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## The Impact of the Russian Federation on the States of Central and Eastern Europe

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**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** This article presents the results of research that set out to identify and characterise the model of strategic impact of the Russian Federation on the states of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and its consequences for security.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** In the research process historical, case study and systemic approach was used. The praxeological interpretation of the main research problem was included in the process of recognition, identification and characterization of instruments, forms and methods of strategic impact and their effects on security. The theoretical framework on which this article was based is embedded in the essence of political war presented by George F. Kennan.

**Findings:** The article describes the evolution of Russian strategic thinking about international competition and presents the contemporary conditions for achieving political goals. It is explained that the challenges to Central and Eastern Europe are a direct consequence of the operationalization of policy, and the strategy is expressed in the concept of new generation of war. It has been established that the Russian Federation achieves its own strategic objectives using the so-called soft influence, avoiding direct military confrontation. The threats to the states of Central and Eastern Europe is a consequence of the pressure and use of aggression through all instruments held by the Russian Federation. The forms and methods of influence have a non-kinetic dimension, but they are not limited to the non-military sphere.

**Practical Implications:** The results of the research have utilitarian values, as they allow to identify threats created by the Russian Federation. On this basis it is possible to take measures to counter the threats and limit their consequences.

**Originality/value:** The evaluation of the operationalization of the new generation of war applied by the Russian Federation in the conducting of international competition through the prism of the theory of political warfare allowed to obtain original research results.

**Keywords:** International competition, threats, new generation war, strategy, Central and Eastern Europe, Russian Federation.

**JEL classification:** O3, M50, G4, L21, L29.

**Paper Type:** Research paper.

**Acknowledgement:** Research financed by the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, Poland, SUPB. RN 21.181, ID 553.

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## **1. Introduction**

The Russian Federation (RF), in pursuit of its own strategic interests, is undertaking a number of hostile activities against the states of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). It is characteristic that strategic goals are not achieved immediately. Nevertheless, the pursuit of these goals is observed to be spread over time, which indicates that they are not accidental. It also shows that Russia's foreign policy is being consistently and meticulously implemented. Secondly, the armed forces are used to achieve these goals differently than in the first decade of the 21st century. Direct military confrontation is avoided and the military forces are used in an innovative way according to the operational and strategic situation.

The Armed Forces of the Russian Federation are always ready to conduct conclusive operations using both nuclear and conventional weapons. Thirdly, aggression is always used, but unlike in the previous decade, its level is consciously regulated and practically never exceeds the threshold of open war. Fourthly, in pursuit of long-term goals, the Russian Federation is increasingly willing to use non-military instruments of influence, which are more effective in certain situations than the armed forces.

However, it should be taken into account that they are practically always synchronized with the military component. Such an approach, called soft impact strategy, differs from the linear approach, in which intermediate goals and expectations for final results are clearly defined. For example, the Russian Federation did not expect and do not expect that the support given to a particular extreme right-wing party in France or Hungary would weaken The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or the European Union (EU). Nor is it expected that this support will lead to the choice of a specific leader who will be able to achieve Russia's political goals. What matters more is that this support, in combination with other actions, or through an unexpected or accidental coincidence of events, will create an opportunity that the Russian Federation will be able to use in the future (Cohen and Radin, 2019).

In the Russian Federation there is a constant evolution of strategic thinking about achieving political goals in the international arena without the need for armed struggle. The concept of so-called a new generation of war has been developed, which in general corresponds to the Western concept of political war. It reflects an innovative way of thinking about conducting and resolving conflicts appearing in different dimensions on the international arena. On the basis of the experience of the conflict between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, it can be assumed that this concept is an operationalization of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation and allows to achieve strategic objectives in the sphere of international competition. On the other hand, a new generation of war is a challenge and a threat to the states of CEE and international organizations in ensuring their own security.

The situation identified in this way leads to the formulation of the main research problem: *What strategic impact does the Russian Federation apply to the states of Central and Eastern Europe to achieve its own political goals and what are the consequences for security?* The main research problem was fragmented and the following specific problems were identified: 1) What is the origin and evolution of Russian thinking about achieving political goals in the CEE states? 2) What instruments, forms and methods of strategic influence does the Russian Federation apply to the CEE states and what are their consequences for security?

