their movement towards the EU and the West more generally.[84] A secondary objective may be to fuel organised crime and corruption, which is essential to Russia's current system of governance and further undermines the ability to create law-governed states. Such tactics have come to be known variously as the creation of 'frozen conflicts',[85] 'managed instability',[86] 'postponed conflicts'[87] and 'protracted conflicts'.[88]

84. Serving a similar goal, but now under diminished Russian influence, is Transnistria in Moldova.
85. Mary Alice C Clancy and John Nagle, 'Frozen Conflicts, Minority Self-Governance, Asymmetrical Autonomies: In Search of a Framework for Conflict Management and Conflict Resolution', paper presented to the 6th Asia–Europe Roundtable, 10–12 June 2009, University of Ulster, Londonderry/Derry, Northern Ireland and Letterkenny, Republic of Ireland, 1 May 2009, p. 14, <https://www.asef.org/images/docs/1276-6th_AER_Background_Paper_-_Dr._Clancy_and_Dr._Nagle.pdf>, accessed 8 June 2016.
86. Jakob Tolstrup, 'Studying a Negative External Actor: Russia's Management of Stability and Instability in the "Near Abroad"', *Democratization* (Vol. 16, No. 5, 2009), pp. 922–44.
87. Filon Morar, 'The Myth of "Frozen Conflicts"', *Per Concordiam* (Vol. 1, No. 2, June 2010), pp. 10–17, <http://www.marshallcenter.org/mcpublicweb/MCDocs/files/College/F_Publications/perConcordiam/pC_V1N2_en.pdf>, accessed 8 June 2016; Nicu Popescu, '"Outsourcing" de Facto Statehood: Russia and the Secessionist Entities in Georgia and Moldova', Policy Brief No. 109, Centre for European Policy Studies, July 2006, pp. 1–8, <http://aei.pitt.edu/11718/1/1361.pdf>, accessed 8 May 2016.
88. *BBC News,* 'Nato Chief: Putin "Wants Zone of Russian Influence"', 4 September 2014.

In September 2013, Surkov was placed[89] in charge of Putin's policy in the occupied regions of Georgia[90] and, according to unofficial sources, relations with Ukraine. The leaked emails reveal that Surkov was widely involved in the management of the 'republics' in Donbas. It must be noted, however, that the latter was not the preserve of Surkov's office alone,[91] with Russia's special forces, primarily the FSB and General Staff of the Armed Forces (GRU), involved in fomenting the conflict at least from mid-March 2014 and providing military training thereafter. Surkov's office was involved in the political aspects of the Russian proxy states and it is these aspects which are reflected in the emails from Tranches One and Two. The work of the three agencies appears to have been uncoordinated at first, although later reports suggest that a joint coordination centre, bringing together the FSB and GRU, was established in 2015.[92] However, Surkov's office appeared to be in conflict with the FSB in the Donbas.

Kremlin-Appointed 'Leaders'

The leaked emails from Tranche One reveal the first days of the proxy states – including the appointment by Moscow of the 'founders' of the DNR (in the same way that it controlled appointments in the proxy administrations of both Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in Georgia[93]). On 13 May 2014, Surkov received a list of recommendations for posts in the DNR government from an employee of the international investment firm Marshall, owned by Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeev.[94] These names included: Denis Pushilin, an alleged former GRU officer and previously Malofeev's employee; Igor Girkin, better known by his nom de guerre, 'Strelkov'; and local pro-Russian individuals A Purgin, A Khodokovskiy and A Zakharchenko. The email explained that 'Konstantin asked [me] to give this to you in the near future', suggesting that Malofeev himself approved the candidates appearing to expose the crucial role played by this oligarch in Russian foreign influence campaigns abroad.

89. *RIA Novosti,* 'Surkov Naznachen Pomoshchnikov Presidenta Rossiyi' ['Surkov Appointed Aide to Russian President'], 20 September 2013, <https://ria.ru/politics/20130920/964778327.html>, accessed 30 March 2017.
90. In August 2008, the Russian army invaded Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions. Russia later proceeded to recognise their independence. Today, only four UN states recognise South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent countries – Russia, Nicaragua, Nauru and Venezuela.
91. Konstantin Gaaze, 'Vybor Surkova: Zachem Kreml Opiat Meniaiet Donetskoe Nachalstvo' ['Surkov's Choice: Why the Kremlin is Changing the Donetsk Command Again'], *Forbes Russia,* 7 September 2015, <http://www.forbes.ru/mneniya-column/vertikal/298849-vybor-surkova-zachem-kreml-opyat-menyaet-donetskoe-nachalstvo>, accessed 24 June 2018.
92. Tor Bukkvoll, 'Russian Special Operations Forces in Crimea and Donbas', *Parameters* (Vol. 46, No. 2, Summer 2016).
93. David Batashvili, '(In)Dependence: Glimpse into Surkov Files', *The Clarion,* 12 December 2016.
94. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 1 February 2016, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Untitled2.pdf>.

Correspondence to Surkov also testifies to the deep involvement of the central Kremlin apparatus in even the day-to-day activities of the DNR. For example:

- A November 2015 report from Aleksandr Kazakov, the self-described 'adviser to the Head of the DNR', describes how Facebook continually closed the account of the then prime minister of the DNR, Aleksandr Zakharchenko, in response to large numbers of complaints from Ukrainian Facebook users.[95]
- On 13 June 2014, Pushilin, who had been appointed the Chairman of the DNR 'parliament' in May 2014, sent Surkov a printout of all the positions in the DNR parliament, including the maintenance staff,[96] suggesting that the Kremlin pulled the strings in the self-proclaimed DNR 'parliament', not only the 'government'.
- On 14 June 2014, Pushilin sent a list of compensation paid by a committee to the families of soldiers who had been killed and wounded, presumably to justify expenditure.[97] This points to organised Russian state support to the families of local militants fighting against the Ukrainian army.

It further appears that the Kremlin worked with its proxy leaders in the DNR on more fundamental issues. On 12 January 2016, Pushilin sent Surkov maps of the 'Ukrainian Federation' in an email with the subject 'print out'. The map divides Ukraine into three (see Figure 3): the green area of Novorossiya (New Russia); the yellow area of Malorossiya (Little Russia); and the orange area entitled Halychyna (Galicia), largely comprising Ukrainian territory that had been under the rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, not the Russian Empire. The specific purpose of this map is unknown; nevertheless, it points to Russian plans for the federalisation of Ukraine.

95. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Помощнику-Президента-России-1.pdf>.
96. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/штат.pdf>.
97. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 28 May 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Отчет-Комиссии-по-пострадавшим-на-13-06-14.pdf>.

Figure 3: One of the Maps of the 'Ukrainian Federation' Sent by Pushilin to Surkov, Entitled 'Composition of the Ukrainian Federation'

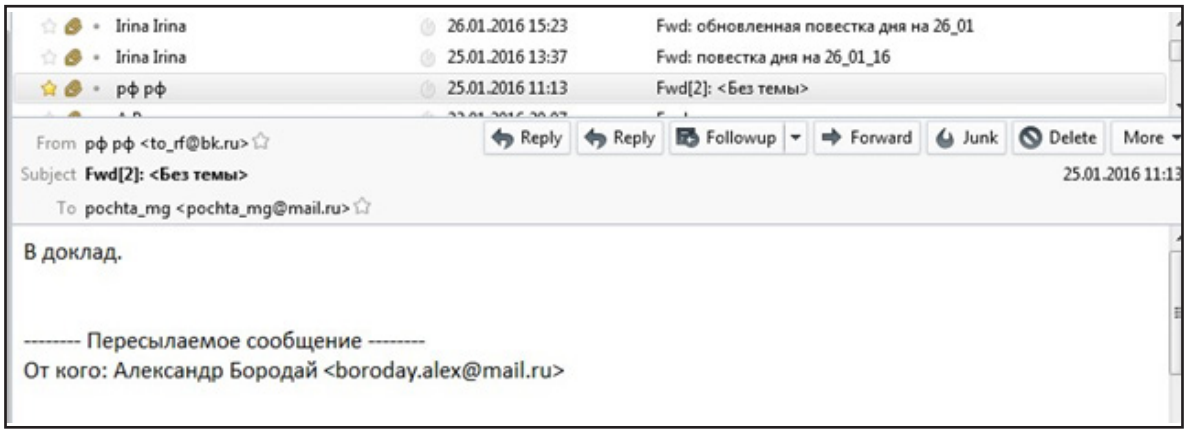
Legend: Green – Novorossiya; Yellow – Malorossiya; Red – Halychyna.

Source: Email from dnrpdv@mail.ru to pochta_mg@mail.ru, 12 January 2016, see InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump'.

Moscow's work with and through the DNR's leaders was not limited to the Donbas region. Aleksandr Borodai, a Russian political scientist who preceded Zakharchenko as prime minister of the DNR, also corresponded with Surkov. In January 2016, he updated Surkov on the work of his NGO, the Union of Volunteers for the Donbas (see Figure 4), which had helped to shore up Russian popular support for the Russian intervention in Ukraine through its collaboration with Russian state media and corralling 2,000 volunteers across Russia and Crimea to provide medical aid for Donbas militias, deliver humanitarian aid to the region and return the bodies of dead Russians to Russia.[98] Borodai's organisation also sought to build support for the Russian intervention outside Russia: the report recorded that the Union was now 'systematically working' with volunteer movements in the Balkans, as well as holding events in France, Germany and Italy to generate support. Presumably, the internationals fighting alongside the Russian-separatist forces in the Donbas, crucial for generating positive PR for the 'republics' in the form of visible international support for them, were recruited through these activities.

98. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Краткий-отчет-о-деятельности-СДД-за-2015г.pdf>.

Figure 4: A Screenshot of the Email with the Report on the 'Union of Volunteers for Donbas' from Aleksandr Borodai

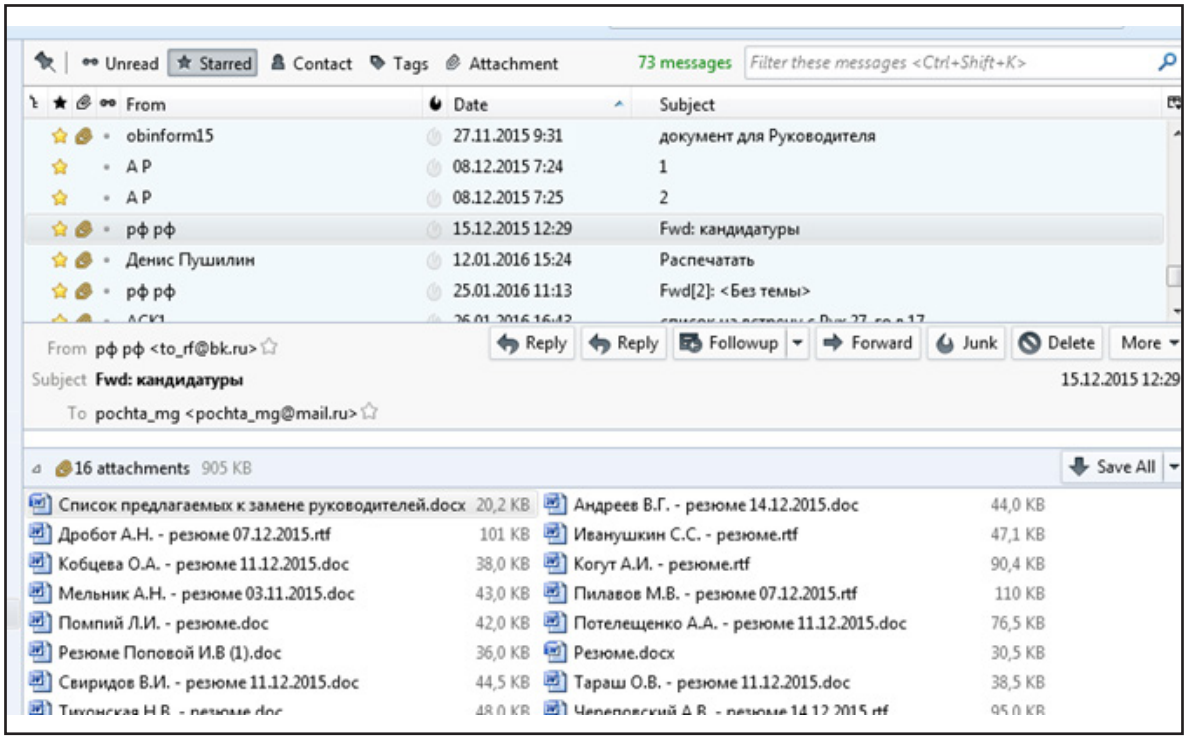


Source: Email from boroday.alex@mail.ru to pochta_mg@mail.ru, sent 25 January 2016, see InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump'.

The emails suggest that the Kremlin similarly controlled the appointment of leaders of the LNR. For example, on 15 December 2015, Surkov received a list of suggested candidates who might replace unsatisfactory LNR leaders – including the prime minister, Gennadiy Tsypkalov, his deputy and acting deputy.[99] Attached to the email were the candidates' CVs (see Figure 5).

99. Email from to_rf@bk.ru to pochta_mg@mail.ru, 15 December 2015, see InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Список-предлагаемых-к-замене-руководителей.pdf>.

Figure 5: Screenshot of the Email with CVs of Kremlin-Approved Officials for the LNR Government



Source: Email from to_rf@bk.ru to pochta_mg@mail.ru, sent 15 December 2015, see InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump'.

However, it appears that Moscow's control of appointments in the LNR was complicated by power struggles and turf wars: Tsypkalov was not removed from his post by Moscow but was instead arrested in September 2016 for plotting a coup against LNR President Igor Plotnitskiy;[100] his death a week later, when he was found hanging in his cell,[101] may well have been at the hands of local rivals. This disobedience may have prompted the DNR's 'invasion' of the LNR and the December 2017 'coup' against Plotnitskiy, which is assessed to have increased FSB control over the 'republic' and diminished that of Surkov.[102]

The Failed Novorossiya Project

The ambitious Novorossiya project was intended to incorporate the whole of South and Eastern Ukraine, areas where Russian-speaking populations were significant, if not dominant. On 22 May 2014, two days before the DNR and the LNR signed a declaration of confederation, the newly

100. Oleksandr Nykonorov, '"LNR" Separatist Field Commander Killed in Car Explosion: Three Versions Why', *Euromaidan Press,* 5 February 2017.
101. Jack Losh, 'Rebel Leader "Kills Himself" in Cell', *The Times,* 26 September 2017.
102. Yuri Zoria, 'After the Coup in Occupied Luhansk: a Real Junta and More Russian FSB Control', *Euromaidan Press,* 1 December 2017.

created Novorossiya Party held its first congress in Donetsk, reportedly attended by representatives from across southeastern Ukraine.[103] Surkov's emails reveal that the Kremlin was involved in – and paid for – this effort to create an image of public support for the Novorossiya project:

- On 14 May 2014, an extract from the DNR–LNR declaration was sent from Surkov's email address,[104] 10 days before it was signed in Donetsk.[105]
- An email received by Surkov on 16 May 2014 listed the political parties and civic associations that were considering attending the event,[106] and the costs of getting their 37 representatives to either Donetsk or Luhansk (Donetsk was cheaper).
- An email received by Surkov on 19 May 2014 listed those whose attendance at the congress was confirmed.[107]

Surkov also received a proposal from the self-described journalist and historian Nikita Kurkin,[108] via an email sent on 27 June 2014, for an event to 'form the new historical policy of Russia regarding Novorossiya', positioning it as the fourth Slavic country (along with Russia, Ukraine and Belarus) and thereby lending the policy (false) historical legitimacy. The projected cost of the event was $32,000–38,000. However, this event does not appear to have taken place.

Although Russia's Novorossiya project proved short-lived – coming to an end a year later, on 20 May 2015, after it had become clear that it lacked popular support – this episode shows the importance of historical and philosophical ideas to Russia's hybrid war.

