ISSUE BRIEF

Ukrainian Election Task Force—Exposing Foreign Interference in Ukraine's Democracy

Western democracies are under threat from outside meddling, and Ukraine is the testing ground for this interference. Russian President Vladimir Putin's persistent efforts to influence the domestic politics of his neighbors and countries well beyond Russia's borders have posed enormous challenges in Europe and across the Atlantic.

From the fabricated "Lisa" case in Germany recand the "loan" for Marine Le Pen in France, to the Russian security service hacks in the United States and the support for Catalan independence in Spain, Moscow has used a variety of means to prop up candidates and to weaken Western governments. The Russian Federation first tested many of these strategies and techniques in Ukraine.

More than any other country, Ukraine has been the unwanted recipient of Moscow's attention, particularly during the past five years. The Kremlin has sought to place a pliable client in command in Kyiv and block Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations, including by pressuring the previous Ukrainian leadership against signing. It has done so through its insistence that Ukraine walk away from the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the European Union (EU). Putin interfered in Ukraine's last elections in 2014, seized and illegally annexed Crimea by military action in 2014, and then launched a military campaign to stir destabilization in the Donbas.

The March 2019 presidential election will be a pivotal event in Ukraine's history. The result will impact Ukraine's ability to defend itself in the Donbas against Russian aggression and will influence Ukraine's progress on reform and on maintaining a path toward closer association with the West. It is likely that Moscow will intervene once again in the vote. For the Kremlin, the perceived stakes are high. Putin may try to tilt the election in favor of a candidate whom he thinks might yield to Kremlin pressure, cutting a deal in the Donbas, relenting on Crimea, and moving toward a policy of accommodation. Accordingly, the Kremlin is very likely to continue, and even increase, its interference in Ukraine's inter-

Putin's "little green men" during the annexation of the Crimean peninsula. *Photo credit: Anton Holoborodko / Wikicommons*

nal affairs, if not just for the sake of a single candidate, then to widen existing fractures in Ukrainian society.

Russia may not be the only country to try influencing Ukraine's elections. The past year has witnessed efforts by the government in Budapest to use the issue of Hungarian-minority language rights to put pressure on Ukraine in the EU and NATO.[1] That government may also find the election a tempting opportunity, especially given the increasingly close ties between the Orbán government and the Kremlin.

The Threat to Ukraine's Election

The Kremlin is likely to use the full spectrum of its capabilities in the run-up to Ukraine's election. This will start with its still-heavy "media" presence in the east and center of Ukraine and will not be limited to its state-run media. The Kremlin may push a variety of content on social media and find sympathetic outlets. Moscow may also use its formidable cyber capabilities to hack into the campaign operations of candidates it does not like and to try to shut down major installa-

tions—including, but not limited to, electricity grids, phone networks, and airport control systems—in order to suggest that the authorities are not in control, and to undermine the integrity of the electoral count. As it did in 2014, it may also try again to sabotage Ukraine's election and voting system.

Moscow may also resort to more forceful measures. In 2015, it tried to orchestrate the emergence of the People's Republics in Odesa and Bessarabia through the activation of its agents in the Ukrainian security services and in pro-Kremlin groups. Thanks to the timely work of Ukraine's National Security Services (SBU), the effort was thwarted. Similar efforts to sow disorder cannot be ruled out in the months before the election.

There have additionally been a number of unexplained assassinations, of Ukrainian security officials, in Kyiv and other cities, who had operated successfully in the Donbas war. More of this is also to be expected. In the wake of the recent alleged poisoning in England of former Russian spy Sergei Skripal—and the 2004 alleged

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1   Andrew Higgins, "At War With Russia in East, Ukraine Has Worries in the West, Too," *New York Times*, October 5, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/05/world/europe/ukraine-hungary-ethnic-languages.html.

poisoning of Ukrainian presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko—it is possible that Moscow may return to this deadly option as well.

The West must also reckon with the last major tool in Moscow's hybrid war arsenal: the use of its military. This might involve the continued or additional concentration of major conventional forces on Ukraine's border, or interference with Ukrainian shipping, particularly in the Sea of Azov. It might entail ratcheting up of additional firing across the line of contact in the Donbas or launching of a new offensive by the Russian proxy commanders.

> "Accordingly, the Kremlin is very likely to continue, and even increase, its interference in Ukraine's internal affairs."