The aim of the research whose results are presented in this article was to identify and characterize the strategic impact of the Russian Federation on the CEE states and their consequences for security. In the research process mainly historical, case study and systemic approach was used. The historical approach made it possible to analyze the evolution of the theory and practice of actions taken by the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation on the international arena, which allowed to identify the main directions of strategic thinking regarding the achievement of political goals without the need for armed struggle. The case study made it possible to confront the theory with practice and to identify the characteristics of repetitive phenomena that will be attributed to the strategic impact of the Russian Federation on the CEE states in the future.

Thanks to the systemic approach it was possible to examine the processes of strategic impact of the Russian Federation through the prism of operationalization of the concept of a new generation of war and to assess the consequences of its application. The praxeological interpretation of the main research problem was included in the process of recognition, identification and characterization of instruments, forms and methods of strategic impact and their effects on security. Furthermore, passive non-participatory observation was also used in relation to the activities carried out by RF in the second decade of the twenty-first century. The theoretical framework on which this article was based is embedded in the essence of political war presented by George F. Kennan.

## **2. The Evolution of Russian Strategic Thinking**

Russian thinking about conducting international competition without the need for armed struggle is firmly established in the past, especially in Soviet foreign policy. According to Jeffrey V. Dickey, the genesis of Russia's international destabilization efforts goes back to the early Bolshevik Revolution (Dickey *et al.*, 2016). During the Cold War, the pillars of Lenin ideology were the basis of hostile influence against strategic rivals. A constant element of the communist Soviet rule was to create destabilization in the authorities, security forces and society of rivals. The model of Soviet international influence against selected CEE states in achieving long-term benefits consisted of using all available means in such a way as to stay below the level of open provocation and usually included a phase of demoralization, destabilization, crisis and normalization (Schuman, 1984). It is estimated that in

Soviet times the soft impact strategy was very effective (Robinson *et al.*, 2019). This is confirmed by the so-called maskirovka used for decades, which included camouflage, misleading the enemy, subversive actions and psychological operations, sabotage, espionage and propaganda (Roberts, 2019). In a broader context, maskirovka is an insidious strategy that many Russian leaders, including President Vladimir Putin, have used over the years to mislead strategic competitors, especially the states of CEE.

The use of soft impact measures at international level also derives from Russia's domestic policy. The authoritarian system of governance often used techniques of unfair manipulation, support for NGOs, formed false organizations to create social moods, manipulated the media and abused the justice system to attack political opponents. According to Peter Pomerantsev, the philosophy of authoritarian rule is based on the utilization of public relations, which means that the regime has no connection with any particular ideology. Instead, there is a smooth shift in the focus of the rulers' communication from the official narrative to controlling opposition groups, which usually issue contradictory messages (Robinson *et al.*, 2019).

The modern concept of using soft impact instruments in the international dimension has its basis in the theory of the so-called new generation of war. In the opinion of the West, it expresses a new way of thinking about the conducting and solving of contemporary conflicts and is a reflection of the American concept of political warfare (Counter, 2014). It is based on the assumption that the main space of battle is the human mind. All activities in the new generation of war are to be dominated by informational and psychological activities. The advantage in the military and civil sphere is achieved by keeping the morale of soldiers and society under control (Berzins, 2014). In Dmitry Adamsky's opinion, political goals in a new generation of war are achieved through a combination of so-called hard and soft power, i.e., a skillful and synchronized implementation of military, diplomatic and economic instruments (Adamsky, 2015).

However, on the basis of an assessment of the practice to date, it seems that such a claim cannot be fully accepted. The Russian Federation is primarily seeking to apply pressure through non-kinetic and non-lethal activities. Usually civilian entities are used, but these may well be subunits of the armed forces, carrying out operations under cover, usually of a special nature. Generally, the aim is to avoid direct armed confrontation (Johnson, 2018) but it is to be reckoned with those regular armed forces will be used (including nuclear weapons) only as a last resort when political objectives cannot be achieved through other instruments, forms and methods of international influence.