Russia's Business Interests in the Occupied Territories

The leaked emails demonstrate that Russia's objectives in Ukraine, as in Georgia, included the economic exploitation of the occupied territories, as well as achieving political and military control.[109] In Ukraine, an email dated 2 June 2014 suggests Russia first established which Russian

103. Artem Pahinin, 'Uchreditelnyiy syezd Obschestvenno-Politicheskogo Dvizheniya "Novorossiya"' ['The Foundation Meeting of the Social-Political Movement "Novorossiya"'], *Novorossy.ru*, 23 May 2014, <http://novorossy.ru/news/news_post/uchreditelnyy-s_ezd-obschestvenno-policheskogo-dvizheniya-no>, accessed 1 April 2017.
104. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/7.pdf>.
105. *Ibid.*
106. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Табл.xlsx>.
107. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 1 April 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Массалов.pdf>.
108. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 8 September 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/h-p_roundT_Kurkin.pdf>.
109. Georgian journalist David Batashvili noted in his report on Georgia that Russia's state oil company Rosneft, for instance, planned to find and exploit oil on the continental shelf off Ochamchire in the

businesses were operating in Eastern Ukraine and in which businesses in the DNR and the LNR Russians owned a controlling stake.[110] An email dated 6 June 2014 showed this intelligence gathering had been extended across southeastern Ukraine.[111] These included businesses connected to Russian state-owned Rosneft and Rosatom, suggesting that Russia may have been considering exploiting Russian business relationships in its conflict with Ukraine. A year later, it appears that Russia had developed a more detailed plan to maximise its economic position in the DNR and the LNR. For example, an email dated 23 July 2015, from the second tranche of Surkov's emails, contained a plan to deliver Russian fuel to the occupied regions,[112] using a subsidiary company created in Russia and the state-owned Russian National Commercial Bank (RNKB) to facilitate the transaction. An August 2016 investigation by the Ukrainian outlet *Liga.net* found that from 2016 100% of the DNR and the LNR's fuel needs were met by a Russian state-owned company, Promsyrieimport,[113] making the Russian government a monopoly fuel supplier in the occupied territories. It was also a lucrative arrangement for Promsyrieimport, which had been exempted from paying export duties on petroleum products supplied to the self-proclaimed republics.

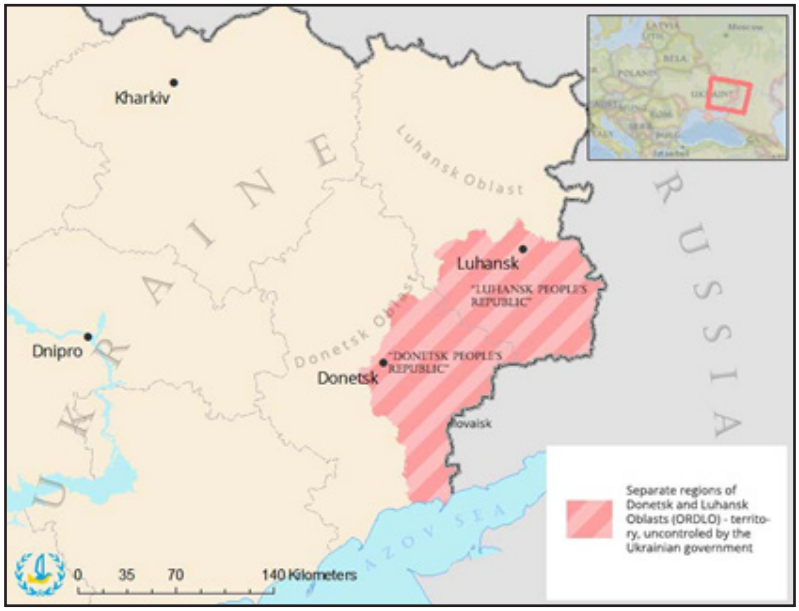
On Moscow's Payroll

A significant question is how the DNR and the LNR functioned economically throughout the war. For example, in 2014, the decision was made in the DNR that taxes would not be collected from businesses or individuals until military actions ceased. The evidence in the leaks shows considerable Russian involvement in this regard.

Black Sea. Russian Railways and Rosatom have also planned investments in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, according to an email received by Surkov on 24 October 2013. See Batashvili, '(In)Dependence: Glimpse Into Surkov Files'; InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 2 September 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/ИП_РА_2410.pdf> and <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/ИП_РЮО_2410.pdf>.

110. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Рос.бизнес-в-ДНР-и-ЛНР.pdf>.
111. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Рос.бизнес-юго-восток.pdf>.
112. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/СХЕМА-ПОСТАВКИ-ТОПЛИВА.pdf>.
113. Evgeny Golavatyuk, 'Gibridnyi Rynok. Minenergo RF Stalo Eksporterom Topliva v ORDLO' ['Hybrid Market. Russia's Ministry of Energy Became an Exporter of Fuel to ORDLO'], *Liga.net*, 18 August 2016, <http://biz.liga.net/all/tek/stati/3462975-novyy-rynok-minenergo-rf-stalo-eksporterom-topliva-v-ordlo.htm>, accessed 2 February 2018.

Figure 6: A Map of the LNR and the DNR



Source: Euromaidan Press, *'Ukraine has Not "Lost" Uncontrolled Donbas Yet, New Poll Shows', 13 June 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/2017/06/13/ukraine-has-not-lost-occupied-donbas-new-poll-shows/>, accessed 21 November 2018.*

In an email dated 26 May 2014, Surkov received an outline of the 2013 budget for the two regions in the Donbas:[114] the Luhansk Oblast, for example, had an income of RUB11.1 billion ($323.5 million), but expenditure of RUB23.3 billion ($679 million).[115] The email suggests that Moscow was preparing to bankroll the 'republics'.[116] Future costs were calculated up until 2017, including up to $8.8 billion each year for law enforcement structures, youth support and pensions in the DNR and the LNR. Russia also apparently paid for the establishment of the DNR Ministry of Information, a press centre and a newspaper. On 16 June 2014, Surkov received a list of expenses for personnel and equipment for the three projects[117] – propaganda, after all, is a crucial element in Russia's hybrid warfare.

114. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/индекс.pdf>.
115. Meaning it essentially existed on subsidies before the war, consuming twice as much as it produced.
116. A scan of an announcement from the 'DNR Supreme Council' dated 12 July 2014, which Surkov received from Denis Pushilin in a letter on 2 August 2014, suggested that Russia did indeed bankroll the DNR in 2014. See InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 2 August 2014, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/o_E_A_I_E_O_I_XA_O_O1-1.pdf>.
117. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 2 August 2014, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Smeta_Min_Presscentr_Gazeta.xls>.

Indeed, Tranches One and Two of the leaked emails confirm that, despite the Kremlin's attempts to hide the occupied territories' dependence on its economic support and therefore its involvement, these two 'republics' only remained solvent and continued to function due to Russian funding.[118] On 21 October 2015, Surkov held a meeting involving Russia's deputy ministers of economic development, trade, construction and energy, as well as the deputy head of the Department of the FSB and representatives from RNKB. The meeting covered several topics, including:

- '[P]lans of the territories [LNR and DNR] to increase tax collection'.
- '[T]he finalisation of forming the energy market on the territories' and 'the work of the [Russian] Federal Anti-Monopoly Service on developing the regulatory framework for the calculation of tariffs on the territories'.
- '[T]he delivery of coal from the territories to Ukraine and by transit through the RF [Russian Federation]'.
- '[R]estoring the private sector (speed of building 214 new houses, materials for the renovation of 4,000)'.
- '[I]ncreasing pensions by 15%'.[119]

Nor was this dependence on Moscow's support limited to the Donbas 'republics'. Surkov's leaked emails show that the proxy regimes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia likewise existed only at the expense of Russia, which also micromanaged their governance. This betrays the assumption that all four areas were, for all practical purposes, considered autonomous regions of the Russian Federation: Kremlin officials and oligarchs have played a decisive role in political appointments; they have provided financial support for the statelets' day-to-day functioning; and they have funded media and PR activity in the regions. However, the leaked emails also expose the failed Russian attempt to create a convincing image of widespread and deep-rooted support for separatism in Ukraine beyond the DNR and the LNR.

118. A documentary created by journalist Elena Volochine and broadcast by *France24* in October 2016 also recorded Russia's involvement in the economic development of the region and the restoration of buildings damaged during the conflict, as well as the forced nationalisation underway in the DNR in an attempt to reduce the financial burden on Russia. See *Euromaidan Press,* 'Russia's Involvement in Donbas War Open Secret in Donetsk – France 24', 17 October 2016, <http://euromaidanpress.com/2016/10/17/russias-participation-in-donbas-war-open-secret-in-donetsk-france-24/>, accessed 29 March 2017.
119. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 2 August 2014, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ПОВЕСТКА-СЕВЕЩАНИЯ-21.10.2015-1.pdf>.

V. The Kremlin's Phantom of Separatism and Chaos in Ukraine

THE RELEASE IN August 2016 of the Glazyev tapes – in which one of Putin's advisers, Sergei Glazyev, was purportedly heard to be orchestrating separatist protests in Odesa and Kharkiv soon after the Euromaidan revolution in February 2014[120] – demonstrate the Russian emphasis on federalisation in its immediate response to the fall of Yanukovych. By weakening the relationships between the oblasts and the central government – using its political and economic power, as well as techniques such as bribery, *kompromat* and assassination – Russia could destabilise Ukraine, battling Kyiv for the regions' loyalty and ultimately gaining control over them, thereby breaking up the country – and all without resorting to conventional military violence.

After several months of pro-Russian protests, these efforts had achieved success only in Crimea and the territories of the DNR and the LNR. Nevertheless, Tranches Two and Three of the leaked emails show that Russia did not abandon its plans to subvert Ukraine. It financed and curated separatist projects in southeastern Ukraine at least until late 2015, with the objective of exacerbating tensions, undermining support for the Ukrainian authorities, influencing local elections – for example, in the Kharkiv Oblast – and, ultimately, achieving a 'soft federalisation' of Ukraine through changes to its constitution that made it possible to secure a special status for each separate region.

The interventions, although tailored to each region, shared common features:

- Strategic separatist narratives, designed to mobilise the greatest number of ordinary citizens, were identified with the help of knowledgeable Ukrainian advisers.
- Proxy commissions with Kremlin-appointed leaders were established to exploit the constitutional reform process – through press conferences, shaping public debate, gathering support for petitions and publishing Kremlin-authored memoranda – to secure a special status for each region through amendments to the constitution (the proxy commissions eventually convened and produced a joint memorandum, creating the impression of a pan-Ukrainian movement).
- Provocations and actions designed to exacerbate tensions and garner media coverage were held, both online and offline.

120. *Euromaidan Press,* 'Ukraine Publishes Video Proving Kremlin Directed Separatism in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea', 23 August 2016, <http://euromaidanpress.com/2016/08/23/ukraine-publishes-video-proving-kremlin-directed-separatism-in-ukraine/>, accessed 29 March 2017.

- Journalists were bribed to cover provocations and events, to create an impression of their far-reaching significance.

The emails from Surkov's and Ardzinba's accounts reveal Russian attempts to intervene in the Kharkiv, Odesa, Zaporizhzhia, Dnipropetrovsk and Mykolayiv Oblasts, although Kharkiv and Odesa received the most attention, presumably because Moscow considered them to be the most strategically important.

Protests Against the Ukrainian Government: Encouraging Chaos

The conditions in post-revolution Ukraine were ripe for Russian exploitation, exacerbating existing problems and divisions. Ukraine experienced a sharp economic downturn after the start of the war in Donbas. In addition, severed economic ties with Russia and unpopular measures such as increased tariffs and labour code reforms, which the new, pro-EU government passed in compliance with IMF loan conditions, provided opportunities to create and encourage dissatisfaction with the government. Ardzinba's and Surkov's email correspondence reveals how the Kremlin sought to deepen this dissatisfaction and stimulate attendant protests across Ukraine throughout 2014 and 2015, and particularly where its network of agents was strong in the Odesa and Kharkiv Oblasts.

Indeed, there are multiple examples to be found in Surkov and Ardzinba's emails where plans, predicted costings, salary slips and retrospective media reports relating to individual protests against worsening economic conditions and living standards in Ukraine had been sent to Surkov. However, perhaps the most telling example, which shows how the Kremlin established, controlled and manipulated proxy groups, is that of a series of protests in Kyiv, which were reported back to Surkov by the pro-Russia NGO Pra?vda! in April and May 2015.

The first report concerned a two-hour demonstration held in front of the US embassy in Kyiv on 14 April 2015, which involved 1,000 people and was covered by multiple TV stations.[121] At midday, the report said, the participants lined up next to the fence near the entrance of the embassy and 15 minutes later, most protesters taped over their mouths with black tape. According to the report, 'All participants were given an agitation leaflet demanding the US remove their puppet government from Ukraine',[122] a reference to the Ukrainian president and parliament elected after the Euromaidan revolution, which has been portrayed as a 'US-backed coup' in Russian propaganda.

121. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ОТЧЕТ.pdf>.
122. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 20 August 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Донбасс_2016-ilovepdf-compressed-1.pdf>.

Figure 7: A Photograph of the Staged Protest Near the US Embassy in Kyiv Received by Surkov in his Mailbox

Source: Email from grusha22222@yandex.ru to pochta_mg@mail.ru, 14 April 2015, see InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump'.

The report said that 110 posters were used, with signs in three languages saying: 'We are not cattle!'; 'Thanks to the USA for our poverty!'; and 'USA. Thank you for the war'. Protesters were also given 20 photographs of destroyed cities in the Donbas region to hold. The protesters turned every 10 minutes, alternating between showing the posters to the embassy and the road. However, the report sent to Surkov noted that something that had not been planned had happened during the rally: 'Unexpectedly for the organizers, the people whose mouths weren't taped over started chanting the word "truth" by themselves and throwing their fists into the air'.[123]

At least seven similar protests by the same group took place in Kyiv, according to emails sent to Ardzinba by its coordinator using the email address ukraine.new.2014@gmail.com. One plan received by Ardzinba the day before a rally was so detailed as to include the chants that the

123. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ОТЧЕТ.pdf>.

protestors would use.[124] Another brief received by Ardzinba noted that such marches needed lawyers and deputies who could replace the leader if needed (as was the case with a May 2016 rally that lacked coordination due to its leader's detainment).[125] Each time photographs, and in many cases uploaded YouTube videos, were sent to Surkov or Ardzinba after the event.

It is possible that these protests, and the many more like them, could have been organised independently and merely reported on to Surkov and Ardzinba, as there is no proof of financial transactions being made. However, this is unlikely. First, if they were not Russian-backed, why would Surkov and Ardzinba be given detailed analytical reports on them, as well as extensive photographic and video evidence of their implementation? Second, the Kremlin's talking points were often precisely reproduced in materials given to protestors – for example, on a leaflet given to all participants of the April 2015 example discussed above. Third, the report about the same protest in April 2015 expressed surprise that the participants had acted on their own initiative, rather than merely following instructions. Finally, the detail and note of successes and mistakes included in the many reports sent to Surkov and Ardzinba leave a clear impression that the organiser was sharing feedback on the best way to increase the impact of protests as part of a coordinated campaign. Even after the Novorossiya project had failed, the Kremlin continued to generate protests against the Ukrainian government, albeit on a smaller scale, and their hallmark – as with all subversive activities pursued by Russia in Ukraine – was micromanagement by Kremlin officials.