A Rapid-Response Team

Recognizing the high stakes, the Atlantic Council, the Victor Pinchuk Foundation, and the Transatlantic Commission on Election Integrity have established a Ukrainian Election Task Force. Working with other Ukrainian institutions—StopFake, the Ukraine Crisis Media Center, and the Razumkov Center—the three partners are creating a rapid-response team with the ability to monitor, evaluate, and disclose the full range of foreign subversive activities in Ukraine, and to propose suitable responses.

David J. Kramer, a former US assistant secretary of state, will lead the Task Force, which includes a distinguished group of experts and practitioners. The Task Force will focus on interference in the form of disinformation coming from outside forces, cyber operations, and kinetic operations. Jakub Kalensky, Atlantic Council senior fellow and former disinformation lead at the EU's East StratCom Task Force, will lead the disinformation team. His Ukrainian colleagues will be experts at StopFake.org and the Ukraine Crisis Media Center. The cyber team will work under Laura Galante, senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, and will include two Ukrainian experts. The Razumkov Center, with Oleksiy Melnyk in the lead, will monitor kinetic activities.

Alongside the Task Force, the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab's (DFRLab) active monitoring mission, under the direction of Graham Brookie, will provide its unique expertise to the Response Team's efforts. Using innovative open-source research methodologies, they will provide real-time monitoring and analysis of the information environment in advance of and during the elections. Findings will be released as publicly accessible reports serving to inform the public conversation around the election and repudiating disinformation attempts in real-time. This analysis ranges from traditional fact checking to more advanced analysis of inauthentic, automated, and coordinated behavior attempting to influence narratives both online and in traditional media. This is a proven model that the Atlantic Council has developed over the last two years, including successful monitoring missions of elections in Brazil, France, Germany, Italy, Macedonia, Mexico, the United States, and beyond.

The Task Force will produce a variety of content detailing the major points of foreign interference in Ukraine's elections. By mid-December, the Task Force will launch an online dashboard providing a real-time index of efforts to interfere in Ukraine's democratic process. The Task Force will also arrange conferences in 2019 on the subject of foreign interference in Ukraine's elections in Brussels, Washington, and Kyiv. Task Force partners will also hold meetings with senior officials in Berlin, Brussels, and Washington to make sure that this issue receives the attention it deserves.

By Ukraine, For Ukraine

The upcoming elections in Ukraine are for Ukrainians to decide, not outside forces. Any efforts designed to influence and/or undermine the integrity of the elections would constitute an attack on Ukraine and would require a response from the international community. Such efforts must be exposed. Ukrainians deserve the right to choose their own leaders free of outside influence and interference, especially after having twice in a decade, in 2004 and again in 2013-14, demanded better from their leaders, the second time at significant cost. By exposing Kremlin interference as it occurs in the run up to March 2019, the Atlantic Council and its partners hope to provide Ukrainians with the necessary tools to check outside efforts to influence their vote, to establish the facts, and to cast their ballots for a better future for Ukraine.

SEEKING THE TRUTH—COMBATING NARRATIVES OF KREMLIN DISINFORMATION

Putin's information war against Ukraine has taken two main directions since its inception: discrediting the Ukrainian state and whitewashing or hiding Russian activities in Ukraine. The Kremlin derives most of its content from both of these topics. It is also worth noting that the Kremlin constantly created content that fell into either one of these two larger narratives and contextualized these current events from its own point of view.

In addition to these proactive disinformation narratives, which try to influence the perception of future actions and events, one can also identify reactive narratives that try to change the perception of past events. The international community has fresh in its memory the deception campaign around the poisoning of the Skripals; Ukraine has seen exactly the same pattern of spreading multiple conflicting disinformation stories already in 2014, including after the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight 17 (MH17) that killed 298 people.

Over the years, the Kremlin has demonstrated an ability to quickly adapt to a changing situation and adjust their propaganda messages. While their grand narratives remain mostly the same, they take different shades and forms.