The effectiveness of achieving the goals of international competition by applying the concept of a new generation of war was confirmed during the annexation of the Crimea. These experiences testify to the blurring of borders between war and peace and the need to synchronize the impact on the opponent's side in many dimensions,

using a variety of instruments and tools, methods and forms of their application. In the Russian Federation this is done through a specially created body, which is the National Management Center<sup>2</sup>. The center is composed of representatives of the state administration in the broad sense of the word, including the management of individual ministries of the Russian Federation. The management of the center is entrusted to the Chief of General Staff of the Russian Federation. The center is responsible for operational coordination of the federal executive bodies. Thanks to the created uniform, classified information space, it is possible to combine the resources of all state entities and access to unified information resources of all participants of inter-agency interactions is ensured.

In the second decade of the 21st century there is a tendency to blur the boundaries between states of war and peace. Wars are no longer declared, but start according to an unknown pattern. The role of non-military measures in achieving political goals, which in many cases are more effective than the armed forces, is growing (Coalson, 2014). According to Valery Gerasimov, political, economic, informational and other non-military measures are widely used, which, together with the coordinated use of the potential of the population in opposition to the official authorities, bring tangible political benefits in the international dimension (Galeotti, 2014). The catalyst and at the same time complementary element of the impact are the armed forces, used in an unconventional way. They usually conduct special operations under cover. The open use of military force is only used in specific phases of conflict, usually under the guise of conducting humanitarian support or peacekeeping operations (Galeotti, 2014).

Often, in Western studies, a new generation of war is identified with the so-called Gerasimov doctrine and explained as a hybrid war. Applying the concept of hybrid war without examining the Russian connotations to this term, and isolation it from Russian operational art, can lead to wrong conclusions. It also seems that using the conceptual framework of hybrid war to explain a separate Russian concept of a new generation of war is a kind of abuse (Adamsky, 2012). After all, one cannot impose

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<sup>2</sup>*On December 1, 2014, the National Defense Management Centre of the Russian Federation was established in order to integrate the management system of the state administration and economy of war and to prepare the defense of the state. At all levels of command, the full-time operational shifts on duty with the same structure of part peace and war have begun works. The tasks of the Centre include monitoring of all areas of activity within the armed forces, as well as the entire command system of war in relation to the undertakings specified in the plan of state defense. In the opinion of the Chief of General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces the amount of information has increased many times in modern conditions, the cycle of its exchange has shortened from weeks and days to hours and minutes, which causes the need for constant monitoring of the processes taking place in the world, in the state and in the armed forces, as well as for conducting a constant, comprehensive analysis of the situation and working out options for responding to its changes. The new structure is to ensure the shortening of the cycle of information transfer and the implementation of the process of managing in real time the forces on duty shifts (Baraniec, 2014).*

a Western way of thinking by assessing the Russian way of conducting and resolving contemporary conflicts. Moscow's approach to a new generation of war is very different from a hybrid war. It is a separate, indigenous Russian concept of achieving strategic success in competition with a relatively strong opponent, as Ulrich Kühn points out (Kühn, 2018).

However, such a restrictive formulation cannot be accepted, as the experience of the conflict with Ukraine shows that it can be successfully applied to the weaker. U. Kühn maintains that a new generation of war theory was developed to win the conflict with NATO or to force the Alliance to give up post-Soviet space and stop further expansion (Kühn, 2018). He believes that as part of this strategy Russia will probably try to avoid direct military conflict with NATO as long as possible. In a situation of direct aggression against the Baltic states, Russia would probably try to paralyse the decision-making process and annihilate plans to implement Article 5 of the Washington Treaty (Kühn, 2018). Although the general strategic assumptions are correct, it is difficult to agree with this opinion, because the theory of hybrid war is based on the use of kinetic force, while in a new generation of war the aim is to reduce or eliminate it completely. Thus, one can come to the conclusion that hybrid war can be part of a new generation war, but that these terms cannot be used interchangeably (Howard and Czekaj, 2019). In other words, the concept of a new generation of war cannot be synonymous with that of a hybrid war.

It is estimated that the achievement of strategic goals in a new generation of war depends on the informational advantage over the enemy. Therefore, in the early phase of the war, instruments of soft influence, mainly non-military, are more important than kinetic actions planned in the last phase. The second important factor determining future success is the application of asymmetrical and indirect activities (Adamsky, 2012).