The Plan for Orchestrating Separatism in Kharkiv

The Kremlin's separatist projects in Kharkiv – targeting the non-violent generation of instability – are described in Tranches Two and Three of the leaked emails. Surkov's emails (Tranche Two) reveal that Kharkiv separatism remained a strategic goal for the Kremlin until 2015. Suggesting that violent uprising was no longer a viable option, the separatist call to arms 'Kharkiv, rise up!' had become politically unpopular and had little traction, according to an unofficial poll of more than 150 'businessmen, middle class, and poor' Kharkivians conducted on behalf of Russian Duma deputy Mikhail Markelov (which was forwarded to Surkov on 4 June 2015).[126] Analysis further showed a shift away from pro-Russian sentiment among a tired and apathetic local population: the bloggers from the Kharkiv Antimaidan – those opposing the pro-Western Euromaidan uprising and post-revolution Ukrainian government – had diminished credibility; pro-Russia activists had left for Russia; and messages such as 'Ukraine is Europe', 'Russia attacked Ukraine', and 'Kharkiv is Ukraine' were becoming more popular. Furthermore, the poll suggested that the ratio of those supporting Russia versus those who opposed had changed from 70:30 to 50:50 (although these

124. Email from ukraine.new.2014@gmail.com to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 1 May 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
125. Email from ukraine.new.2014@gmail.com to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 30 May 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
126. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Харьков.-Проблемы-и-настроения.pdf>.

figures are likely overstated). It also showed that while there was discontent with the 'authorities' and the introduction of higher tariffs, people were content to deride them in the kitchens, not through street protests. This is yet another example of the type of quality research used by the Kremlin to guide its actions in Ukraine and to identify potential trigger points for public displays of discontent.

Tranche Three of the leaked emails – those belonging to Ardzinba – revealed more details about the Kremlin's actions in Kharkiv, its reliance on proxy groups, and the fact that its political campaigns were not only intended to disseminate information but were also intimately connected to insurgency and violence.

For example, in email correspondence from the Russian MP Alexei Muratov dated 10 October 2014, Ardzinba received options drawn up by the NGO Triunite Rus to bring the 'Russian world' to Kharkiv, which included holding political protests (overtly and legally) and conducting sabotage (covertly and illegally) until such time as Kharkiv could be invaded from the occupied Donbas region or the nearby Russian oblast of Belgorod.[127] The group had also established an action plan for that month, along with the estimated cost of each action, which included: rallies; a picket; a flashmob and 'sticker war' advocating the boycott of the forthcoming local election; the publication of the 'personal data of enemies' on the internet; and the trolling of opponents via social media, in an operation to be coordinated from headquarters in Moscow and Kharkiv (at a cost of $130,500). It also identified those civic groups that would carry each action out, such as the Kharkiv Women's Movement, Parents' Committee, The Orthodox Choice, the Communist Party, the Oblast Committee for the Disabled, trade unions, Working Kharkivshchyna, and the Union of Soviet Officers.[128] Although it is unclear whether any of the Triunite Rus rallies planned for October 2014 took place, in his email to Ardzinba, Muratov commented, 'the group really does do work, are waiting for our instructions and support for a month already'.[129]

Emails sent to Ardzinba in autumn 2014 also demonstrate how the Kremlin used the same techniques – information campaigns and paid street rallies that were covered by local journalists who had been bribed, thereby creating the illusion of widespread discontent with the

127. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to pdf on 4 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/записка-что-делать-по-Харькову.pdf>.
128. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to pdf on 4 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/смета-октябрь.pdf>.
129. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to pdf on 4 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/записка-что-делать-по-Харькову.pdf>.

post-Euromaidan government in Ukraine, and exacerbating tensions within a fatigued society – to promote and suggest popular support for maintaining economic ties with Russia. For example:

- The leader of the Triunite Rus NGO reported to Muratov on 14 November 2014 that a planned rally – involving 150 people and to be held near the Kharkiv factory, Turboatom, at a total cost of $4,150, including bribes for local journalists – had been intercepted by the Kharkiv police.[130] According to a local media outlet, the rally had been intended to 'draw attention to the deteriorating socioeconomic status of Ukraine' and 'remind [citizens] of the importance of economic connections with Russia'.[131]
- A protest held on 11 March 2015 involved 150 workers from the Kharkiv Elektrotiazhmash factory who demanded the 'normalisation of the economic situation of the enterprise'[132] – code for resuming Ukraine's economic relationship with Russia. A month earlier, the Kremlin's diaspora coordinator in Kharkiv, Petr Gorbunov, had sent an email to Ardzinba about the rally, listing the contact detail of the organisers, a trade union leader and a factory worker, and setting out the costs in an unspecified currency (assumed to be dollars): 1,500 to pay the participants, 500 for security and bribes to the police, 1,000 for the organisation, and 1,000 for the organisers.[133]
- In summer 2016, Ukraine was targeted by a disinformation campaign promoting the argument that Ukraine's economy industry would not survive without resuming the country's economic ties with Russia.[134] Pro-Russian politicians articulated these messages on select Ukrainian media platforms such as *Timer* and *Korrespondent,* which had previously been accused of promoting the Kremlin's narrative. Fake petitions demanding that 'Poroshenko make peace with Russia' and purportedly signed by factory workers were covered by minor blogs, before being picked up by larger media outlets and, ultimately, the Russian media. The Ukrainian outlet *Liga.net* revealed that journalists had been offered $500–1,000 to carry a 'story' about one enterprise based on a fabricated petition.

All of the examples provided in this section demonstrate the Kremlin's use of reflexive control: it identified real vulnerabilities and created a false impression of their magnitude, thereby allowing

130. Letter from kursk18@gmail.com to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 14 November 2014, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
131. *Vgorode.ua*, 'Na Sleduiushchei Needle v Harkove Sobiralis Ustroit Ocherednoi Separatistskiy Miting' ['In the Following Week, a Separatist Rally was to be Held in Kharkiv Again'], 14 November 2014, <https://kh.vgorode.ua/news/sobytyia/242395-na-sleduuischei-nedele-rossyia-planyrovala-ustroyt-v-kharkove-separatystskyi-mytynh-tytushek>, accessed 4 February 2018.
132. *From-Ua.com,* 'Rabotniki Harkovskogo 'Eletrotiazhmash' Vyshli na Protest Protiv Zakrytiya Zavoda' ['The Workers of Kharkiv's "Elektrotiazhmash" Came out to Protest Against the Closure of the Factory'], 11 March 2015, <https://from-ua.com/news/341997-rabotniki-harkovskogo-elektrotyazhmasha-vishli-na-protest-protiv-zakritiya-zavoda.html>, accessed 12 February 2018.
133. Email from gorbunovpetr@inbox.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 11 February 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
134. Olena Makarenko, 'Ukraine Targeted by Disinformation Campaign to Restore "Friendship" with Russia', *Euromaidan Press,* 12 January 2017.

Kremlin agents in Ukraine to take political action that would 'solve' the 'problems'. (This is discussed further in Chapter VII.)

Kremlin Intervention in Local Elections in the Kharkiv Oblast

The February 2015 Minsk II Agreement paved the way for decentralisation in Ukraine by the end of 2015, to be codified in a new constitution. With this provision in place, the leaked emails suggest that the Kremlin attempted to intervene in the local elections of the Kharkiv Oblast, where it had a wide network of agents. It did so through two principal actors.

Mikhail Markelov

In an email to Surkov dated 18 June 2015, the Russian Duma deputy Mikhail Markelov argued that the forthcoming elections to the regional council, to be held on 25 October 2015, were as important as elections to Ukraine's national parliament, because Ukrainian decentralisation would endow the council with greater power.[135] Observing the need for a good pre-election campaign, Markelov suggested holding a conference that would advocate autonomy for the Kharkiv Oblast under the new constitution, based on its historical role in Ukraine's political system.[136] The conference would take the form of a roundtable that brought together members of both the regional department of the Party of Regions (Yanukovych's party before the revolution) and the NGO established earlier that year by Markelov (Grazhdanskaya Initsiativa – Civic Initiative) with a view to shaping public opinion and elections – including by fielding its own candidates for the regional council, suggestions for whom had been sent by email to Surkov in April 2015.[137] Indeed, Markelov's email said, the pro-Russian NGOs established by Russian agents of influence and the pro-Russian party would come together to create 'a pre-election union of two structures to participate in the local elections'.[138]

Markelov also recommended filming a discussion programme for local television, with the title 'Local Elections: The Path to Separatism or Prosperity of Ukraine Through Regional Self-Government?', which would include a common declaration in support of Ukraine's constitutional changes – likely one of Russia's key war aims.

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135. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ХАРЬКОВ-1-от-ММ-1.pdf>.
136. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ХАРЬКОВ2-Мероприятия-и-проекты-Х-обл-_таблица_1-2-3-1.pdf>.
137. *Ibid.*
138. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Предварительный-список-_возможно-наших_-кандидатов-1.pdf>.

Crucially, Markelov's proposals offered the Kremlin a way of achieving the same end state in Kharkiv as in the DNR and the LNR – autonomy from Ukraine – but by using primarily political means, rather than chaos and violence. Markelov even suggested talking points that might be used to achieve electoral victory, which included the civil war's casualties, a dramatic fall in living standards and the rise in poverty, and the rewriting of history through the removal of statues of Lenin. Although Markelov's plans were not fully realised, two deputies from his April 2015 list were elected to the regional council,[139] while other protest activities were implemented in Kharkiv under Markelov's supervision.[140]

Alla Aleksandrovska

Emails sent from Alla Aleksandrovska to Ardzinba between June and October 2015, and leaked in Tranche Three, indicated the Kremlin's active support for her efforts to get proxy candidates elected to the city and regional councils in the October elections.

In an email dated 15 June 2015, Aleksandrovska sent an analytical brief to Ardzinba stressing the importance of the local elections, given the ongoing decentralisation processes.[141] Her proposal was for members of the banned Communist Party to stand for election, either registering as independent candidates or as candidates affiliated to the group she had recently established, Slobozhanshchyna (Public Council for Assistance to Constitutional Reform). According to an expenses sheet sent with the same email, estimated campaign costs for 30 oblast council candidates came to $120,460; estimated costs for 20 city council candidates totalled $183,240. These sums would cover candidate deposits and payments to electoral committee members, party representatives, electoral observers and agitation brigades, as well as fuel, print materials and media coverage.[142]

It appears that the proposal interested Ardzinba, because on 9 July 2015, Aleksandrovska sent a list of candidates for the various local council elections in Kharkiv Oblast,[143] as well as a list

139. For election results, see <http://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vm2015/PVM058?PID112=12&PID102=5441&PF7691=5441&PT001F01=102&rej=0&pt00_t001f01=100>, accessed 21 November 2018.
140. A September 2016 interview with Kharkiv-based anti-Euromaidan activist Andriy Borodavka helped to confirm Markelov's involvement in organising unrest in Kharkiv, see *InsiderNews,* 'Razgovor po Dusham s Pochti Separatistom' ['A Heartfelt Conversation with a Separatist'], 3 September 2016, <http://insidernews.info/razgovor-po-dusham-s-pochti-separatistom-chast-1/>, accessed 29 March 2017.
141. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 3 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/выборы-2015.pdf>.
142. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 3 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/План-обеспечения-1.xls>.
143. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 3 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Список-кандидат.pdf>.

of campaign leaders.[144] Three days later, Aleksandrovska forwarded Ardzinba an email from the address simonov_semen86@mail.ru (possibly that of Petro Symonenko, the former leader of the disbanded Communist Party of Ukraine), which attested to Aleksandrovska's experience in running election campaigns and outlined potential campaign topics, including: special status for the Kharkiv region; expanding the powers of local communities and budget autonomy; and criticism of the current authorities for their non-compliance with the political clauses of the Minsk agreements obligations and for rising prices and cuts to benefits.[145] The forwarded email also outlined the Communist Party's successes during previous elections, possibly testifying to the ability of its members to win elections, even though the party itself had been banned.[146]

In August, Aleksandrovska sent Ardzinba updated cost calculations and candidate lists.[147] A document entitled 'Main events' set the ex-Communists the goal of gaining 5% of the vote, which was required for groups to take their seats and to form factions on the city, regional and oblast councils.[148] It also proposed that a new party, to be called Nova Derzhava (New State), be formed as a vehicle for the ex-Communists' election. While none of this constitutes conclusive proof that the Kremlin financed the ex-Communists' election campaign in Kharkiv, there is no other reasonable explanation as to why these documents were sent to Ardzinba. However, preliminary election results sent by Aleksandrovska to Ardzinba on 27 October 2015 proved disappointing.[149] Nova Derzhava won only 2.44% of the vote for the oblast council. It also failed to win enough votes

144. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 3 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/спислк-2015.pdf>.
145. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 4 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/выборы-2015.pdf>.
146. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 4 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Итоги-2006_2007_2010_2012.xls>.
147. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 4 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Книга1_РАСЧЕТ-ЗАЛОГА.xls>; InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 4 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Список-кандидатов.pdf>; InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 4 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Кандидаты-в-депутаты_облсовет.pdf>.
148. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 4 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/основные-мероприятия1-1.pdf>.
149. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 4 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Справка-по-результатам-выборов.pdf>.

to be elected onto the Kharkiv city council. Nova Derzhava candidates were elected only to the small city councils of Kharkiv Oblast, while 11 were elected to village councils.

In June 2016, Aleksandrovska was arrested by the Ukrainian authorities on suspicion of separatism and as of February 2017 has been under house arrest. In December 2016, a Kharkiv court found a man guilty of passing a $9,000 bribe from Aleksandrovska to the head of an NGO in the city of Yuzhne. The bribe had been intended to persuade the city mayor to demand changes to the Ukrainian constitution that would enable the local election of directors and judges – a first step towards the Kremlin's envisaged 'soft federalisation' of Ukraine.[150]

Destabilising Odesa

Emails from Tranche Three show that the Kremlin orchestrated and financed a strategy for the 'soft federalisation' of Odesa Oblast – known as the 'Porto Franco' project – in coordination with other similar projects in southeastern Ukraine, even after it had become clear that the Novorossiya project had failed. The strategy was implemented by local organisations overseen, from Moscow, by the Ukrainian separatist Anton Davidchenko.

Ardzinba's emails contain Davidchenko's reports of what he called 'actions of direct influence'.[151] These included street rallies and protests, inflammatory messaging, violent political agitation and vandalism designed to spread chaos. Other provocative street actions by Davidchenko's group included:

- Graffiti – with one Odesa street sign reading: 'The southern capital of Novorossiya'.[152]
- Activists carrying placards demanding cheaper bread walking back and forth on a pedestrian crossing for several hours.[153] This action proved to be a cheap but effective way of attracting media attention and irritating residents by paralysing traffic.
- Vandalism of cars belonging to political opponents, by spray-painting Ukrainian flags on them or smashing their windscreens.[154]

150. *Hromadske*, 'Sud Vynis Obvynuvachuvalnyi Vyrok y Spravi Aleksandrovskoyi' ['The Court Issued a Conviction in Aleksandrovska's Case'], 16 December 2016, <https://hromadske.ua/posts/sud-vynis-obvynuvachuvalnyi-vyrok-u-spravi-aleksandrovskoi>, accessed 4 March 2018.
151. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
152. Email from kolokol_2008@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 19 November 2014, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
153. Email from kolokol_2008@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 9 March 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
154. Email from kolokol_2008@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru , 20 December 2014, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'; email from luiza.mamedova.81@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 4 February 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.

- Setting ablaze a bus belonging to the hardline Ukrainian group, Right Sector.[155]
- Setting off an explosion in the office of Right Sector.[156]

Alongside these tactics, Ardzinba's emails suggest that Davidchenko's operations in Odesa included activity that was a bit more unusual.

Exploiting the May 2014 Odesa Fire

The port town of Odesa was at the epicentre of one of the largest pro-Russian protest movements to erupt after the Euromaidan revolution. Intense protests by the pro-Euromaidan and pro-Russian sides climaxed on 2 May 2014 when street fighting and a fire took the lives of 48 activists, most of them pro-Russian. The tragedy became a focal point for Russian propaganda, which presented the event as a 'massacre' in which the Ukrainian government burned its opponents alive.[157] This vitriolic messaging has proved especially successful with Russian audiences and is still used to portray the purported barbarism of Ukrainians, despite the evidence available that, while the Ukrainian authorities had done very little, pro-Euromaidan activists had at least tried to rescue those inside the building that was on fire.[158]

Ardzinba's leaked emails show that Davidchenko specifically sought to exploit the May 2014 fire. On 5 November 2014, Davidchenko sent Ardzinba 15 variations of a poster with the words: 'Punish the murderers of May 2, Vladimir Vladimirovich [Putin]'. A week later, Davidchenko sent Ardzinba a photograph and video report of the banner being hung on a bridge in Odesa.[159] This was covered extensively by local media: the next day, Davidchenko sent Ardzinba a list of 29 media outlets that had reported the event.[160] A major rally was also held by pro-Russia groups on the first anniversary of the fire; Davidchenko had sent Ardzinba an email detailing the arrivals and departures of the rally's international participants, including journalists and politicians from Israel and Poland.