Research has found that Kremlin-backed media has particularly focused on several topics in its attempts to spread disinformation in Ukraine:[2] Maidan was a coup d'état and the current authorities are illegitimate;[3] Ukraine is on the verge of collapse;[4] Internally displaced persons are not welcome in other regions of the country;[5] Ukraine's armed forces and volunteer battalions have violated the laws of war;[6] NATO troops are fighting in the Donbas;[7] Crimea has gained international recognition as Russian territory;[8] EU-Ukraine cooperation does not tangibly benefit Ukraine;[9] the West has "Ukraine fatigue" and is tired of Ukraine and its alleged lack of progress;[10] and Ukrainian armed forces shot down MH17.[11]

In the first years of the war, the narrative of Ukraine falling into a civil war clearly dominated Kremlin-backed content. In 2014, a significant amount of all news stories about Ukraine were about the alleged civil war and, as Kremlin propagandists claimed, its impact on domestic politics. This was done with a clear purpose of creating a smokescreen that would hide the real war—the Kremlin's invasion—and its violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Another popular narrative has been that Ukraine is a "failed state." Since the significant decrease of the violence in the Donbas, dating from the second half of 2015, Kremlin authors have begun to reorient the focus of their content toward the domestic politics of Ukraine, with the aim of portraying Ukraine as a chaotic, unglued, and hopelessly corrupt failed state.

2   "Fakes Debunked by the StopFake Project between 2014-2017: Narratives and Sources," *StopFake,* last updated September 20, 2018, https://www.stopfake.org/en/fakes-debunked-by-the-stopfake-project-between-2014-2017-narratives-and-sources/.

3   "Fake: American media question the legitimacy of Ukraine's "neo-nazi regime," *StopFake,* last updated September 05, 2017, https://www.stopfake.org/en/fake-american-media-question-the-legitimacy-of-ukraine-s-neo-nazi-regime/.

4   "Fake: 97% certainty Ukraine will collapse," *StopFake,* last updated September 5, 2017, https://www.stopfake.org/fejk-97-takova-veroyat-nost-raspada-ukrainy/.

5   "Fake: disabled Donbas IDP had his mouth torn for speaking Russian," *StopFake,* last updated July, 10, 2018, https://www.stopfake.org/uk/fejk-invalidu-pereselentsyu-z-donbasu-porvaly-rota-za-te-shho-rozmovlyav-rosijskoyu-movoyu/.

6   "The lie of LifeNews: Images of Ukrainian Army Bombardment in Ilovaisk," *StopFake,* last updated August 21, 2014, https://www.stopfake.org/en/the-lie-of-lifenews-images-of-ukrainian-army-shellfire-in-ilovaisk/.

7   "Fake: NATO Soldiers Killed in Donbas," *StopFake,* last updated May 21, 2018, https://www.stopfake.org/en/fake-nato-soldiers-killed-in-don-bas/.

8   "Fake: Germany has supported the annexation of Crimea," *StopFake,* last updated November 8, 2018, https://www.stopfake.org/uk/fejk-ni-mechchyna-pidtrymala-aneksiyu-krymu/.

9   "Fake: EU Bringing Ukraine to Its Knees," *StopFake,* last updated June 29, 2017, https://www.stopfake.org/en/fake-eu-bringing-ukraine-to-its-knees/.

10   "Fake: Washington Post said Ukraine is helpless," *StopFake,* last updated March 7, 2016, https://www.stopfake.org/fejk-washington-post-naz-val-ukrainu-beznadezhnoj/.

11   "Disinfo News: The Kremlin's Many Versions of the MH17 Story," *StopFake,* last updated May 29, 2018 https://www.stopfake.org/en/disinfo-news-the-kremlin-s-many-versions-of-the-mh17-story/ .

Changes in Kremlin disinformation narratives can be tied to the levels of violence on the frontlines in the Donbas. *Photo credit: Sasha Maksymenko / Wikimedia Commons*

The use of these two narratives reflects a clear connection with the situation in eastern Ukraine. During periods of calm on the frontlines of the Donbas, the Kremlin uses its disinformation resources to demoralize Ukrainians about the "failures" of their authorities.[12] As violence returns to Ukraine's east, Kremlin disinformation sources return to the "civil war" narrative, diverting attention from Russia's role in the conflict.[13]

These Kremlin narratives sow distrust and division within Ukraine—and there has been a greater tendency to focus on creating disinformation directed at exacerbating Ukraine's internal divisions. The Kremlin has shifted its focus from attempting to disguise its own involvement in the Donbas to trying to exploit Ukraine's current problems to divide the population. The Kremlin is not only trying to hide its own crimes, but trying to distract, disrupt, and destabilize Ukraine from the inside, using disinformation as one of its primary tools.