A certain evolution of strategic thinking regarding the conducting of future conflicts can be seen in S.G. Chekinova and S.A. Bogdanova studies. As well as V. Gierasimov they point out the key role of having an informational advantage, which can be achieved through the skillful application of cyberspace, media and social networks (Chekinov and Bogdanov, 2015). They predict that future wars will be waged using different forms and methods, focusing on a combined military and non-military action, in which the amplitude of violence will be deliberately modulated and a skillful combination of political, economic and informational measures will be carried out, with the possibilities offered by modern technologies and the use of the environment. They concluded that unconventional actions may consist of deliberately inducing natural phenomena such as earthquakes, typhoons or heavy downpours, which in the long term may lead to erosion of the economy and increase tensions among the affected population (Chekinov and Bogdanov, 2015).

They forecasted the need to conduct various, synchronized actions aimed at creating negative behavior of military personnel towards their superiors and causing social

tensions in the civilian population leading to protests against legal authorities (Chekinov and Bogdanov, 2015). Andrey V. Kartapolov drew attention to the burning of internal problems in the opponent's society and to the use of so-called third forces, which involves indirect action. Moreover, he suggested conducting informational confrontation with the use of forgery and distortion of information (Kurz, 2017), which was verified during the occupation of Crimea. A. Kartapalov explained that currently the conflicts are staggered and carrying out indirect actions results in a decrease in morale and causes certain damage to the opponent without the use of armed forces.

In the initial phase of the war a new generation political, economic, informational and psychological pressure is applied, which, among other factors, is supposed to lead to confusion among political and military leader (Kurz, 2017). Valeriy A. Kiselev, on the other hand, stressed that illegal arming of opposition groups and hiring of private military companies can bring certain benefits (Thomas, 2018). He predicted that in the future it will also be possible to achieve the political goals set by the leaders by conducting behavioral warfare, based on manipulating algorithms of behavior, habits, activities and stereotypes, as well as interfering in the cultural sphere (Thomas, 2018).

### **3. Instruments of Strategic Influence**

#### **3.1 The Political Instrument**

In the political sphere, the Russian Federation influences the states of Central and Eastern Europe through open and secret, formal and informal influence mechanisms. Russia has experience in manipulating and creating social tensions by influencing minority groups e.g., in Estonia, Latvia, Kosovo and Bosnia or majority groups in other European states. The aim of Moscow's influence is to take control over political processes and especially their results. Activities are targeted at large social organizations as well as small groups and even individual citizens. Due to the scope and forms of influence and the ability to achieve political goals through foreign supporter groups or substitute organizations, Russian pressure materializes in three dimensions. Firstly, Russia aims to maintain control over the actors who will be willing to carry out the orders of the Russian authorities (Cohen and Radin, 2019).

To this end, it seeks to influence foreign elections (Chivvis, 2017) and seeks to take control of political parties by financing them, as exemplified by France (Motet, 2016). Another example is Austria. In May 2019, the head of the Austrian far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ), Heinz-Christian Strache, was forced to resign after recording and publishing a video in which he offered government contracts and shares in one of Austria's largest newspapers in exchange for Russian support for his party. In addition, both the Austrian Freedom Party and Italy's League have formal cooperation agreements with the Kremlin's United Russia party (Polyakova, 2010).

Secondly, the Russian Federation is trying to find an area of common interest. For example, it has decided to support marriage legislation in Latvia in order to gain the support of conservative parties, and in Bulgaria it has allegedly financed environmental groups and right-wing parties in order to prevent an increase in local energy production and maintain demand for Russian gas (Hope, 2014). Thirdly, the Russian Federation aims to increase the ability of individuals or groups in society to really influence on conducting of policies in favor of Russia, as exemplified by Viktor Orban in Hungary (Feher and Gulyas, 2017).