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155. Email from luiza.mamedova.81@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 16 February 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 12 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/отчет-по-акциям-одесса-2015.pdf>.
156. Email from luiza.mamedova.81@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 23 February 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 13 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/новость-22.02-О.pdf>.
157. *Euromaidan Press,* 'The Odesa Tragedy: Bloody Trail of the "Russian Spring" – New Film by Human Rights Group', 24 November 2016.
158. *Ibid*.
159. *Narodnaya Druzhina Odessy (Antimaidan) ND* [*People's Troop of Odesa (Antimaidan) ND],* 'Odessa Tyoschin Most 12.11.2014' ['Odesa, Tyoshchyn Bridge 12.11.2014'], <https://vk.com/narodnay_druzina?z=video-62358666_170234696%2Fvideos-62358666>, accessed 10 February 2018.
160. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 6 February 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/баннер.pdf>.

Figure 8: The Banner with the Words 'Punish the Murderers of May 2, Vladimir Vladimirovich', Which Davidchenko Sent to Surkov's Adviser on 12 November 2014

Source: Email from kolokol_2008@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 12 November 2014, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.

Notable Publicity Stunts

The leaked emails record some of Davidchenko's more creative ideas for attracting media attention and exacerbating tensions. For example, effigies of the Ukrainian prime minister and the president were hung in public in central Odesa in March and April 2015, respectively. A sign hung on the effigy of the prime minister read: 'Forgive me, Ukraine, I sold my soul to the IMF, and the people to slavery' – reflecting a prevalent anti-IMF narrative at the time. Davidchenko had first suggested this idea to Ardzinba in December 2014.[161] In March 2014, he sent Ardzinba a press monitoring report on the prime minister's effigy.[162] Later that month, Ardzinba received photographs of the president's effigy from Davidchenko the night before it was hung in Odesa.[163]

161. Email from kolokol_2008@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 1 December 2014, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 7 February 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/акции-прямого-действия.pdf>.
162. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 7 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ссылки.pdf>.
163. Email from kolokol_2008@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 31 March 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.

Figure 9: The Effigy of Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk Hanging in Odesa

Source: Email from kolokol_2008@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 31 March 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.

Another idea sent by Davidchenko to Ardzinba in January 2015 was to hang a banner opposing the Ukrainian army's conscription campaign in central Odesa, at a cost of $1,500.[164] On 1 February 2015, Ardzinba received a photograph showing the banner hanging on Odesa's seaport. The banner read: 'This is not my war! Say "stop" to mobilisation!'

Online Activism

Social media operations were a crucial part of the activities of Davidchenko's group. Tactics ranged from using social media websites such as Facebook and VKontakte (the leading Russian site) to attack political figures such as Odesa's governor, Igor Palitsa;[165] spamming social media communities with fake news, such as that about a bomb in the Odesa mayor's office;[166] spreading

164. Email from kolokol_2008@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 25 Janaury 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 7 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/мобилизация-убивает.pdf>.
165. Email from kolokol_2008@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 16 November 2014, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 6 February 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/вк.pdf>.
166. Email from kolokol_2008@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 14 December 2014, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.

memes about social uprisings led by workers;[167] and spamming social media sites with the help of special software.[168] As in Kharkiv, 'grantees' submitted proposals for activities, along with estimated costs. The leaked emails also show Ardzinba's close involvement in establishing the details of these plans, right down to agreeing the content of inflammatory memes ridiculing Ukrainian politicians, to be spread via social media.[169]

'Trojan Horse' Rallies

A feature of many rallies held in Odesa was the way they sought to exploit historical issues to Russia's advantage, in an approach described by former Odesa city council deputy Ihor Dimitriyev as a 'Trojan horse'.[170]

For example, in November 2014 Davidchenko's groups organised a march dedicated to Empress Catherine II, who had played a negative role in Ukrainian statehood but had invested heavily in Odesa, and delighted in the subsequent conflict between the pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian citizens of this Russian-speaking city: 'Now there is a big shitstorm on Fb [Facebook] from both sides … and in VKontankte too', Davidchenko wrote to Ardzinba after his group had placed advertisements for the march all over the city.[171]

Protestors also planned a rally for 18 October 2014, ostensibly to mark the 73rd anniversary of the arrival of Romanian–Nazi forces in Odesa during the Second World War. In reality, however, the rally was intended to facilitate public attacks on the Ukrainian government for waging war against the breakaway 'republics', on the 'oligarchs' for their pursuit of profit via this war, and on the EU Association Agreement for its attempt to render Ukraine a cheap labour colony. The event was to end with the Ukrainian, Russian and 'Great Patriotic War victory' flags being tied together with a single knot, while 'fraternal nations killing each other for the fun of puppeteers' was renounced.[172] The powerful symbolism of the Second World War was therefore to be used as a vehicle for Russia's strategic messaging: that Ukraine should give up fighting against the covert Russian invasion, abandon its 'pro-European' choice and return to Mother Russia.

167. Email from kolokol_2008@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 3 February 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
168. Email from kolokol_2008@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 22 February 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
169. Email from kolokol_2008@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 15 March 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
170. Email from deputatdimitriev@gmail.com to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 16 October 2014, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
171. Email from kolokol_2008@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 3 November 2014, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
172. *Ibid.*

Exploiting Ethnic Divisions in Besarabia

Another element of Russia's separatist activities in Odesa was the creation of the People's Council of Besarabia (PCB), whose objective was to break off the multi-ethnic Besarabia, a remote part of the Odesa Oblast near Transnistria. While Besarabia's secession was probably first suggested to Ardzinba in January 2015 by the journalist Olena Hlyshchynska-Romanova,[173] the plan for establishing the PCB to achieve this was apparently conceived by the Transnistrian KGB operative Dmitry Soin, who on 17 March 2015 sent Ardzinba a concept note describing it as an 'independent, critically minded platform which would concentrate powers opposing the nationalist, anti-Russian course of Ukraine's leadership'.[174]

Formed on the basis of proportionate representation, the PCB would unite Bulgarian, Gagauzian, Ukrainian, Russian, Moldovan, Roma and Cossack representatives, and would create 'a centre of informal power in South Besarabia', according to Soin.[175] Planned activities included: a founding conference; appeals to the authorities to ensure equal rights of all nationalities in the region; quotas for each nationality in government institutions; and petitions calling for regional referendums on the status of national communities and languages.[176] In line with the Kremlin's preference for micromanagement, Soin planned all the details of the project, ranging from a manifesto[177] to banners[178] to the agenda and speeches for the opening conference[179] – including that of Yevheniy Velkov,[180] the head of the European Communication Centre, a pro-Russian NGO in Bulgaria. Soin also crafted a development strategy with the stated objective of 'spread[ing] panic, disbelief in the power of authority, etc.', by carrying out guerrilla attacks on power, water, gas and transport

173. Letter from gelena_od@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 22 January 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 10 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/тезисы.pdf>.
174. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 8 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/народная-рада-план.pdf>.
175. *Ibid.*
176. *Ibid.*
177. Email from goldabxazia@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 23 March 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 9 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/манифест-ред.pdf>.
178. Email from goldabxazia@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 23 March 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
179. Email from goldabxazia@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 29 March 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 9 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/сценарий.pdf>.
180. Email from goldabxazia@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 24 March 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.

infrastructure, cars and the residences of selected individuals.[181] He identified groups willing to carry out the actions but noted the need to activate and fund them.[182] In addition, Soin suggested creating an intermediary structure to mask the real 'customer' of efforts to destabilise this part of Ukraine – the Kremlin.

To the credit of Ukrainian law enforcement agencies, the plan was quickly noticed by the relevant authorities. Soin's correspondence with Ardzinba noted anxiety among potential speakers for the opening conference about repercussions; he proposed that 30–50 uniformed representatives of the 'Cossacks' – a pro-Russia militant formation – be hired to provide security, at a cost of $50 per Cossack per day.[183] Due to the attention of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), the planned launch of the conference on 2 April 2015 was rescheduled for 6 April,[184] under a new title of 'Decentralisation of Ukraine and the role of national–cultural societies in the development of Besarabia' – another example of the 'Trojan horse' approach at work. The conference did ultimately go ahead; the pro-Russia manifesto was adopted, and a committee was elected; and in a rather blunt exposure of intentions, the decision was made to establish a website, the domain name for which was ultimately registered in Moscow.[185] However, the PCB was broken up by the SBU later that month. Three Odesa-based journalists – Artem Buzyla, Vitaliy Didenko (chief editor of a website belonging to Davidchenko) and Olena Hlyshchynska-Romanova – were arrested under suspicion of promoting separatism.[186] The subsequent investigation found evidence of Hlyshchynska-Romanova's communications with Moscow, as well as evidence that she had received $10,000 and Buzyla had received $17,500 from Moscow.[187]

On 15 March 2016, Surkov received news that all three journalists had written to the Kremlin asking it to facilitate their release, even though they were all Ukrainian citizens.[188] Hlyshchynska-Romanova and Didenko were eventually exchanged for Ukrainian political prisoners

181. *Ibid.*
182. Email from goldabxazia@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 19 April 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
183. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 8 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/НРБ-пошагово.pdf>.
184. *Dumskaya.net,* 'Narodnaia Rada Bessarabii Take Byla Sozdana: v Rudkovodstve – Lubiteli Rossii, Sait Zaregistrirovan v Moskve' ['The People's Council of Besarabia was Actually Created: Russia-Lovers are in the Management, the Site is Registered in Moscow'], 6 April 2015, <http://dumskaya.net/news/v-odesse-taki-byla-sozdana-narodnaya-rada-bessar-045386/>, accessed 9 February 2018.
185. *Ibid*.
186. *Yuzhnyi Kurier,* 'Dva Odesskih Zhurnalista Otpravleny v SIZO za Separatism' ['Two Odesa Journalists are Sent to Pretrial Detention Accused of Separatism'], 6 May 2015, <http://uc.od.ua/news/crime/1175901>, accessed 10 February 2018.
187. *Ibid.*
188. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 1 April 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Заключенные.pdf>.

Gennadiy Afanasyev and Yuriy Soloshenko on 14 June 2017.[189] The Kremlin's willingness to exchange Ukrainian citizens for other Ukrainian citizens strongly indicates that the separatists had been acting as agents of the Kremlin. This is certainly credible: as earlier chapters have shown, the Kremlin values agents who can develop plans for subversive activities in Ukraine using their insider knowledge of society.

As a footnote to this episode, the failure to establish a separatist body in Besarabia did not prevent Soin from trying again – this time in the southern Ukrainian city of Mykolayiv. An email sent to Ardzinba on 28 May 2015 outlined his initial ideas for a 'People's Council' in the city, with a view to creating an assembly of such councils that would demand national-level change.[190] The People's Council of Mykolayiv was launched on 7 June 2015,[191] but was immediately dispersed by the SBU. Soin's plan failed to progress further. In an interview a year later, Ukraine's SBU chief Vasyl Hrytsak said that the situation in Odesa at that time had been 'catastrophic' and that Ukraine had been facing a 'second front', in which the proclamation of the PCB would have provided the trigger for an invasion by Russian troops stationed in Transnistria. In Hrytsak's view, Hlyshchynska-Romanova and Didenko played a key role in this ultimately unsuccessful plan.[192]

Perhaps one of the reasons for the rapid exposure of the Besarabia plan was that it was developed by an outsider to Ukraine, with imperfect knowledge of the social landscape. As is evident from the discussion so far, and will be explored further in the next chapters, those plans for subversion developed by the Kremlin's Ukrainian agents were carried out more stealthily and were rarely disrupted.

189. UNIAN, 'Media Update Info on Subjects of Soloshenko, Afanasyev Swap', 14 June 2016, <https://www.unian.info/society/1375539-media-update-info-on-subjects-of-soloshenko-afanasyev-swap.html>, accessed 1 April 2017.
190. Email from goldabxazia@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 28 May 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
191. Nikolaev-city, 'SBU Zaderzhala Uchastnikov Pervogo Zasedaniya "Narodnoi Rady Nikolaeva"' ['The SBU Detained the Participants of the First Meeting of the "People's Council of Mykolayiv"'], 7 June 2015, <https://nikolaev-city.net/15548/sbu-zaderzhala-uchastnikov-pervogo-zasedaniya-narodnoy-rady-nikolaeva>, accessed 10 February 2018.
192. Petro Shuklinov, 'Direktor Voiny' ['Director of War'], *Liga.net,* 22 June 2016, <http://www.liga.net/projects/gricak_interview/>, accessed 5 March 2018.

VI. Political Meddling: How the Kremlin Tried to Change Ukraine's Constitution

IF THE GOAL of Russia's war in Ukraine was to prevent Ukraine's drift towards European integration and to pull it back into the Customs Union, forcing through Kremlin-sponsored changes to Ukraine's constitution was seen as a major step towards this goal. The contents of Tranches Two and Three of the leaked emails reveal that Russia attempted to change Ukraine's principal law through the political process envisioned by the Minsk Agreements, and through an orchestrated campaign in support of 'special economic zones' for multiple Ukrainian regions.

The 'Bosnianisation' of Ukraine Through the Minsk Agreements

The Minsk Agreements,[193] signed by Ukraine to suspend a further Russian invasion, contained political concessions to be made by Ukraine in exchange for peace in the Donbas. These concessions included changing the Ukrainian constitution to decentralise power and to legalise the LNR and the DNR by establishing their special status and passing attendant legislation by the end of 2015.[194] Russia, along with Western countries including France, Germany and the US, exerted pressure on Ukraine to implement the political part of the Minsk Agreements before the ceasefire could come into force in the Donbas, which some experts argued would result in the 'Bosnianisation' of Ukraine and would constitute an appeasement of Russia for its aggression.[195] Still, on 31 August 2015, the Ukraine parliament adopted draft constitutional amendments on decentralisation for Ukraine,[196] together with a provisional article on the special status of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.[197]

193. Minsk I was signed on 5 September 2014. It collapsed and was followed by Minsk II on 11 February 2015.
194. UN Peacemaker, 'Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements', 12 February 2015, <https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/UA_150212_MinskAgreement_en.pdf>, accessed 6 March 2015.
195. Hanna Shelest et al., 'State of Minsk Agreements Implementation: An Unofficial Ukrainian Experts' Opinion', International Renaissance Foundation, 14 December 2015, <http://www.irf.ua/knowledgebase/publications/state_of_minsk_agreements_implementation_an_unofficial_ukrainian_experts_opinion/>, accessed 6 March 2015.
196. Kirill Mikhailov, 'Ukraine's Decentralization and Donbas "Special Status": What You Need to Know', *Euromaidan Press,* 1 September 2015, <http://euromaidanpress.com/2015/09/01/ukraines-decentralization-and-donbas-special-status-what-you-need-to-know/>, accessed 20 August 2017.
197. A second vote is needed before it can come into force, but it is unlikely that it can gather 300 out of the 450 votes necessary.