The Kremlin attentively follows Ukraine's internal developments and reacts very swiftly, proving it is able to provide more than just premeditated content, allowing the Kremlin to project its own point of view across Ukraine, in real time. One of the clearest examples was Russian media's reaction to the expected creation of an independent church in Ukraine. This step would be harmful to Russia's position in the Orthodox world and would greatly limit its influence over Ukrainians. The disinformation campaign about the Ukrainian independent church is overarching—criticizing the actors involved and questioning the legitimacy of the process, and featuring media provocations that create the anticipation of violence.[14] Also, Russian media are trying to drive the public discourse by introducing topics that require other actors to react, framing the entire debate.[15] The destabilization of Ukraine's information ecosystem has been a priority for years and remains high on the Kremlin's agenda.

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12   "Fake: Medical Genocide in Ukraine," *StopFake,* August 24, 2017, https://www.stopfake.org/en/fake-medical-genocide-in-ukraine/.

13   "Manipulation: Vakarchuk Says Ukraine Can't End Civil War Soon," *StopFake,* September 7, 2018, https://www.stopfake.org/uk/va-karchuk-ukrayina-ne-v-zmozi-shvidko-zakinchiti-gromadyansku-vijnu-manipulyatsiya/; "Fake: The Russian Army Did Not Invade Ukraine," *StopFake,* August 28, 2014, https://www.stopfake.org/en/fake-the-russian-army-did-not-invade-ukraine/.

14   "Fake: Neo-Nazis are Preparing to Seize Kyiv—Pechersk Lavra," *StopFake,* September 22, 2018, https://www.stopfake.org/uk/fejk-neonat-sisti-gotuyutsya-do-zahoplennya-kiyevo-pecherskoyi-lavri/.

15   "Propaganda War Against Tomos for Ukraine," *StopFake,* June 23, 2018, https://www.stopfake.org/propagandistskaya-vojna-protiv-po-

As Ukraine enters its first election season since the Revolution of Dignity, there is no reason to believe that the Kremlin can resist the temptation to use its information sources, disinformation network, and pro-Kremlin proxies to spread disinformation about Ukrainian internal affairs with the explicit aim of influencing the election result and undermining the democratic process.

AN OVERVIEW OF CYBER ACTIVITY TARGETING UKRAINE: 2014–2018

Since 2014, Ukraine has been the victim of real, damaging cyberattacks attributed to the Russian government. Three major incidents illustrate the recent aggressive activity taken by Russian actors over the past five years: the 2014 network exploitation of Ukraine's Central Election Commission, the destructive 2015 and 2016 attacks on Ukraine's power grid, and the NotPetya attack, which debilitated Ukrainian and global corporations' operations in summer 2017. The 2019 presidential election will likely serve as yet another flashpoint for Russian influence and interference in the cyber domains.

In 2014, months before Ukraine's last presidential election, a pro-Russian hacking group called CyberBerkut destroyed key vote-tallying system files and leaked private emails and administrator documentation from Ukraine's Central Election Commission (CEC). After restoring its systems, the CEC faced another wave of malicious activity leading up to election day. The CEC programs to monitor voter turnout and tally votes were shut down for twenty hours by the deletion of key files, while the CEC's website was compromised, so that it displayed former Right Sector leader Dmytro Yarosh as the winner.[16]

The first known power-grid outage caused by a network attack occurred in Ukraine in 2015; it happened again in 2016, with blackouts caused both times. The group behind the attack is known by a variety of monikers, including Sandworm and Telebots. The malware it used to conduct attacks on the power grid, and on other Ukrainian targets like the railways, has been referred to as Black Energy, Crash Override, and Industroyer. [17]

In October 2018, the security firm ESET linked the group and its malware to the devastating 2017 NotPetya operation.[18] This operation used a vulnerability previously exploited by the US National Security Agency in Microsoft's operating system, called Eternal Blue, that was leaked publicly in spring 2017. The group delivered the exploit to Ukrainian and international companies doing business in Ukraine by hijacking the servers of an oft-used Ukrainian tax software called ME.doc.[19] The damage to the networks of the Ukrainian government and financial sector was severe. In 2017 and 2018, numerous governments—including the United States, the United Kingdom, and Ukraine—publicly attributed the NotPetya attack to the Russian military.[20]

As the 2019 presidential election approaches, the Kremlin will likely intensify efforts to meddle in the election and undermine its legitimacy, as well as deploy operations that sow chaos and strike at Ukrainians' sense of security and safety. Given the Russian government's past cyber operations, which targeted Ukraine from 2014–2017, state-sponsored cyber operations will likely compromise networks that deal directly with vote tallying and result presentation, exploit civil and financial-sector institutions, and technically manipulate media outlets and campaigns' digital efforts.