It can also try to kill political opponents. For example, in 2006 Alexander V. Litvinenko was murdered in London and in March 2017 Denis M. Voronenkov, former member of the Russian Parliament in Ukraine (Kramer, 2016). Another example is the failed attempted assassination attempt on Montenegrin Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic in October 2016. It was planned to replace him with a person with pro-Russian sympathies in order to block the country's accession to NATO. At that time Serbia deported two Russian citizens suspected of taking part in this conspiracy, which confirms the thwarting of the Kremlin's intentions (Borger *et al.*, 2016).

### **3.2 The Information Instrument**

In Russia it is believed that foreign policy objectives cannot be achieved without the use of the information sphere, especially the media (Robinson *et al.*, 2019). To this end, the Russian Federation has developed an extensive, well-functioning media arsenal settling mainly on Rossiya Segodnya and RT (Russia Today) platforms. They have extensive capabilities to broadcast on many radio and television channels, to transmit photographic and infographic content, and to spread information on social media and mobile devices. The authorities influence social media through sponsored troll farms that run blogs and tweets on behalf of the Kremlin. They manipulate information and try to change the narrative in favor of Russia (Russia, 2017).

The media regularly disseminates information that reflects the viewpoint of the regime, questions Western narratives and influences the formation of public opinion outside the state (Robinson *et al.*, 2019). Russian Federation is trying to moderate the discussion in social media by placing political advertisements on various platforms and promoting selected information stories, often by false narration. For example, in October 2017, during a hearing before a subcommittee on the judiciary of the U.S. Senate, Twitter's lawyers revealed that 1.4 million tweets came from Russian bots during the presidential election in 2016. These efforts led to the fueling of political and social divisions (Shaban *et al.*, 2017). Through alternative messages Russian Federation attacks or undermines the credibility of various individuals or institutions perceived as having a negative impact on Russian interests. This is particularly the case with the promotion of news articles that are clearly hostile to the European Union and NATO (Morris *et al.*, 2019).



Russia is increasingly using cyberspace to conduct political and military campaigns. It is able to disrupt the functioning of the state under attack, for example by denying services provided by critical infrastructure. For example, in December 2015, Russia planned and carried out a sophisticated attack on the Ukrainian power grid, leaving 230,000 Ukrainians without electricity the day before Christmas. The attackers cancelled operators' access to the system by means of a password, as well as shut down the backup generators (Zetter, 2017). In June 2017, the so-called Not Petya virus, which was created as a result of a targeted attack on Ukrainian accounting systems, spread to 64 states and affected large international companies, logistics operators, government agencies, telecommunications providers and financial institutions. Not Petya's name referred to the covert nature of the attack, which appeared as a ransomware attack (Petya), but was actually aimed at destroying and removing data from information systems in Ukraine (Polyakova and Boyer, 2018). It turned out that Not Petya was a cybernetic form of maskirovka, whose purpose was to mislead about the true source and intent of the attack. In February 2018, the American administration assigned Not Petya to the Russian armed forces (Polyakova and Boyer, 2018).

The Russian Federation combines cyberattacks with psychological operations and the possibilities offered by social media platforms. In January 2017, Russian influence was aimed at discrediting the anti-Kremlin candidate for President Hillary Clinton. The U.S. intelligence services noted that the Russian goal in the U.S. presidential election was to undermine public confidence in the democratic process in the U.S., which was sought through a strategy that combined covert intelligence operations conducted in cyberspace with overt activities of Russian government agencies and proxies' entities (Background, 2017).

Russian attempts to interfere in internal affairs, and especially in the elections that have taken place in Europe, have been seen to varying degrees. Internet troll farms have been used to spread false information. Their activities were synchronized with the process of automatically generating fictional accounts using a bot virus. This strategic impact model was used during the campaign of French presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron in spring 2017. Another example is the disinformation campaign conducted in October of the same year during the Catalan referendum on independence in Spain. In each case, the tools and objectives were the same. Disinformation campaigns were used, cyberattacks were carried out, sympathizers of Russian Federation were promoted, proxy were used, and attempts were made to carry out political upheaval in order to create social divisions and destabilize the internal situation of the state under attack (Polyakova and Boyer, 2018).

Although there is increasing evidence of Russian international interference in cyberspace, attributing responsibility to the authorities is extremely difficult. It seems that many Russian hackers are directly employed or controlled by the state. They sometimes operate independently, but it must be assumed that their interests coincide with those of Russia.