The leaked emails show that from February 2015, Surkov's office was focused on changing Ukraine's constitution, starting with the mechanism by which constitutional amendments could be made in the first place. Surkov received the first email on the issue on 10 February 2015.[198] Just days later, DNR leader Denis Pushilin suggested in the media that the 'people's republics' were ready to discuss changes to Ukraine's constitution with the international Trilateral Contact Group negotiating on settling the conflict in Donbas.[199] Surkov received specific proposals for changes to Ukraine's constitution on 11 March 2015,[200] and these were published with minor changes by the LNR and the DNR on 13 May 2015.[201] These proposals called for Ukraine's constitution to assign special status to the LNR and the DNR, giving them their own 'people's militia' − that is, a de facto military − and local executive and judicial authorities – all of which would, in reality, remain under Moscow's control. However, it would also all be financed by the Ukrainian state, which would serve the dual purpose of crippling Ukrainian finances – not least due to the costs of reconstructing the local economy and infrastructure in the Donbas − while relieving the pressure on the Russian budget at a time of low oil prices. Critically, the proposals also called for a clause on Ukraine's neutral status to be included in the constitution, as well as a power of veto over major national decisions for the LNR and the DNR. It was no surprise that these proposals were rejected by Ukraine. If the purpose of the Eastern Ukraine conflict was to prevent Ukraine from signing the EU Association Agreement or from joining the EU and NATO at some point in the future, the clause declaring Ukrainian neutrality would have represented a tangible victory for Russia in the war, achieving the political objectives for which it was fighting.

It appears that the pro-Russia Opposition Bloc – the successor to Yanukovych's Party of Regions – also played a key role in advancing Russia's interests in Ukraine, first through introducing relevant draft legislation and then through proposing amendments to the constitution.[202] In relation to

198. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Порядок-внесения-изменений-в-Конституцию-Украины.pdf>.
199. *NBNews,* 'V DNR i LNR uzhe Podgotovili Popravki v Konstitutsiyu' ['The DNR and LNR have Prepared Their Amendments to the Constitution'], 14 February 2015, <http://nbnews.com.ua/ru/news/143365/>, accessed 29 March 2017.
200. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Текст.pdf>.
201. *Donetskoye Agenstvo Novostei [Donetsk News Agency],* 'Popravki DNR i LNR v Konstitutsiyu Ukrayiny' ['DNR and LNR Amendments to the Constitution of Ukraine'], 13 May 2015, <https://dan-news.info/official/popravki-dnr-i-lnr-v-konstituciyu-ukrainy.html>, accessed 29 March 2017; *Voices from Russia,* 'LNR and DNR Published Their Proposed Amendments to the Constitution of the Ukraine', 13 May 2015, <https://02varvara.wordpress.com/2015/05/13/lnr-and-dnr-published-their-proposed-amendments-to-the-constitution-of-the-ukraine/>, accessed 29 March 2017.
202. The Opposition Bloc is the main pro-Russian party in Ukraine and the successor group to Yanukovych's pro-Russian Party of Regions. Recent progress in the investigation led by US special counsel Robert Mueller has revealed that Paul Manafort, US President Donald Trump's former campaign chairman, who was a lobbyist of Yanukovych in Ukraine, played an active role in reorganising the Opposition Bloc from the remains of the Party of Regions, see Michal Kranz,

the former, in April 2015, Surkov received a special report entitled 'Analysis of Laws Submitted by the Opposition Bloc Faction to Implement the "Minsk Agreements"'.[203] It contained a list of nine draft bills related to the LNR and the DNR, which the faction had submitted in March 2015. Surkov had also received slightly different versions of two of the bills – those relating to an amnesty for participants of the conflict and a free economic zone for the occupied Donbas territories[204] – in January, suggesting that either the political party had at least informed the Kremlin of its intended actions or that the Kremlin had worked with it to create the legislation. None of the nine bills were ultimately brought to a vote, having been blocked by various committees.

The Opposition Bloc was also involved in an attempt to change the constitution. In late May 2015, after the Ukrainian government rejected the amendments proposed by the LNR and the DNR,[205] Surkov received an alternative draft from an unnamed individual with the initials 'V V',[206] which would grant the two regions, under their special administrative status, the power to form a representative government, executive authority and paramilitary structures, as well as to control state appointments such as the security service, prosecutor's office and courts. On 29 June 2015, Surkov received a Russian translation of a letter submitted by the leader of the Opposition Bloc,[207] Yuriy Boiko, to the head of the Ukrainian parliament. This letter proposed the same powers for the LNR and the DNR as the draft received by Surkov a month earlier. Boiko argued that accepting these amendments would implement the Minsk Agreements and facilitate the peaceful regulation of the situation in the Donbas. He called on Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman to put these draft amendments to the vote in the national parliament.[208]

'Manafort Didn't Just Consult for Russian-Backed Politicians in Ukraine – He Also Helped Them Form a New Party', *Business Insider,* 17 November 2017.

203. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/анализ-опоз.-2.pdf>.
204. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 7 March 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/12.01.15-ПРОЕКТ-русс1.pdf>; InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 7 March 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/12.01.15-Проект-Закона-Украины.pdf>.
205. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/21.05.15-Проект-изменений-в-КУ-21.05.15-20.30.pdf>.
206. Speculations about the person behind the initials 'V V' have ranged from Russian President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin to Viktor Volodymyrovych Medvedchuk, a pro-Kremlin Ukrainian politician involved in the Minsk peace process, whose daughter has Putin as a godfather.
207. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Верховная-Рада-2.pdf>.
208. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Верховная-Рада-2.pdf>.

However, this plan did not succeed either. The only draft law for constitutional amendments put to a vote in parliament on 1 July 2015, and adopted on 31 August 2015,[209] was that authored by President Petro Poroshenko, whose only reference to special status for the LNR and the DNR stated: 'The specifics of executing local governance in certain counties of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions are defined by a separate law'.[210] There was no mention of executive authorities, militia or Ukraine's neutrality. Unsurprisingly, these amendments were rejected by Russia's puppet leaders of the DNR and the LNR.

Special Status for a 'Parade of Sovereignties'?

The leaked emails show that the Kremlin's efforts to establish regional 'special status' under the new constitution went beyond the DNR and the LNR. Ukrainian political analyst Yevhen Magda has suggested that the Kremlin sees decentralisation as a way of dismantling the Ukrainian state under the pretext of reconstruction[211] – and indeed, Surkov's emails reveal that the Kremlin had been actively working towards this end throughout 2015, under the guise of solving regional economic problems. The threat this posed to the integrity of the Ukrainian state was also identified by the SBU and Ukraine's Foreign Intelligence Service in a joint statement in 2016.[212] In a contemporaneous interview, SBU chief Vasyl Hrytsak argued that if this strategy were to succeed, Ukraine's regions would become 'separate principalities'. Russia's agenda, he said, had nothing to do with real decentralisation and instead was aimed at the 'hidden federalisation of Ukraine'.[213] In February 2017, Hrytsak further announced that Russia was financing political projects in Ukraine, such as Zakarpatskyi Krai, Odesa for Porto Franco and Sotsialne Zaporizhzhia (Social Zaporizhzhia), whose principal objective was the country's federalisation.[214] The contents of Surkov's, Ardzinba's and Aleksandrovska's inboxes detail how some of these projects had been managed in 2014 and 2015.

209. Mikhailov, 'Ukraine's Decentralization and Donbas "Special Status"'.
210. *Ibid.*
211. Yevhen Magda, 'Kreml' Chekaye, Shho Ukrayinci z'yidyat' Sebe Sami: pro Novi Peregovory' Shhodo Donbasu' ['The Kremlin is Waiting for Ukrainians to Eat Themselves: About the New Negotiations About Donbas'], *online.ua,* 14 February 2017, <https://novyny.online.ua/767905/kreml-chekae-shcho-ukrayintsi-zyidyat-sebe-sami-pro-novi-peregovori-shchodo-donbasu/>, accessed 3 May 2017.
212. Security Service of Ukraine, 'SBU and SZRU Statement About Plans of Russian Secret Services to Destabilize Situation in Ukraine', 11 November 2016, <https://ssu.gov.ua/en/news/27/category/21/view/2238#sthash.k6OXAUGN.dpuf>, accessed 3 May 2017.
213. Yana Lemeshenko, 'Vasyl Hrytsak, Holova Sluzhby Bezpeky Ukrainy. U Planakh Kremlia – Destabilisatsiia ne Tilky v Ukraini, a y u "Starii Yevropi"' ['Vasyl Hrytsak, Head of Security Service of Ukraine. The Kremlin Plans to Destabilise Not Only Ukraine, but "Old Europe"'], *UKRINFORM,* 22 December 2016, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politycs/2144501-vasil-gricak-golova-sluzbi-bezpeki-ukraini.html>, accessed 3 May 2017.
214. Roman Kravets and Yevhen Kizilov, 'SBU: Rosiya Finansuie Deiaki Ukrainski Politichni Proekty' ['SBU: Russia Finances Ukrainian Political Projects'], *Ukrainska Pravda,* 21 February 2017, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2017/02/21/7136042/>, accessed 10 February 2018.

‘Porto Franco’ in Odesa

Anton Davidchenko – a key player in the Odesa street protest movement (see Chapter V) – also played a role in organising the ‘Porto Franco’ movement, which sought to establish a free economic zone in the port town of Odesa. Once again, the Kremlin sought to create the illusion of mass support for its agenda, in this case Ukraine’s federalisation, and to bolster popular support by appealing to historical sentiment. The name chosen for this project, Porto Franco, was associated locally with a time of historic economic prosperity – another ‘Trojan horse’ deployed to the Kremlin’s advantage.

In January 2015, Davidchenko sent a list of candidates who could lead the Porto Franco initiative to Ardzinba,[215] as well as an outline of activities for the project that would take place throughout February.[216] These included a meeting at which the Porto Franco declaration would be formally adopted, a press conference, a petition that would be sent to the president once it had amassed signatures, and a roundtable.[217] The press monitoring review that Davidchenko sent to Ardzinba suggested significant media coverage of the project.[218] Ardzinba was, as usual, consulted on the detail of the planning: he received variants of the ‘Odesa for Porto Franco’ logo; a sketch of a model of booths where signatures would be gathered[219] and the text that would be printed at the top of the papers on which signatures would be recorded;[220] and photos[221] of the press conference. Ardzinba also frequently received invoices from Davidchenko between February and June 2015, strongly indicating that the key individuals involved in the Porto Franco project were on the Kremlin’s payroll. The first invoice arrived on 7 February 2015 (see Box 1).

215. Email from kolokol_2008@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 22 January 2015, see InformNapalm, ‘SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov’s First Deputy Inal Ardzinba’.
216. Email from kolokol_2008@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 26 January 2015, see InformNapalm, ‘SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov’s First Deputy Inal Ardzinba’.
217. It took place on 11 March 2015; 20,000 signatures were gathered.
218. InformNapalm, ‘SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov’s First Deputy Inal Ardzinba’, converted to PDF on 7 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/порто-франко-ссылки.pdf>.
219. Email from kolokol_2008@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 3 February 2015, see InformNapalm, ‘SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov’s First Deputy Inal Ardzinba’.
220. Email from kolokol_2008@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 6 February 2015, see InformNapalm, ‘SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov’s First Deputy Inal Ardzinba’.
221. *Ibid.*

Box 1: Invoice for Porto Franco Project

Salaries

Rabotin 5,000, we gave 1,000
Ishchenko 5,000, we gave 1,000
Ivanitskyi, we gave 1,000
Ladynenko 1,000
Salaries for Anton and Artem???

Rallies

Odesa for Porto Franco 15,000, we gave 7,500
Roundtable for peace 5,000
Rally Odesa for peace 10,000
Protest action trade union 5,000 – 100 people, or 15,000 – 300 people
Sport clubs 12–15,000

Source: Email from kolokol_2008@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 7 February 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.

The project culminated in May 2015 with a petition bearing 37,000 signatures in support of Porto Franco delivered to the Ukrainian parliament where, despite a rainstorm, a rally in support of the initiative took place. Davidchenko sent photographs of the rally to Ardzinba on 28 May 2015, as well as photographs of 20 people who he described as 'his idiots' standing next to a minivan, suggesting that Ardzinba had paid for their transportation from Odesa to Kyiv.[222]

Economic Autonomy for Dnipropetrovsk

It appears that the Kremlin also targeted the major southeastern Ukrainian city of Dnipro as part of its federalisation agenda. Although the leaked emails do not include *direct* conversations with those implementing the plan to secure special status for the Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, there are nevertheless several references to it in Ardzinba's emails.

For example, on 17 December 2014, Ardzinba received a plan for an event called the Dnipropetrovsk Civic Forum, to be held in Pavlohrad,[223] the focus of which would be the potential benefits of special status for the local economy and the harm caused to the Ukrainian national economy

222. Email from kolokol_2008@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 28 May 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
223. Email from masya.ulyanova@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 27 December 2014, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 10 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/для-прессы-Павлоград.pdf>.

by the economic blockade of the occupied territories of the Donbas. Philipp Depisch from the initiative Pro Mitteleuropa, based in Vienna, had been invited to talk about the federal status of Austria. The benefits of the Austrian model of federalism were also the subject of a roundtable held in Pavlohrad on 22 December 2014.[224] One argument given in favour of this model was the fact that Austria could not use its army 'to suppress the demands and desires of one of the federal states of Austria'. Applied to Ukraine, this would prevent the military from being used to oppose Russian forces – proxy or otherwise − in the Donbas.

Ardzinba's emails suggest he paid close attention to the regular meetings for this forum: in January 2015, for example, he received a scan of the passport belonging to the Italian politician Giacomo Bezzi and the CV and flight details for the Italian expert Andrea Maria Vilotti, who had been invited to the February session.[225]

Special Ecological Status for Zaporizhzhia

On 25 October 2014, Pavlo Broyde, the Zaporizhzhian PR specialist living in exile in Moscow, sent Ardzinba several options for 'popularising the ideas of decentralisation and a special status for the region', based on economic, ecological, historical or human rights factors.[226] Broyde soon followed up with a plan for December 2014 and January 2015,[227] noting that pursuing special status for the Zaporizhzhia Oblast based on ecology would minimise the risk of being thwarted by the SBU in the early stages – although he also intended to complement this campaign with messaging on economic self-government issues and, ultimately, political demands.[228] The campaign he proposed would include: holding rallies on health and ecology issues – potentially popular in the industrial

224. Email from andr.kirilenko@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 22 December 2014, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 10 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/статья-Виктории.pdf.>
225. Email from mplisyuk@gmail.com to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 28 January 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'; Email from mplisyuk@gmail.com to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 25 January 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'; Email from pixellion@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 27 January 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/tickets-S47S9G.pdf>.
226. Email from vac2011@inbox.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 25 October 2014, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 10 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Векторы-по-Запорожской-области.25.10.14.pdf>.
227. Email from vac2011@inbox.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 24 November 2014, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 10 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ХОДОВКА_декабря14_январь15.pdf>.
228. *Ibid.*

town – and a pan-oblast rally in support of special ecological status; dedicated roundtables; a petition; a forum of local councils; and the submission to the Ukrainian parliament of a draft law granting special ecological status for Zaporizhzhia.[229]

This plan was implemented between December 2014 and April 2015, and the centrepiece was the establishment of the Council for the Special Status of Zaporizhzhia, which not only advocated a special status for the region, but also propagated Kremlin messaging about the harm that would be inflicted on the region as a result of Ukraine's integration into European structures, the issue of local mobilisation for service in the occupied Donbas territories, and the benefits of federation, 'like Switzerland'.[230] Ardzinba was again involved throughout, receiving by email draft banners for the council,[231] a template for the document on which signatures would be collected,[232] information about the chairs that would be used by the council,[233] and a draft law ultimately granting the region special status.[234] Ardzinba also appears to have signed off a new idea proposed by Broyde in March 2015 to win control of the City Council, through 'systemic funding', which would then vote in favour of the Kremlin.[235] Two days after Broyde made this suggestion, a group was formed within the City Council of deputies who supported the region's special status and Ardzinba was sent a list of 12 deputies who became part of the group.[236] On 28 April, Broyde sent Ardzinba photographic evidence that the committee for social and economic affairs of the Zaporizhzhia City Council had adopted an appeal to the president, cabinet and parliament calling for changes to the law that would grant special status to Zaporizhzhia; he sent

229. *Ibid.*
230. *Ibid.*
231. Email from vac2011@inbox.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 13 January 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
232. Email from vac2011@inbox.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 10 February 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 10 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/зп_ПОДПИСНОЙ-ЛИСТ.pdf>.
233. Email from vac2011@inbox.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 16 February 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
234. Email from vac2011@inbox.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 5 February 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 21 November 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Проект-закона-эко-2.pdf>.
235. Email from vac2011@inbox.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 21 March 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'
236. Email from vac2011@inbox.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 23 March 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 10 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/В-состав-депутатской-группы-вошли.pdf>.

a similar photograph of the health and social protection committee on 29 April.[237] Deputies from Broyde's group were members of both committees.