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16   Laura Galante and Shaun Ee, *Defining Russian Election Interference: An Analysis of Select 2014 to 2018 Cyber Enabled Incidents* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2018), http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/issue-briefs/defining-russian-election-interference-an-analysis-of-select-2014-to-2018-cyber-enabled-incidents.

17   Catalin Cimpanu, "Security Researchers Find Solid Evidence Linking Industroyer to NotPetya," *ZDNet*, October 11, 2018, https://www.zdnet.com/article/security-researchers-find-solid-evidence-linking-industroyer-to-notpetya/.

18   Anton Cherepanov and Robert Lipovsky, "New TeleBots Backdoor: First Evidence Linking Industroyer to NotPetya," *WeLiveSecurity*, October 11, 2018, https://www.welivesecurity.com/2018/10/11/new-telebots-backdoor-linking-industroyer-notpetya/.

19   Andy Greenberg, "The Untold Story of NotPetya, The Most Devastating Cyberattack in History," *Wired*, August 22, 2018, https://www.wired.com/story/notpetya-cyberattack-ukraine-russia-code-crashed-the-world/.

20   Andy Greenberg, "The White House Blames Russia For NotPetya, The 'Most Costly Cyberattack in History,'" *Wired*, February 15, 2018, https://www.wired.com/story/white-house-russia-notpetya-attribution/.

THE EVOLUTION OF KREMLIN KINETIC OPERATIONS IN UKRAINE

The role of the Russian military in the Crimea annexation campaign in February–March 2014 has already been studied and described in detail. Even Putin publicly admitted that Russia had a role after denying the obvious.[21] He also disclosed one of the new tactics the Russian military tested in Crimea: using local civilians as human shields and as proxy fighters.[22]

Russia's military involvement in the Donbas has also been observed and documented, but has still not been legally recognized as an act of military aggression.[23] As for the evidence of Russia's culpability in the Donbas, there are numerous official and independent sources, which regularly track its presence and ongoing material support through the use of video, photo, and even material evidence.[24] These open- and closed-source investigative efforts continued to compile proof of the Kremlin's involvement in the Donbas, particularly in the aftermath of the MH17 investigation.[25]

> "Today, military power remains one of the most effective instruments in the toolbox of Russian hybrid warfare."

Moscow has also used nuclear bluster as a tool in Ukraine. Putin and a number of other prominent figures have voiced Russia's readiness to deliver a retaliatory, or even a preventive, nuclear strike—a position outlined in Russia's military doctrine.[26]

In 2018, Russia further exacerbated tensions by creating and enforcing a blockade of Ukraine's ports in the East, along the Azov Sea coast. This effort seems to be directly aimed at influencing the outcome of ballots cast in next year's election, by attempting to stoke economic and societal tensions in the region's main industrial cities that rely on the Azov Sea.

During the last four years, Russia significantly expanded its land, air, and naval presence in Crimea, and reinforced and expanded the presence of its forces located in close proximity to Ukraine's borders. The two army corps (armed formations in Donetsk and Luhansk) should also be considered part of the Russian forward military presence, as there are substantial political and military links between the de-facto authorities and Moscow. The Kremlin has also sought to put forces on Ukraine's northern border, by seeking to establish a military base in Belarus. Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko has thus far refused this request.

Moscow is expected to use kinetic means to influence Ukraine's March 2019 election by maintaining the low-intensity conflict in the Donbas; continuing and increasing acts of sabotage and terrorism, such as assassinations of public figures and high-ranking officers, attacks on military depots, and interference against critical civilian infrastructure; unilaterally escalating or de-escalating the conflict, with or without any warning; and reinforcing and maintaining a significant military presence and activity near Ukraine's borders and along the Black Sea and Azov Sea coasts.

21 "Putin Says He Decided To Take Crimea Just Hours After Yanukovych's Ouster," RadioFree Europe Radio Liberty, March 9, 2015, https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-ukraine-putin-crimea-decision/26889839.html.

22 "Crimean self-defense forces were of course backed by Russian servicemen," Putin said. "They acted very appropriately, but as I've already said decisively and professionally." "Putin Acknowledges Russian Military Serviceman Were in Crimea," RT, April 17, 2014, https://www.rt.com/news/crimea-defense-russian-soldiers-108/.