However, most of them remain under the control of Russia's security services. Practice shows that caught hackers in the act have a choice between prison or official work for Russia. So, they usually choose a contract of employment (Herzog, 2011).

### **3.3 The Economic Instrument**

The Russian Federation is the second largest exporter of oil and gas in the world, the EU's third largest trading partner, and the dominant economic entity in the former Soviet Union republics, and can therefore successfully apply economic impact instruments. Russia has repeatedly tried to use broad economic links to exert political influence on selected states of CEE, including Poland. Many European states are vulnerable to the cutting off of Russian raw material supplies, which is used for economic warfare, including price dictation (Larrabee *et al.*, 2017). Based on the analysis carried out by the European Commission, it can be concluded that a six-month shutdown of the gas supply from Russia would have a serious impact on the energy security of Finland, Estonia, Bulgaria and the Western Balkan states, and the shortage of raw material would reach 80-100 percent (European Commission, 2016).

Large Russian companies operating in the European market are used to exert a certain economic pressure. For example, the Russian oil company Lukoil, which is present in Bulgaria, controls a significant market for liquid fuels, but its political influence is not fully explored. However, there is evidence of its funding of political parties and other pro-Russian organizations. In an effort to ensure its own interests, the Russian Federation is constantly increasing its economic presence in Bulgaria (Robinson *et al.*, 2019). In some situations, it tries to achieve its own political objectives more directly through economic coercion. Russia's actions outside the energy sphere can affect trade, employment, investment flows and transport. They mainly consist in imposing certain investment and trade restrictions to sanction or prohibit certain imports into Russia. In some cases, these actions are of a criminal nature.

For example, a few days after the Turkish authorities shot down a Russian military plane in 2015, Russia banned imports of certain agricultural products (Stubbs and Winning, 2015). The Russian Federation has repeatedly applied economic sanctions against Moldova when its decisions were seen as contrary to its interests. In 2005, The Russian Federation banned imports of meat, fruit and vegetables, and in March 2006 added wine to the list of banned products, which was repeated in 2013-2014. These sanctions were implemented due to the intensification of tensions between these states. Following the signature of the association agreement with the EU by Moldova on 27 June 2014, a ban on imports into Russia of processed pork and canned fruit and vegetables was introduced (Larrabee *et al.*, 2017). In an effort to fuel political tensions in Georgia, the Russian Federation tried to disrupt communication links, including transport, telephone lines, mobile network services

and postal services, and in 2006 it completely disrupted postal and transport lines (Schenkkan, 2014). In 2014, as a consequence of imposing sanctions after the annexation of the Crimea, the Russian Federation decided to ban imports of products from European Union Member States.

### **3.4 The Military Instrument**

The new generation of war, apart from non-military instruments, also assumes the use of armed forces in both classical and non-traditional ways. However, classical activities do not rely on conducting direct armed combat. They are limited to the display of force and demonstrating readiness to use it, rather than conducting kinetic operations. In accordance with the operational assumptions in the Russian Federation, it is preferable that the ratio of kinetic to non-kinetic activities be 1 to 4 (Adamsky, 2015). Another form of pressure is military exercises. These are usually aimed at concealing real intentions and achieving a surprise effect on strategic rivals. In the case of the Crimea, under the cover of naval exercises, airborne subunits and special troops were deployed (Hurt, 2014). Russia also deployed some 50,000 soldiers along the border with Ukraine, which was a deterrent factor and effectively discouraged Ukraine from military intervention in the separatist-occupied territory (Jones and Olearchyk, 2014).

In the last five years, provocative incidents involving Russian planes over the Baltic Sea have intensified, exacerbating the political situation in the region. Quite systematically, Russian aircraft, especially the Su-27 fighters and Su-24 bombers, have been violating the airspace of Finland, Sweden, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. In 2016, the Russian Su-24 bomber performed dangerous manoeuvres several meters away from the USS American cruiser 'Donald Cook'. These were risky incidents not only for military or political reasons, but also due to the possibility of an accident (Sabak and Palowski, 2016).