However, the Council for the Special Status of Zaporizhzhia was not the Kremlin's only proxy group in Zaporizhzhia. Broyde sent images of events conducted by the Sotsialne Zaporizhzhia group, as well as articles written in its name, suggesting that the group was a conduit for Russia's plans. This is corroborated by later reports of the SBU, which named Sotsialne Zaporizhzhia as a Russian front.[238]

A Special Economic Zone for the Kharkiv Oblast

The Kremlin used similar tactics to promote federalism in the Kharkiv Oblast. Once again, a council was formed to generate and give the illusion of popular support for regional special status, and its name − the Public Council Slobozhanshchyna in Support of Constitutional Reform − was once again chosen to tap into local historical sentiment ('Slobozhanshchyna' is a historical toponym for Eastern Ukraine). On 7 April 2015, Ardzinba received a draft banner.[239] The publicly acknowledged goal of this organisation, according to an interview by Kharkiv Communist Party leader Alla Aleksandrovska and sent to Ardzinba on 14 April, was to ensure a 'broader participation of the population of the country into the process' of constitutional reform.[240] However, Ardzinba was sent concrete proposals to change Ukraine's constitution a month later, which envisioned special economic status for Kharkiv, Kyiv and Sevastopol, as well as the Autonomous Republic of Crimea.[241] Under this status, Kharkiv would establish treaty relations with Ukraine's central government in social, economic and cultural matters; it would also develop relations with nearby Russian regions. These proposals were considered by the council on 21 May,[242] after which Ardzinba received a draft appeal calling on Ukrainian President Poroshenko and Prime Minster Groysman to consider the proposed amendments.[243] Two months later, Ardzinba sent Aleksandrovska a document

237. Email from vac2011@inbox.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 28 April 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Pat 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
238. Kravets and Kizilov, 'SBU: Rosiya Finansuie Deiaki Ukrainski Politichni Proekty' ['SBU: Russia is Funding Ukrainian Political Projects'].
239. Email from roukin4@yandex.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 7 April 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
240. Email from roukin4@yandex.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 14 April 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 11 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/В-Харькове-будет-создан-общественный-совет-поддержки-конституционной-реформы.pdf>.
241. Email from roukin4@yandex.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 18 May 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
242. Email from roukin4@yandex.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 21 May 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
243. Email from roukin4@yandex.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 25 May 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba',

entitled 'Key Theses of the Draft Law of Ukraine "About the Special Region 'Slobozhanshchyna'"'.[244] Rallies, festivals and roundtables were also held in support of the 'special region', while a forum of deputies from local councils adopted a resolution that called on the national parliament to put the region's status to a vote.[245]

All-Ukrainian Constitutional Forum

In another example of Russia's efforts to create the illusion of mass support for federalisation, leaked emails from Aleksandrovska's account record the creation of an all-Ukrainian constitutional forum.[246] On 1 June 2015, Aleksandrovska received a draft invitation to the forum planned for 11 June, which envisioned the participation of representatives from Zaporizhzhia, Odesa, Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk and the Constitutional Commission, as well as MPs and international speakers.[247] The draft resolution agreed at the forum, which Ardzinba had sent to Aleksandrovska on 9 June, called for the federalisation of Ukraine by giving Odesa a 'free port' status, increasing the budgetary powers of the Ukrainian regions, and granting areas such as Besarabia the legal status of a national cultural autonomy.[248]

Aleksandrovska was also among those who received unofficial instructions and talking points in advance of the second forum, which was set to take place on 8 July.[249] The 'compulsory topics' included: 'supporting the special status of oblasts'; tailored packages of regional powers due to the 'unacceptability of uniform decentralisation'; the demand for directly elected governors; criticism of Poroshenko's efforts towards constitutional reform; and what Ardzinba called the 'sabotage of

converted to PDF on 11 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Письмо-порошенко.pdf>.

244. Email from viktor_vinogr@mail.ru to fedor_fedorov53@mail.ru, 30 July 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 11 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Тезисы-проект-ОРР-Харьков-рус.pdf>.
245. Email from simonov_semen86@mail.ru to fedor_fedorov53@mail.ru, 6 October 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
246. The last of Ardzinba's emails, exposed in Tranche Three, is dated 10 June 2015. However, the emails leaked from Aleksandrovska's mailbox cover the period up to 6 November 2015.
247. Email from viktor_vinogr@mail.ru to fedor_fedorov53@mail.ru, 3 June 2015, InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 11 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ПРОГРАММА-ВСЕУКРАИНСКОГО-ФОРУМА.pdf>.
248. Email from viktor_vinogr@mail.ru to fedor_fedorov53@mail.ru, 9 June 2015, InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 11 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/РЕЗОЛЮЦИЯ-ФОРУМА.pdf>.
249. Email from viktor_vinogr@mail.ru to fedor_fedorov53@mail.ru, 3 July 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.

the Minsk Agreements'.[250] When the second forum convened on 8 July, its participants, who now also included regional representatives from the west Ukrainian regions of Lviv and Zakarpattia, adhered to Ardzinba's talking points, in some cases word for word.[251]

What Happened Next

Although the last of the leaked emails is dated November 2015, media reports record what happened next with the Kremlin's federalisation plan. In Dnipro, the appeal for special status was supported by the City Council on 10 June and by the Oblast Council on 27 August 2015. On 12 December 2015, the SBU announced it had forestalled a conference, at which 1,000 participants had been set to demand special status for the oblast.[252] Nevertheless, a project under this name was supported by representatives of almost all factions in the national parliament and a meeting of a group of parliamentary deputies did take place in June 2016. Laws supporting Odesa Porto Franco and the special ecological status of Zaporizhzhia were registered in the Ukrainian parliament by deputies from the Opposition Bloc. In addition, a petition in support of the idea was launched.[253]

A number of regional councils in the Dnipropetrovsk and Kharkiv Oblasts also launched a 'national project for elected governors',[254] which would see the constitution changed so that governors could be locally elected, rather than appointed by Kyiv. Superficially democratic, this measure would give the Kremlin endless opportunities to interfere in the appointment of high-level officials. Indeed, the reason for Moscow's interest in autonomy movements in Ukraine is clear: the greater independence granted to the regions, the more opportunities to influence the choice of regional representatives and the regional political scene thereafter. In summary, by pursuing a wide range of activities that are designed to destabilise Ukraine, but which can be presented as a genuine and homegrown initiative, Russia has been attempting to persuade both Ukrainian citizens and the West that federalisation is a genuine solution for Ukraine.

250. *Ibid.*
251. *24tv.ua,* '"Vseukrainskiy Konstitutsionniy Forum" Potreboval of Poroshenko Uchityvat Mneniye Regionov' ['"All-Ukrainian Constitutional Forum" Demanded Poroshenko Take the Opinion of the Regions into Account'], 8 July 2015, <https://24tv.ua/ru/vseukrainskij_konstitucionnyj_forum_potreboval_ot_poroshenko_uchityvat_mnenie_regionov_n591585>, accessed 11 February 2018.
252. *TSN,* 'SBU Sorvala Vozmozhnoye Sozdaniye Zaporozhskoi Narodnoi Respubliki' ['The SBU Disrupted the Creation of the Zaporizhzhia People's Republic'], 12 December 2015, <https://ru.tsn.ua/politika/sbu-sorvala-vozmozhnoe-sozdanie-zaporozhskoy-narodnoy-respubliki-543071.html>, accessed 10 February 2018.
253. Taiysiya Grigorieva, 'Dnepropetrovskaya Oblast Potrebovala u Poroshenko Avtonomii' ['Dnipropetrovsk Oblast Demands Autonomy from Poroshenko'], *Riafan.ru,* 22 August 2016, <https://riafan.ru/548151-dnepropetrovskaya-oblast-potrebovala-u-poroshenko-avtonomii>, accessed 29 March 2017.
254. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/АРХИВ-ДЕПУТАТОВ-1.pdf>.

VII. The Kremlin's Political Power: Reaching the Ukrainian 'Soul'

THE THREE TRANCHES of leaks provide compelling evidence of direct Kremlin funding and control as well as ample proof of the day-to-day mechanics of unconventional subversive war, in which power is manipulated through media coverage, political influence and civic actors, in combination with a covert military presence and overt paramilitary forces, in pursuit of Russia's goals in Ukraine. To achieve its goals, Russia purposefully sought to 'get into' the heads of Ukrainians, to learn how to manipulate their perceptions and then compel them to make decisions which would ultimately harm their interests and benefit Russia's.

To do that, the Kremlin – as in other instances – relied on the services of Ukrainians ideologically allied with the 'Russian world'. One telling example is Surkov's 2013 email correspondence with Vitaliy Leybin, chief editor of the *Russian Reporter* newspaper and native of Donetsk who later sought Russian citizenship, before November 2013, when President Yanukovych publicly announced his decision to delay signing the EU Association Agreement. This correspondence shows how the Kremlin sought to shape popular opinion in favour of, and therefore prepare the ground for, Ukraine's reorientation away from the EU and towards the Russia-led Customs Union.

On 17 October 2013, Leybin sent Surkov a document that outlined the 'entry points' to Ukraine's public opinion. He categorised a list of journalists, PR experts, historians, and business executives operating in Ukraine into three groups: individuals with whom 'all types of interaction were possible', meaning they displayed a strong interest in promoting the pro-Russian position; individuals with whom 'interaction was possible'; and individuals with whom common points were 'theoretically possible'.[255] Russia, it appears, was planning to find third-party endorsements within Ukrainian society to champion Ukraine's rejection of the EU.

The author of the document, whether Leybin or another individual, had an insider's insight into the Ukrainian psyche. Many suggestions were tactical. The author suggested toning down the 'hard agitprop' of overtly 'pro-Russian politics'. Instead, they suggested highlighting Russian business successes or comparing the salaries of teachers and doctors in Russia and Ukraine. The document also suggested that the Kremlin should mimic EU Eastern Neighbourhood support programmes,

255. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/вл_украина-1.pdf>.

observing that the predominantly pro-EU stance of the Ukrainian media might be explained by the grants provided by the EU or the fact that many journalists had studied there.[256]

The document also explored more fundamental cultural and ideological aspects. Noting that 'Europeans praise Ukraine and we only scare her [Ukraine] away', the document's author suggested developing a historical narrative emphasising Ukraine's special place in Russia's destiny, as well as deconstructing the stereotype that 'Ukraine is less savage and more European' than Russia. In addition, Ukraine's national characteristics of stubbornness and pride meant that creating 'at least an illusion of a free choice, equal partnership, and not subordination' was advisable.[257]

Another telling example of Russia's efforts to shape popular perceptions and narratives also involves Leybin, who penned an appeal calling on Ukrainian citizens to pressure their leaders to bring a halt to the war, using emotive phrases such as 'no ideas or political goals justify killing', 'foreign powers are tearing our country apart' (presumably referring to Western countries such as the US, France and Germany, and the EU), and 'your brothers and sisters are dying'. Surkov was sent a draft of the appeal on 21 August 2014 by the office of Oleg Govorun, head of the Directorate for Cooperation with the CIS Countries, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia.[258] It appeared in print – under the name of the Civic Initiative of the Donbas, and signed by Leybin and four others – on 2 September 2014 in multiple outlets, including in *Korrespondent.*[259] Its publication coincided with the end of the Battle of Ilovaisk, during which the Ukrainian army's attempt to retake the city of Ilovaisk resulted in its suffering the greatest number of casualties since the start of the conflict, after a massive influx of Russian regular forces had left its forces encircled.[260] The letter exudes what one might consider an extraordinary level of cynicism: those engaged in starting war used fear of killing to undermine the morale of their enemy. In this, the work of Russia shows some similarities to the Soviet-backed anti-war movements of the 1970s and 1980s.

Overall, anti-war narratives and attempts to paint the conflict in the Donbas region as a civil war played a prominent role in Russia's information operations. As seen earlier in this paper, the Kremlin also sponsored anti-mobilisation appeals by the Council for the Special Status of

256. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/вл_украина-1.pdf>.
257. *Ibid.*
258. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 1 April 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/unnamed-file-1.pdf>.
259. *Korrespondent*, 'Nemedlenno Ostanovit' Vojnu! Obrashhenie Obshhestvennoj Organizacii Grazhdanskaja Iniciativa Donbassa' ['Immediately Cease the War: An Appeal of the Civic Organisation Citizen's Initiative of Donbas'], 2 September 2014, <http://korrespondent.net/ukraine/politics/3413145-nemedlenno-ostanovyt-voinu-obraschenye-obschestvennoi-orhanyzatsyy-hrazhdanskaia-ynytsyatyva-donbassa>, accessed 1 April 2017.
260. Dajey Petros, 'Satellite Images Prove Russian Forces Crossed the Border to Attack Ukraine at Ilovaisk', *The Interpreter,* 30 January 2015, <http://www.interpretermag.com/satellite-images-prove-russian-forces-crossed-the-border-to-attack-ukraine-at-ilovaisk/>, accessed 1 April 2017.

Zaporizhzhia, anti-mobilisation protests as part of activities coordinated by Muratov in the Kharkiv Oblast, and the anti-mobilisation banners hung in central Odesa (see Chapter V). The grievances and emotional losses of war were, and remain, a vulnerability open to continual exploitation by the Kremlin, while concealing its role in beginning and sustaining the war in the Donbas. To paraphrase George Orwell, Russia appears to be persuading Ukrainians that its hybrid war is, in fact, a form of peace.[261]

Manipulating the Ukrainian Media Landscape

Infiltrating Ukrainian Media Outlets

Despite the ban on Russian media operating and broadcasting in Ukraine, the Kremlin employed a variety of other methods to get its messaging into the Ukrainian media space. These included: seeking to overtake or redesign existing Ukrainian outlets; and bribing Ukrainian journalists to cover Kremlin-sponsored events, thereby spreading Russian narratives and creating new media outlets in Ukraine that would promote Russia's interests.

On 16 July 2014, Surkov received an email from Pavel Broyde, the former PR 'technologist' who had fled Zaporizhzhia for Moscow after the Euromaidan revolution.[262] His email explains that it was possible to address the failure to spread pro-Russian narratives in the mass media, and the attendant failure of Russia's separatist protests in southeastern Ukraine, by developing a pro-Russian presence in Ukraine's information space through reorientating existing media outlets and creating new outlets.

Broyde identified Ukrainian Media Holding (UMH) as the most promising media company for achieving 'an informational pro-Russian breakthrough in the Ukrainian media space'. Although it did not have sufficient resources to dominate the media space, it could nevertheless have significant influence over the internet and radio sectors. An additional benefit was its ownership by Serhiy Kurchenko, a 27-year-old Ukrainian oligarch who had previously managed Yanukovych's assets and was then taking refuge in Russia – an international warrant for his arrest had been issued earlier in 2014. Broyde classified the UMH outlets as 'moderate re-translators of anti-Russian messages'. The intention was not to turn UMH outlets into platforms for the DNR or Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs per se, but to reorient their content so that it promoted Russian interests in Ukraine. This could be achieved by selling the controlling stake to Russian businesses close to the Kremlin or by moving their editorial offices into territories no longer under the control of the Ukrainian government. UMH could also be used to develop other, more distinctly pro-Russian, outlets. If questions were raised about the negative impact of UMH's activities on Ukraine's national security, this attack on free speech would be turned into an international scandal.