23 "Russian Military Presence in Ukraine," StopFake, November 6, 2018, https://www.stopfake.org/en/tag/russian-military-presence-in-ukraine/.

24 Putin also initially denied the "little green men" present during the annexation of Crimea were Russian soldiers, but later admitted they were. Shaun Walker, "Putin Admits Russian Military Presence in Ukraine for First Time," Guardian, December 17, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/17/vladimir-putin-admits-russian-military-presence-ukraine.

25 Samuel Osborne, "Flight MH17 Shot Down by Russian Military-Sourced Missile, Investigators Conclude," Independent, May 24, 2018, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/mh17-missile-ukraine-2014-russia-military-netherlands-deaths-investigation-a8366721.html.

26 "The Russian Federation shall reserve the right to use nuclear weapons in response to the use of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction against it and/or its allies, as well as in the event of aggression against the Russian Federation with the use of conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is in jeopardy." Embassy of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, press release, "The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation," June 29, 2015, https://rusemb.org.uk/press/2029.

Ukrainian Election Task Force

David J. Kramer, Team Leader

Senior Fellow, Vaclav Havel Program for Human Rights and Diplomacy, Steven J. Green School of International and Public Affairs, Florida International University

David Kramer joined Florida International University's Steven J. Green School of International and Public Affairs as a senior fellow in the Vaclav Havel Program for Human Rights and Diplomacy in May 2017. Before moving to Miami, Kramer had worked in Washington, DC for over twenty years, most recently with the McCain Institute for International Leadership as senior director for human rights and democracy. Before that, he served for four years as president of Freedom House. Prior to that, he was a senior transatlantic fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States. Kramer served eight years in the US Department of State, including as assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights, and labor; deputy assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs; professional staff member in the secretary's Office of Policy Planning; and senior adviser to the undersecretary for global affairs. He has also served as executive director of the US Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy in Washington.

Laura Galante, Senior Strategist and Cyber Lead

Founder, Galante Strategies; Senior Fellow, Eurasia Center, Atlantic Council

Laura Galante founded Galante Strategies in 2017. At Galante Strategies, she helps equip governments and corporations to respond effectively to cyber and information threats. Additionally, she has helped develop an operational cyber security framework for the Ukrainian government and advised numerous other European governments on cyber threats. Ms. Galante also serves as a senior fellow for the Atlantic Council's Cyber Statecraft Initiative. Prior to starting Galante Strategies, she served as the director of global intelligence for FireEye Inc., a cyber security company. She has been featured on BBC, CNN, NBC, and NPR, and in Le Monde, the Financial Times, and the Wall Street Journal, among other outlets. She received her bachelor's degree from the University of Virginia and her juris doctor from the Catholic University of America.

Jakub Kalenský, Disinformation Lead

Senior Fellow, Eurasia Center, Atlantic Council

Jakub Kalenský joined the Atlantic Council's Eurasia Center in Autumn 2018 as a senior fellow focusing on disinformation. In this capacity, Jakub is focusing on raising the awareness about pro-Kremlin disinformation campaigns via producing articles and reports on this topic, including for the DisinfoPortal; giving interviews and public speeches; as well as via briefing governments and journalists in Europe. He also works with the Ukrainian Election Task Force as disinformation lead. Between 2015 and 2018, Jakub worked for the European Union's (EU's) East StratCom Task Force as the team lead for countering disinformation. There, Jakub was responsible for the EUvsDisinfo campaign and its flagship product, the weekly #DisinfoReview. This work also included briefings and trainings of journalists and civil servants, as well as numerous background briefings for the media. Before that, Jakub worked as a political correspondent in numerous print, online and television newsrooms in the Czech Republic. He was awarded for his work in 2011 with a prize for promising junior journalists. Jakub has a degree in Philosophy and Russian language and literature.

Oleksiy Melnyk, Kinetic Lead

Co-director, Foreign Relations and International Security Programs, Razumkov Centre

Before joining the Razumkov Centre (Ukrainian Centre for Economic and Political Studies), he served as the Head of the Organizational and Analytical Division and the First Assistant to the Minister of Defence of Ukraine and worked for SC Ukroboronservice. He also served 21 years in the Air Force (Lt Col. Ret.) including participation in the UN peacekeeping operation (UNTAES). He studied international relations and security at the Royal College of Defence Studies, London, UK (2007). Before that he was educated in the United States under the International Military and Education Program (1993-94 & 2000-2001) and graduated from the Air Force Academy (1984).