The covert utilization of the armed forces, which are usually used for irregular and non-kinetic operations, is very important for achieving Russia's political goals. In 2014, they played a key role in the mass mobilization of the local population in eastern Ukraine, destabilizing the state and undermining the legitimacy of the government. As part of its irregular operations, Russia implemented several new methods of supporting separatists. For example, humanitarian convoys were used as a pretext for military involvement in the conflict in eastern Ukraine (Karabulut, 2018). Soldiers of the regular armed forces deployed on Ukrainian territory wore no distinction, and some of them were dressed in uniforms of the opposition forces, or wore civilian clothes (Haines, 2016). V. Putin called the Russian soldiers fighting in Eastern Ukraine volunteers and self-defence groups, denying the involvement of Russian troops (Russia, 2017). The way the Russian armed forces are being used in

Ukraine indicates that they are waging a war of proxy<sup>3</sup> with the West (Karabulut, 2018).

Russia has a well-prepared apparatus for conducting secret missions in the form of special forces, which, in Moscow's opinion, will be involved in conflicts of low combat intensity on the territory of other states. The so-called Spetsnaz is treated on an equal footing with military intelligence, the propaganda machine and agents for special tasks (Galeotti, 2014a). In the Kremlin, it is believed that within a few months or even days, with the help of covert operations of special forces, even a prosperous state can be transformed into an arena of acute conflict, plunged into chaos, led to a humanitarian disaster or civil war (Galeotti, 2014b). This view was practically verified in Ukraine. The day after Viktor Yanukovych escaped from Kiev, the special subunits, after clandestine negotiations with members of the local ethnic Russian elite, organised masked and armed self-defence militias in the Crimea, including representatives of both local police and criminals (Galeotti, 2014a). The role of Spetsnaz in eastern Ukraine was much more spectacular.

In most cases, the activities were indirect. They consisted of the disguised subunits seizing important state facilities and critical infrastructure, and then, together with local agents, Russian sympathizers and irregular forces, causing unrest and riots, leading to subversion and the removal of legal authorities from government (Russia, 2017). The special subunits were also used to train and coordinate local proxy forces and to ensure the security of supply of heavy weapons to separatists and to provide specialized training in their use (Galeotti, 2014a).

On the basis of the conducted case studies, it can be concluded that the Russian Federation undertakes a number of strategic actions and strives to achieve its own political goals in the states of CEE. These actions, in most cases burdened with pressure and various amplitudes of aggression, force certain behaviors, according to the will of the activist. At the same time, they create serious challenges, threats and risks to the security of the CEE states. It seems that the Russian Federation adopts a soft impact strategy, in which it uses many instruments at the same time, with broad foreign policy goals in mind, but the lack of a specific cause-and-effect logic does not guarantee the possibility of achieving them.

The Russian Federation has access to a wide range of instruments to achieve the objectives of strategic impact, without the need to involve the armed forces and conduct direct armed confrontation. The individual instruments of influence, which

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<sup>3</sup>*Proxy war is defined as an international conflict between two powers, occurring on the land of a third state, exploiting its population, resources and territory to achieve strategic foreign policy objectives. It is an alternative to states pursuing their own strategic objectives, while avoiding costly and bloody direct warfare. It has been recognized as a relatively cheap, risk-free and easy form of international competition for those who are able to recruit weaker states or groups of states to fight for their interests (Zellman, 2013).*

are oriented on the vulnerability of the opponent, are always synchronized vertically or horizontally in order to create the desired linear or non-linear effects (Cullen, 2017). Non-linear effects are in their essence unpredictable, which means that the party affected cannot control or predict them. The simultaneous or sequential use of the instruments of influence and the moderation of their intensity and amplitude of influence are intended to escalate or de-escalate the conflict. It also leads to ambiguities and specific difficulties in the unambiguous assessment of risks (Cullen, 2017).