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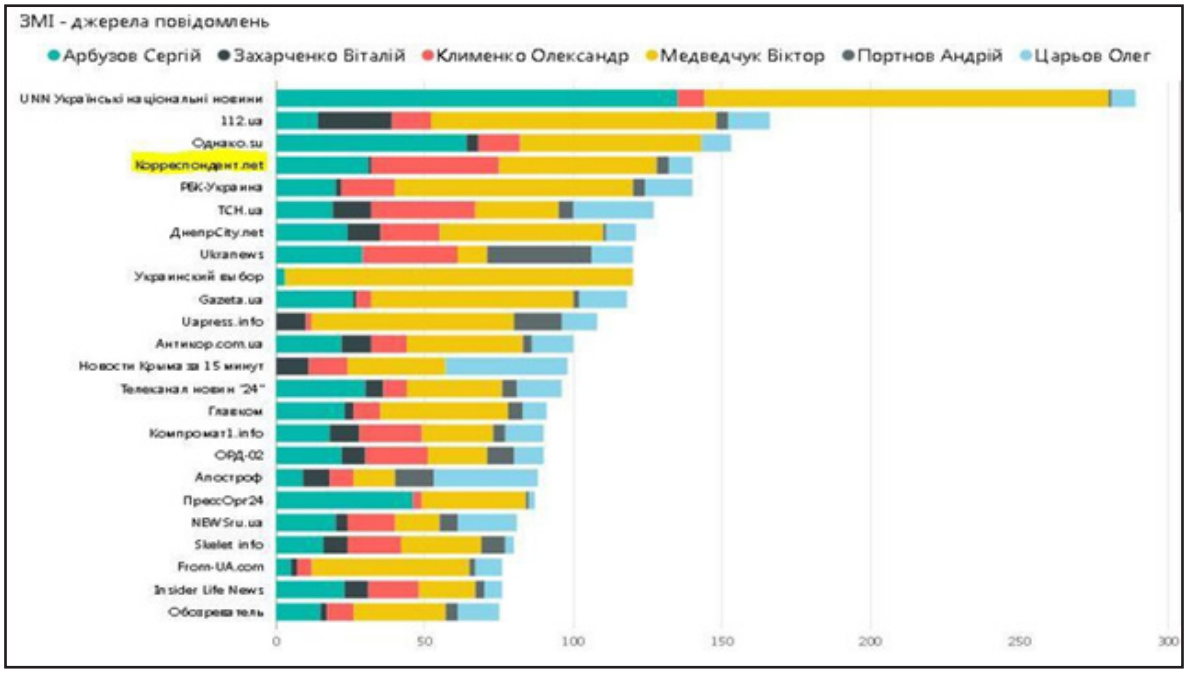
261. Orwell's original quote is: 'War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength', in George Orwell, *1984* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing, 1949).
262. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/В-отношении-Украинского-медиа.pdf>.

Figure 10: *Korrespondent.net* Ranked Fourth Among Ukrainian Internet Sites for Mentions of Fugitive Former Officials of Yanukovych's Circles



Key: Colour code, from left to right, of fugitive former officials: Serhiy Arbuzov, Vitaliy Zakharchenko, Oleksandr Klymenko, Viktor Medvedchuk, Andriy Portnov and Oleh Tsariov. Vertical axis (first five positions): UNN (Ukrainian National News), 112.ua, Odnako.su, Korrespondent.net, RBK-Ukraine.

Source: Liga.net, *'Mediagigiena' ['Media Hygiene'], <http://www.liga.net/projects/mediagigiena/>, accessed 29 March 2017.*

It is unclear what happened with UMH next. However, data analysis by Ukrainian site *Liga.net* for July–September 2016 suggests that one of its outlets, *Korrespondent.net*, sought to popularise the pro-Russian views espoused by former Ukrainian officials from Yanukovych's circles.[263]

The leaked emails show that the Kremlin also considered gaining control over the Odesa media outlets Timer and STV. In November 2014, Surkov's deputy Ardzinba received analysis of the two outlets' potential as conduits of Kremlin messaging and of the risks involved.[264] He also received

263. *Liga.net,* 'Mediagigiena' ['Media Hygiene'], <http://www.liga.net/projects/mediagigiena/>, accessed 29 March 2017.
264. Email from amalovatsky@gmail.com to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 19 November 2014, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 12 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/СТВ_ТАЙМЕР.pdf>.

their estimated monthly costs ($7,080 for Timer and $34,995 for STV[265]). Although it is unclear whether Ardzinba proceeded with the plans to fund these outlets, an email sent by Dmitry Soin on 4 May 2015 about further plans to destabilise the Odesa Oblast referred to Timer as an 'allied' media, but recommended that Ardzinba invest in the Transnistrian news portal TIRAS because Timer did not show up in search-engine results.[266]

Although it is unclear whether the Kremlin took control of existing Ukrainian media outlets, its agents definitely appeared to use bribery to shape their coverage, as discussed in Chapter V. There are multiple detailed examples in Ardzinba's inbox of such payments being made to journalists working for major media outlets to ensure coverage of Kremlin-sponsored events. As just one example, in April 2015, Odesa activist Davidchenko sent price lists for being featured on Ukrainian TV channels, including Ukrayina ($3,900), ICTV ($4,400) and NTN ($3,900).[267] On 18 April 2015, the same Davidchenko suggested placing a news report about a rally with car drivers blocking a square in Kharkiv in protest at increased gas prices on *unn.com.ua* for $700, and *rbc.ua* for $600. And on 9 May 2015, Davidchenko informed Ardzinba that the sites 112.ua and Comments.ua refused to cover a Russian-organised rally, while *Korrespondent.net* asked for a price three times higher. Broyde sent Ardzinba a table[268] with prices of coverage for the majority of Ukrainian large outlets. Although the later reports of press coverage that he sent Ardzinba rarely included links from these central outlets, this nonetheless indicated that the road to media coverage for the Kremlin was open, given the proper funding.

The ease with which Kremlin messages were planted in Ukrainian media is illustrated by a document[269] Surkov received on 18 February 2016 for the preparation of a roundtable of the 'Committee for the Salvation of Ukraine', a group of politicians from Yanukovych's circle who fled after Euromaidan. During a meeting on 25 February, fugitive Ukrainian politicians such as former Prime Minister Mykola Azarov, former MPs and other Russian and pro-Russian actors discussed how the two years that passed after Euromaidan 'have placed Ukraine on the brink of an economic, demographic, and social catastrophe'. According to the document, the Kremlin organisers of this event established the price for getting Ukrainian media to cover this event at $7,000.

265. Email from fontan2014@rambler.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 5 December 2014, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/смета-таймер.ods>; Email from fontan2014@rambler.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 5 December 2014, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/МИНИМАЛЬНЫЕ-требования.xlsx>.
266. Email from goldabxazia@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 4 May 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
267. Email from kolokol_2008@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 6 April 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
268. Email from vac2011@inbox.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru 4 January 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
269. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/pages.pdf>.

Another way of working around the ban on Russian media in Ukraine was to fund new Ukrainian outlets that would facilitate steady Russian influence on Ukrainian audiences. Broyde's July 2014 email to Ardzinba stated this would certainly be cheaper than cross-Ukraine PR campaigns leveraging central media outlets – perhaps four to five times cheaper if the new outlets were internet-based.[270] According to Broyde's calculations, start-up costs over a period of eight months ranged from $668,360 for a news website in the top 75 Ukrainian sites to $5,339,640 for a news website in the top five.[271] Furthermore, a news website was only one possible option. Other potential specialised sites included:

- A political analysis site ('it should appear objective' and 'shouldn't create the impression of a "pro-Russian" site').[272]
- A military news site ('to form a negative attitude in Ukrainian society towards the "anti-terrorist operation" and the Kyiv regime').[273]
- Regional portals promoting separatism in southeastern Ukraine.[274]
- An anti-war site ('to demoralise the Ukrainian population and servicemen').
- A site appealing to Ukrainian nationalist-minded audiences (to promote the idea that Ukraine should abandon the Donbas).[275]

Ihor Dimitriyev, a former deputy of the Odesa Council, also submitted a proposal for alternative media to Surkov in October 2014,[276] which envisaged a 'pirate FM radio station' broadcasting from nearby Transnistria and promoting 'an alternative picture of events'. Based on Radio

270. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/В-отношении-Украинского-медиа.pdf>.
271. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/1_Калькуляция_ведущий-новостной-сайт.pdf>.
272. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/2_сайт-Политанализ.pdf>.
273. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/3_Сайт-военных-новостей.pdf>.
274. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/4_Региональные-порталы.pdf>.
275. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/6_хватит-кормить-Донбасс.pdf>.
276. Email from deputatdimitriev@gmail.com to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 16 October 2014, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to PDF on 12 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Одесса_прогнозы-и-планы_181014.pdf>.

Liberty, he wrote, 'the station would feature hourly news dispatches, political commentaries and "counter-propaganda", Russian programmes, and patriotic Soviet and Russian music'.

It is not known if any of those plans sent to Surkov came to fruition. However, their existence testifies to the importance of media and propaganda in the Kremlin's plans to control Ukraine. It is also noteworthy that the planned outlets were designed to appeal to different segments of the Ukrainian audience, building a lesson from the Soviet era on the benefits of diverse propaganda narratives.

Planting Messages in Ukraine and Russian Media Coverage

In July 2014, Surkov received a curious document that gives a unique insight into the process by which the Kremlin injected Russian propaganda messages – designed to demoralise Ukrainians – into the Ukrainian media space.[277]

Entitled 'Thematic Lines for Working with the Political Network for 20–27 July 2014', the document contains a list of themed messages to be pushed by the Kremlin's network of what might be called 'information agents'. One of these themes was the MH17 disaster. Although the event is not central to this paper's research, the messaging in this document provides more evidence of the cynicism with which the Russian authorities approached the information campaign to create confusion over, and to obfuscate Russian responsibility for, the disaster. The document provided eight potential messaging lines:

1. It was a provocation by Kyiv targeting the DNR and the LNR.
2. Kyiv, backed by the West, is trying to blame Russia and Putin personally.
3. A Malaysia Airlines plane was deliberately directed through an area where anti-terrorist operations were taking place.
4. An audio recording revealed that militiamen talked about being attacked by 'so-called' civilian airliners (implying that MH17 was not a civilian plane).
5. It is an excuse for NATO intervention.
6. It was an act designed to hide Ukraine's strategic failure.
7. It could be compared to the shooting of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in July 1914, with Kyiv trying to start a new world war.
8. Ukraine's own air defence, partially located in the occupied territories, shot the plane down, and there is evidence to show that these air-defence systems were readied shortly before it was hit.

The document also included messaging that criticised Poroshenko's amendments to the constitution, emphasised the need to make peace with Novorossiya, and provoked doubts about the resilience of the Ukrainian army and Ukraine's socioeconomic situation.

277. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/20.07-27.07-1.pdf>.

The email also divided those influencers who would receive, and then presumably promote, these messages – including journalists, historians, editors, political scientists, and politicians – into categories according to their effectiveness, from 'ineffective' to 'high' status.[278]

A Google search reveals that this network did indeed appear to disseminate the strategic messages via those platforms to which they had access. For example, former Kremlin adviser Alexander Nekrassov used the Franz Ferdinand analogy to warn against a new world war in a piece for *CNN,*[279] as did journalist Viktor Rudnev in an article published on *Korrespondent.net*.[280] Mikael Chagalyan, a 'non-status effective person' according to the Kremlin's classification, wrote an article about the encirclement of 5,000 Ukrainian troops for *rian.com.ua*,[281] while Yuriy Lukashyn, a journalist from the Kremlin's 'reserve' list, penned an article titled 'ATO [Anti-Terrorist Operation, the Ukrainian term for the war in Donbas] is on the Verge of Collapse' for *Korrespondent.net*,[282] which contained most of the Kremlin's messaging points from this document.

Surkov also appeared to rely on Russian political experts to spread the Kremlin's messaging about Ukraine in *Russian* media outlets, with a view to maintaining domestic support for Russia's foreign policy relating to Ukraine, by manipulating perceptions of reality.

These experts predominantly came from the Russian Centre for Current Policy, whose director was Aleksei Chesnakov (introduced in Chapter II). At least once a week, Surkov received reports about the articles published by these experts and their promotion via social media,[283] while approximately once a month he also received a list of experts with whom a meeting was planned. Both the publication reports and lists of experts were sent from the secured email address ask1@digitalsafe.com. The agenda pursued in these articles comprises several common themes:

- The only good Ukrainian fascist is a dead fascist.
- Hagiographic accounts of the leaders of the DNR and the LNR, and of the emergence of 'independent republics'.
- The crumbling resilience of the Ukrainian army and of Ukraine itself.
- The denigration of Ukraine's independence using historical narratives.

278. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks: 1GB Mail Cache Retrieved by Ukrainian Hacktivists', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/20.07-27.07-1.pdf>.
279. Alexander Nekrassov, 'Malaysia Flight 17: A Franz Ferdinand Moment?', *CNN,* 21 July 2014.
280. Viktor Rudnev, 'Provokatsiya s Malaziyskim Boingom: Komy Vygodno?' ['Provocation with the Malaysian Boeing: Who Benefits?'], *Korrespondent.net,* 21 July 2014, <http://blogs.korrespondent.net/blog/politics/3395109/>, accessed 29 March 2017.
281. Mikael Chagalyan, 'Pochemu ne Udalsya Blitskrig v Stepyah Donbassa' ['Why the Blitzkrieg in the Donbas Steppes Didn't Work Out'], *rian.com.ua,* 27 July 2014, <http://rian.com.ua/view/20140727/355388016.html>, accessed 29 March 2017.
282. Yuriy Lukashyn, 'ATO na Grane Kollapsa' ['ATO is on the Verge of Collapse'], *Korrespondent.net*, 27 January 2014, <http://blogs.korrespondent.net/blog/politics/3397768/>, accessed 29 March 2017.
283. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/октябрь-19-25нов.pdf>.

Other techniques for disseminating the Kremlin's messaging on Ukraine via Russian outlets included holding roundtable discussions,[284] publishing press releases, and offering expert commentary to the press.

The reports received by Surkov suggest this approach to shaping domestic media coverage was by and large successful. In one telling example, two media reports received by Surkov in July 2015 recorded the positive headlines regarding the introduction of Russian passports in the DNR and the LNR, such as 'Donbas is Russia' and 'Russian passports are an act of mercy'. The Kremlin's messaging, delivered by its network of political agents, had succeeded in presenting the undeniable reality of Russia's involvement in the war in Ukraine in a positive, humanitarian light.[285]

This approach to the Russian PR and information campaigns in both Ukraine and Russia – spreading identical messages simultaneously through multiple channels and thus creating the illusion of many individuals coming to the same conclusions independently – is called 'carpet bombing'. It is extremely difficult to expose, as Russian influence over individual agents is much more difficult to identify than its influence on media outlets.

Trolling, Aggravating Divisions and Creating New Ones

Ardzinba's emails shed light on some of the media and social media tactics used by pro-Kremlin forces to destabilise Ukraine. The well-known tactic of trolling opponents on social media was among the daily operations of activist groups in Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia seeking Kremlin funding.[286] As discussed in Chapter V, Davidchenko's group regularly agreed memes and caricatures for trolling on social media with Ardzinba, tying this where possible into its activities in Odesa. For example, Davidchenko exploited Ukrainians' negative views of same-sex marriage to spread negativity towards EU integration with a banner featuring Ukrainian politicians dressed up as participants in a gay parade. The text on the banner, 'My idiom v Yevropopu' ('We are going into the Euroarse'),

284. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/отчет-0402-КП-2. pdf>.
285. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ОТЧЕТ-17-07-ПАСП-1.pdf>; InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ОТЧЕТ-20-07-ПАСП-2.pdf>.
286. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to pdf on 4 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/смета-октябрь.pdf>; InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to pdf on 8 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/По-активной-работе-в-Запорожье-и-области-есть-следующие-ресурсы.pdf>.

was a play on words that facilitated the extensive media and social media coverage recorded in the press monitoring report later sent to Ardzinba.[287]

Chapters III and V have shown how the Kremlin preyed on existing vulnerabilities and sore spots, such as economic hardship, to aggravate existing divisions. The May 2014 fire in Odesa, discussed in Chapter V, is one compelling example of how physical actions provoked conflict between rival groups on social media sites – which Davidchenko enthusiastically reported to Ardzinba by email.[288]

However, the Kremlin did not stop at exploiting existing divisions; it also sought to create new ones. A report sent to Ardzinba by Luisa Mamedova, who managed press activity, on 16 February 2015 indicates that the Kremlin had actively pursued the creation of new ethnic tensions in Odesa.[289] In one example, camouflaged attackers set upon a 75-year-old Azeri in an attempt to spark an inter-ethnic conflict or at least create the illusion of one. If the headlines generated by Mamedova are to be believed, Azeri entrepreneurs living in Odesa united against Ukrainian nationalists, who were said to be intimidating the city's minorities while the police looked on passively. This artificially generated 'conflict' was used to launch a Kremlin-curated paramilitary group, the Patrol of Odesa Patriots, whose self-proclaimed goal was to 'not allow radical elements to intimidate our citizens'. However, the group's real intentions, according to a report sent to Ardzinba,[290] were to infiltrate and bribe the Odesa law enforcement agencies and to use robberies and ambushes to provoke 'radicals' – that is, Ukrainian nationalists.