Maxim Eristavi, Media Lead

Research Fellow, Eurasia Center, Atlantic Council; Co-Founder, Hromadske International

Maxim Eristavi is a research fellow at the Atlantic Council's Eurasia Center. Mr. Eristavi is also a Ukrainian writer, media entrepreneur, and civil rights advocate. He is one of the most well-known English-speaking journalists stationed in Eastern Europe and serves as a founding consultant for the Russian Language News Exchange, the biggest support network for independent newsrooms in Eastern Europe. In 2014, Mr. Eristavi co-founded Hromadske International, a leading independent news startup covering Eastern Europe in Russian and English. He has been a contributor for news outlets such as BBC, CNN, Reuters, Foreign Policy, Foreign Affairs, Politico, and the Washington Post, among others. He is the only openly gay journalist in Ukraine and has been an outspoken voice in raising civil rights issues of the region abroad. Mr. Eristavi's work and bridge-building took him to parliaments and foreign ministries of the United Kingdom and Sweden, the Senate hearings at US Congress, and the EU Parliament. Mr. Eristavi is a 2015 Poynter fellow at Yale University with a focus on informational wars and pan-regional LGBTI civil rights movements. He is also a 2016-17 fellow of the Millennium Leadership Program at the Atlantic Council.

John Herbst, Director

Director, Eurasia Center, Atlantic Council

John Herbst is the director of the Atlantic Council's Eurasia Center. Ambassador Herbst served for thirty-one years as a foreign service officer in the US Department of State, retiring at the rank of career minister. He was the US ambassador to Ukraine from 2003 to 2006. Prior to his ambassadorship in Ukraine, he was the ambassador to Uzbekistan from 2000 to 2003. Ambassador Herbst previously served as US consul general in Jerusalem; principal deputy to the ambassador-at-large for the Newly Independent States; director of the Office of Independent States and Commonwealth Affairs; director of regional affairs in the Near East Bureau; and at the embassies in Tel Aviv, Moscow, and Saudi Arabia. He most recently served as director of the Center for Complex Operations at the National Defense University. He has received two Presidential Distinguished Service Awards, the Secretary of State's Career Achievement Award, the State Department's Distinguished Honor Award, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Distinguished Civilian Service Award. Ambassador Herbst's writings on stability operations, Central Asia, Ukraine, and Russia are widely published.

Geysha Gonzalez, Atlantic Council Lead

Deputy Director, Eurasia Center, Atlantic Council

Geysha Gonzalez is the deputy director of the Atlantic Council's Eurasia Center where she oversees programming and strategy. She's also the founder of DisinfoPortal.org, an online guide tracking efforts to counter disinformation. Prior to joining the Council, Geysha spent two years at Freedom House, a human rights and democracy watchdog, working in various roles including as a member for the Freedom of Expression team, where she worked on issues related to digital and physical security for human rights defenders. She also contributed to Freedom House's flagship report, Freedom in the World, and wrote several pieces on the rise of modern dictatorships and international sporting events. Her previous experiences include work as a parliamentary assistant for the British Parliament and on Capitol Hill. Her work has been featured on The Hill and The Washington Post. She holds a master's degree in history of international relations from the London School of Economics, where she focused on transatlantic relations during the Cold War in the 1960s and 1980s. She earned her bachelor's in international affairs with a focus on European politics from Marquette University and spent a year at King's College London.

Yevhen Fedchenko

Co-Founder and Chief Editor, StopFake.org

Yevhen Fedchenko is a co-founder and chief editor of the fact-checking website StopFake.org, which is a leading hub of expertise on Russian disinformation. He is also the director of the Mohyla School of Journalism at National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Kyiv, Ukraine. Dr. Fedchenko spent more than 20 years in media, covering international stories for different outlets and serving as the leader of the foreign news desk at one of leading Ukrainian TV channels. Additionally, he has contributed to the New York Times, BBC, and Politico, among others. After moving to academia, he has taught international relations as well as a course on news media. He served as a visiting professor at Ohio University and a Fulbright visiting professor at the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California. He is also a co-founder of the Digital Future of Journalism program for journalists and the Digital Media for Universities Internet journalism curriculum development program.

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