The consequences of the impact in political, informational, economic and military dimensions will lead to dysfunction of the systems most important for the functioning of the CEE states. The new dimensions of competition, which include cyberspace, significantly expand the possibilities of impact, especially in the information sphere, and enable remote intervention from anywhere in the world. Regardless of the existing physical inter-state borders, continuous interference from outside and inside the states of CEE is possible, whether in times of peace, crisis or war. The effects of threats created by the Russian Federation may have a material dimension, e.g., in the form of physical destruction of critical infrastructure or critical resources for the functioning of individual states, as well as an intangible dimension, expressed e.g., in a loss of political cohesion or a decrease in the morale of society. A significant contribution to the achievement of intangible effects has propaganda tools, which are used openly through the mass media or camouflaged through trolling in social media, most often in combination with hacking activities (Defense, 2017).

#### **4. Conclusions**

On the basis of the research, it has been established that the Russian Federation is constantly applying pressure and aggression to the CEE states. Its level is deliberately regulated so as not to cross the border of an open armed conflict established by international law and not to expose itself to a direct response from the attacked or the international community and thus reduce its political effectiveness. Secondly, the armed forces are as important for the Russian Federation as they were in the past, yet instruments of non-military influence are becoming more prominent. Their effectiveness exceeds the use of armed forces and are much less costly, which creates specific challenges for the states of CEE. Thirdly, aggression is directed against the civilian population, and especially its psychological sphere, in order to achieve behaviour in line with the expectations of the Russian Federation. Fourthly, there are no international legal regulations concerning conflict between people.

Taking into account the arguments presented, it can be concluded that the contemporary paradigm of the Russian Federation's influence on the CEE states will be expressed in the aggression below the threshold of open armed conflict, with the use of non-military and military entities conducting unconventional activities.

Based on the research, it can be concluded that the model of Russian influence on the states of CEE will be based on the operationalisation of a new generation of war concept. It will be expressed in a vertically and horizontally synchronized application of the influence in order to create the desired linear and/or non-linear effects. Their consequences will lead to dysfunction of the systems most important for the functioning of the CEE states. The consequence of such a logic of strategic behaviour of the Russian Federation will be the evolution of threats and the emergence of new, so far unknown forms of their materialization.

Taking into account the arguments presented concerning instruments, methods, forms and ways of influence and strategic conditions, one cannot simplify the reasoning and believe that threats will be limited only to non-military entities. Taking into account the theory and operational practice of the Russian Federation's involvement in the international arena, it can be assumed that the armed forces will carry out tasks of a non-kinetic and non-lethal nature. These will usually be irregular, unconventional and special activities. Generally speaking, the aim will be to avoid direct military confrontation, but it must be reckoned with those regular armed forces will only be engaged if the political goals cannot be achieved by other instruments of influence. It is to be expected that there will always be pressure and aggression, but its level will be consciously and deliberately regulated and will probably never exceed the limit defined by international law as a state of war. Thirdly, since the international competition will involve the use of armed forces, there can be no talk of only non-military actions or threats. Given the articulated premises, it can be concluded that non-kinetic threats will dominate in the future, but that they will come from both non-military entities and the armed forces of the Russian Federation.

On the basis of the studies, it was established that the Russian Federation has a wide range of capabilities to influence the states of CEE, including the conduct of alternative wars, information and cyberspace warfare, or to influence specific states through the use of an instrument of economic impact, as well as the use of political corruption, support for ethnic minorities and separatist movements, up to and including limited use of armed forces. This poses specific threats to the states which the Russian Federation, guided by its own national interests, intends to influence in order to achieve specific material and non-material benefits. The instruments at its disposal do not limit the scope of the possible influence. Although they are commonly used, there is no pattern of their use. The choice of capabilities and methods and forms of implementation will depend on the specific situation and objectives to be achieved. It is therefore to be expected that the level of threat to specific CEE states will depend on their vulnerabilities and the strategy of the international impact instruments used.

The Russian Federation takes advantage of the human naivety, the vulnerability of the social media ecosystem and the lack of public awareness and political decision-makers in influencing the CEE states. However, in the next three to five years the

tools used by Russia will become more advanced and difficult to detect. In particular, technological advances in artificial intelligence and cyber capabilities will open up opportunities for malicious software and viruses to undermine democracy in a more secretive and far more effective way than has been the case so far. Moreover, increasingly sophisticated cyber tools, tested mainly by Russia in Eastern Europe, are already affecting the systems of other European states. It seems that mass hits in cyberspace combined with other informational impact instruments are inevitable.

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