This artificially created inter-ethnic conflict in Odesa was exacerbated by another relatively new Kremlin technique used in Ukraine: *vbrosy* (literally 'tossed-in' news). Unlike fake news, *vbrosy* is not necessarily fake, but often involves rapidly spreading pieces of emotionally charged information through prepared channels to manipulate the audience's attention. In Mamedova's February 2015 report to Ardzinba[291] she outlined the way in which it was being deployed: examples of headlines include: 'Azeris are Troubled by the Actions of Ukrainian Nationalists'; 'Nationalism: A Monster Set Free'; and 'Caucasians of Odesa are Uniting Against the Nationalists'. Notably, the last one received coverage in more than 95 media outlets and blogs.

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287. Email from kolokol_2008@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 30 March 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to pdf on 13 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ссылки-1.pdf>.
288. Email from kolokol_2008@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 3 November 2014, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
289. Email from luiza.mamedova.81@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 16 February 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to pdf on 12 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/отчет-по-акциям-одесса-2015.pdf>.
290. Email from tolopchuk@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 27 January 2015, see InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba'.
291. Email from luiza.mamedova.81@mail.ru to viktor_vinogr@mail.ru, 16 February 2015.

Destabilising societies by exacerbating divisions, creating new ones, and spreading panic have long been identified as the Kremlin's goals in Ukraine and beyond. The leaked emails provide valuable proof as to how Russia advanced these goals in Ukraine through online channels.

Bringing Europe into Play

Operation 'Eurorealism'

Leaked emails suggest that the Kremlin was involved in the launch of the Ukrainian Policy Fund, an institute in Kyiv that would promote the principle of 'Eurorealism' – that is, that Ukraine should come to the realisation that the EU is not serious about Ukraine's accession, efforts to integrate would ultimately fail, and that closer relations with Russia are the better option for Ukraine.[292]

Although the Eurorealism initiative was reportedly established by the right-wing, populist Eurosceptic party Alternative für Deutschland, Surkov received a concept note on the issue from the new institute's director, Kost Bondarenko, on 30 June 2015,[293] a week before it was presented at a roundtable conference hosted by the institute. While it is not clear if Surkov commissioned the concept note, the fact that it was sent to Surkov in advance implies that the Kremlin was involved in the project.

According to a press monitoring report later sent to Surkov,[294] the event – which called for Ukraine to 'discard the pink glasses of Euro-optimism' – garnered significant media coverage in Ukraine and Russia and generated favourable headlines such as: 'The EU policy of good neighbourship failed'.[295] The Eurorealism message gained a further boost from the fact that it found a political home in Ukraine with the pro-Russia Opposition Bloc, with its leader, Boris Kolesnikov, appearing on Ukrainian television channels to promote the concept and the apparently related need to secure special status for the DNR and the LNR under a new Ukrainian constitution.[296] In yet another demonstration of reflexive control, therefore, the Kremlin sought to present integration into Europe as a lost cause for Ukraine, prodding it back into Russia's embrace.

292. Ukrainian Politics Foundation, <http://uapolicy.org/>, accessed 12 July 2018.
293. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/еврореализм1-4.pdf>.
294. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 29 March 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/МОНИТОРИНГ-ПО-КРУГЛОМУ-СТОЛУ-0607-4-1.pdf>.
295. Vladimir Mihailov, 'Politika Dobrososedstva ES Provalilas' ['The EU Policy of Good Neighbourship Failed'], *Politnavigator*, 7 July 2015, <https://www.politnavigator.net/politika-dobrososedstva-es-provalilas.html>, accessed 20 August 2018.
296. InformNapalm, 'Surkov Leaks (Part 2): Hacktivists Publish New Email Dump', converted to pdf on 20 August 2017, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/ТВ-кр.стол0607.pdf>.

Protecting National Security Versus Free Speech in a Time of Undeclared Conflict

The collision between journalistic standards during a time of peace, which Ukraine is in de jure, and during a time of war, which Ukraine is in de facto, has been an issue for the Ukrainian government for more than four years, since the armed uprising of Kremlin-backed militants in the Donbas began. As this chapter has so far shown, the Kremlin's aim is to use Ukrainian media outlets wherever possible to manipulate public opinion in a way that undermines Ukraine's national security. However, efforts to neutralise those messages provoke accusations that press freedoms are being undermined, especially from some European institutions.

The current state investigation into *Vesti,* a free daily newspaper with a daily circulation of approximately 200,000, is one such example. In Ukraine, the newspaper's anti-Ukrainian content has elicited protests of experts and activists alike, who describe it as an instrument of Kremlin propaganda. Kyiv's prosecutor's office opened criminal proceedings against the newspaper for promoting separatism. The SBU has accused it of questionable financing, searching its offices on 22 May and 11 September 2015. In May 2015, Ukraine's parliamentary committee for national security declared *Vesti* to be a threat to national security.[297]

The leaked emails suggest there is substance to these accusations. In an email to Surkov on 21 May 2015, Vitaliy Leybin, chief editor of the *Russia Reporter* newspaper, which is a partner of *Vesti,* reported a conversation he had had with the newspaper's then chief editor, Ihor Huzhva. Huzhva had offered some tactical advice for destabilising Ukraine, suggesting adding local elections in the occupied Donbas to the agenda of the Minsk negotiations and pushing for preliminary parliamentary elections in Ukraine, as this might return a larger number of Kremlin-controlled representatives from the DNR and the LNR to the Ukrainian parliament. More generally, Huzhva made it clear that he stood ready to assist the Kremlin in exercising influence on local elections in Kyiv using the wide reach of *Vesti*.[298]

During the meeting, Leybin promised Huzhva that the Kremlin would 'facilitate acquiring help from European friends on the topic of media freedom in Ukraine'.[299] Whether due to Russian influence or not, Western organisations have criticised the Ukrainian government for impinging on the freedom of the press, and specifically in relation to its treatment of *Vesti.* For example, in September 2014, after the SBU searched *Vesti*'s offices, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Representative on the Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatović called on the Ukrainian authorities 'to refrain from any measures which could intimidate members of the media and impede the work of media outlets', adding that 'national security concerns related to the current challenges in Ukraine

297. *Espreso TV,* 'Komitet Rady Vymahaye Zakryty Inter ta Vesti bo Vony Dopomagayut Kremlyu' ['The Rada Committee Demands the Closing of Inter and Vesti Because They are Helping the Kremlin'], 20 May 2015, <https://espreso.tv/news/2015/05/20/komitet_rady_vymahaye_zakryty_quotinterquot_ta_quotvestyquot__bo_vony_dopomahayut_kremlyu____nardep>, accessed 29 March 2017.
298. *Ibid.*
299. *Ibid.*

should not justify disproportionate restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of the media'.[300] *Vesti* was also cited in the 2015 report by Freedom House as an example of violation of freedom of the press.[301]

By way of a footnote, Huzhva resigned as chief editor of *Vesti* on 29 July 2015, taking up leadership of the news website *Strana.ua,* and on 31 January 2018 sought political asylum in Austria.

Weaponising Culture

Surkov's office dedicated efforts to promoting cultural events that supported its messaging. Some of these efforts did not come to fruition, but the mere number of proposals coming into Surkov's inbox serves as evidence of the Kremlin's awareness of the power of propaganda through culture. Examples include a book that seeks to decontaminate the prime minister of the DNR, on which Surkov received regular updates and which was ultimately published in June 2016,[302] and a music festival, organised by the Russian Ministry of Culture and featuring Russian artists, which toured the cities of the occupied Donbas region in February 2016.[303] In addition, Kharkiv Communist Party leader Alla Aleksandrovska, in her analysis of local election results in the Lozovskyi district in October 2015, told Ardzinba that a culture festival promoting the idea of special status for the Kharkiv Oblast had been instrumental in garnering support for the Kremlin-funded Nova Derzhava party.[304]

300. OSCE, 'OSCE Representative Urges Authorities in Ukraine to Respect Media After Raid on Vesti Newspaper', 12 September 2014, <http://www.osce.org/fom/123521>, accessed 29 March 2017.
301. Freedom House, 'Freedom of the Press 2015: Ukraine', <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/ukraine>, accessed 21 April 2018.
302. ZakharPrilepin.ru, 'Zakhar Prilepin: Biografiya' ['Zakhar Prilepin: a Biography'], <http://zaharprilepin.ru/ru/bio.html>, accessed 20 August 2017.
303. *NTV,* 'Rossiyskiye Artisty Gastroliruyut po Gorodam Donbassa' ['Russian Artists Tour Cities of Donbas'], 13 February 2016, <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1605462/>, accessed 20 August 2017.
304. InformNapalm, 'SurkovLeaks (Part 3): Analysis of the Correspondence of Surkov's First Deputy Inal Ardzinba', converted to pdf on 4 February 2018, <http://euromaidanpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Справка-по-результатам-выборов.pdf>.

Conclusions

THE 2016 AND 2017 leaks of senior Kremlin officials' emails are the largest yet and give a unique insight into the Kremlin's political–military subversive 'hybrid warfare' in Ukraine. This version of hybrid warfare is based less on an updated form of insurgency warfare and more on a reinvention of Soviet-era active measures. The exact tools Russia uses to achieve its aims differ from country to country. In Ukraine, where the degrees of Russian infiltration and intervention are higher than in the West, Russia has used a very full spectrum of means and methods, ranging from support provided by conventional troops and Special Forces (under a fig leaf of deniability) through to economic, political, informational, governance, and diplomatic and public outreach tools.

This Occasional Paper examines the leaked emails to provide a detailed insider's view of Russia's strategy and tactics for destabilising Ukraine. In this, it stands out from other studies which draw conclusions from external observations yet were not able to give conclusive proof of Russian interference. Proving covert activity, especially in the field of political and informational activity, is difficult. Covert action is just that, while proving the provenance of cyber attacks is fraught with difficulty.

The leaked emails also confirm that the separatist 'republics' in Eastern Ukraine were from the outset, and continue to be, Russian entities, despite their persistent protests to the contrary. Kremlin officials and oligarchs have played a decisive role in making political appointments within, providing financial support to, and funding the media and PR expenditure of the statelets. Similar Kremlin activity can be observed in relation to the frozen conflicts in the frozen conflict zones of Georgia, while a connection with the frozen conflict zone in Moldova is evident in the contribution of a Transnistrian KGB operative to Russia's plans to break Ukraine apart from within.

There is therefore no doubt that the separatist 'states' plaguing each of Russia's reform-minded neighbours – Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova – are part of a Russian strategy to prevent their further integration with the West. Leaked emails dispatched by President Putin's aide, Vladislav Surkov, should leave no doubt as to the nature of the conflict in Ukraine: the Kremlin largely manages and finances the war in the Donbas region under the guise of internal separatism, which the Kremlin is equally involved in generating.

The occupied territories are instrumental in the Kremlin's strategy to destabilise Ukraine and prevent its democratisation, its exit from Russia's political, economic and military sphere of influence and its moves to embrace Western alliances. Victory for Russia is not represented by a ceasefire, but by changes to Ukraine's constitution, both to allow Russian-controlled territory a veto over Ukraine's future foreign policy, and to compel its future neutrality, which would leave it vulnerable, ultimately, to being drawn into a Russian-controlled defensive alliance – a mini-Warsaw Pact comprising the former Soviet republics minus the Baltic states.

In addition, the leaked emails show the Kremlin's unsuccessful attempts to generate the appearance of historical roots for separatism in Ukraine. The ambitious Novorossiya project, Russia's initial plan to break off southeastern Ukraine, failed, with even the DNR and the LNR unable to unite. The leaks reveal an ever-shifting, ever-adapting Russian strategy which relies heavily on intelligence and changes in the sociopolitical situation.

The leaks also provide extensive evidence for the Kremlin's engagement in Ukrainian internal affairs, outlining a plan to destabilise and, ultimately, undermine the country's sovereignty by orchestrating separatism in Kharkiv Oblast and other areas, and diminishing the central government's control over Ukraine's regions under the guise of 'special economic zones'. In doing so, the Kremlin relied on alliances with pro-Russian actors, two of which it rescued from prison by trading them for Ukrainian hostages. As well as using its covert political control of NGOs and influence over pro-Russian politicians to advance its agenda, the Kremlin also spreads propaganda through direct and indirect sources, encouraging defeatism and demoralisation.

Above all, the leaked emails demonstrate how the Kremlin exerts its political power over societies by studying target audiences and carefully selecting the messages with which it plans to manipulate them into doing Russia's bidding. Relying on the analysis of experts and insiders, the Kremlin carefully and flexibly sought out those psychological dividing lines whose exploitation could create chaos in Ukraine. The methods included infiltrating the Ukrainian media, creating new media outlets, and maintaining a network of influencers and political analysts disseminating Kremlin messaging in the Ukrainian and Russian media, as well as building alliances with selected Western actors and 'weaponising' culture.

All of these techniques were also used to create an illusion of support for its messages on the ground with the help of proxy civic groups and domestic politicians, further amplifying these narratives through controlled media channels. This, as well as the extensive intelligence which the Kremlin has gathered on Ukraine, suggests that the overarching strategy of Surkov's interference in the country relies on the Russian strategy of reflexive control – formerly associated primarily with its military – in which a deep understanding of a target and its vulnerabilities is sought as a first step towards manipulating the perceptions of its target audiences. Having created this fake reality, the Kremlin is then able to compel its targets to take decisions leading to their own defeat.

For Russian interference to be successful, whether in former Soviet states or in Western countries, local expertise is essential in developing effective strategies and narratives. In the West this has often been achieved by political parties friendly to Russia and by Western PR firms happy to take Russian money, but the leaked emails of senior Kremlin officials demonstrate the Kremlin's reliance on local ideological allies in Ukraine.

In a related point, Russia's interventions in Ukraine were enabled by the weakness of the Ukrainian state. A functioning state, the exercising of state power with the support of a functioning police, and a robust independent media and civic society, as well as a political scene devoid of oligarchic control, would be much less vulnerable to Russian subversion. However, even in Ukraine's weak state, civic activism and volunteerism did play a critical role in preventing Russian victory, whilst

the battle for ‘economic separatism’ was stopped by the Ukrainian security services and senior politicians, some of whom understood the risks to the Ukrainian state. While many of the law enforcement structures in the West are in better shape than Ukraine’s, Russian money is no less likely to appeal to Western fringe politicians than it did in Ukraine. Therefore, identifying and dealing with local collaborators should be key to any strategy of countering Russian interference.

At the outset of the conflict, the Kremlin created a non-existent phantom of ‘fascism’ and ‘repressions against Russian-speakers’ in Ukraine to sow confusion and discredit the pro-democratic Euromaidan uprising. Following that, it continued to fabricate phantoms of ‘Eurorealism’, ‘special economic zones’ and separatist movements in Ukraine. Paradoxically, to achieve the death of a state, the Kremlin relies on Western media freedoms to do its bidding and enable its agents of influence to work in Ukraine.

About the Authors

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