

Call for Proposals

## Russia's Influence: Leverages and Operations From Ukraine to the "Global South"

March 8, 2024

Organization: Paris Nanterre University, CRPM

Location: Campus Condorcet - Bâtiment de recherche Nord, Salle 0.010  
(14 Cours des Humanités 93322 Aubervilliers)

An event supported by CORUSCANT, The European Branch of the Russia Program

Proposals for papers may be submitted in French or English (300 words), with participants' institutional affiliation. They should be sent no later than **January 15, 2024** to the organizing committee: Maxime Danielou ([maxime.danielou@parisnanterre.fr](mailto:maxime.danielou@parisnanterre.fr)) and Gabriel Porc ([porc.gabriel@parisnanterre.fr](mailto:porc.gabriel@parisnanterre.fr)).

See the complete calendar below.

Since Ukraine's independence in August 1991, and particularly since the Orange Revolution in 2004, Russia has perceived any sign of rapprochement between Ukraine and the West as a threat to its strategic interests and security<sup>1</sup>. Long before it provoked a high-scale military conflict following its invasion of Ukraine, Vladimir Putin's Russia implemented a wide range of strategies based on multiple levers of influence modes of operations. For example, Russia has endeavored to influence Ukraine's internal politics by employing electoral strategy experts to support Moscow-friendly parties and candidates<sup>2</sup>. As Kyiv's leading economic partner until 2018, Moscow has exploited the interdependence between the two countries, particularly in terms of hydrocarbons. The Russian government has deployed classic tools of influence, such as soft power and public diplomacy, and has made the promotion of Russian culture and language an integral part of its documents related to foreign policy concepts<sup>3</sup>. These strategies have gradually been transformed into genuine offensive

---

<sup>1</sup> The Russian Federation's 2023 foreign policy concept, unveiled during its high-scale invasion of the Ukrainian territory, attempts to present the conflict as a proxy war with the United States, using the argument of the military and financial support. Thus, the document mentions that American purpose "is aimed at weakening Russia in every possible way, including at undermining its constructive civilizational role, power, economic and technological capabilities, limiting its sovereignty in foreign and domestic policy, violating its territorial integrity", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, March 31, 2023, [https://mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/fundamental\\_documents/1860586/](https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586/)

<sup>2</sup> Clémentine Fauconnier, "Circulations et appropriations de pratiques démocratiques en situation autoritaire : quel rôle pour les experts en stratégie électorale en Russie ?", in Pascal Bonnard (eds), *Faire, défaire la démocratie. De Moscou, Bogota et Téhéran au Conseil de l'Europe*. Karthala, 2021, pp. 159-187

<sup>3</sup> See for example Russia's 2008 foreign policy concept, [https://russiaeu.ru/userfiles/file/foreign\\_policy\\_concept\\_english.pdf](https://russiaeu.ru/userfiles/file/foreign_policy_concept_english.pdf)

tools, leading to the reclassification of Russian soft power as sharp power<sup>4</sup>. Russia has also implemented new strategies, including non-kinetic means (notably disinformation operations and cyberattacks), but also "indirect" military means (presence of semi-state actors in the Donbass). Since the annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbass, this mix of conventional and unconventional means of waging war has led to the rise of the term "hybrid warfare" in the public discourse, though the scientific literature has mostly described it as inappropriate. Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 can be seen as the failure of these various indirect strategies, which are part of the "theorization for bypassing armed struggle<sup>5</sup> and these leverages of influence.

The aim of this conference is twofold. Firstly, it will provide an opportunity to review Russia's various leverages of influence and modes of operation in Ukraine prior launching its "special military operation" in February 2022, to offer an overview and attempt to put them into perspective. As part of a comparative approach, the day will also look at these same leverages of influence in the different areas in which Russia has sought to project its power, both at the borders of the former USSR and in more distant territories, notably in the Middle East, Africa and Latin America.

### **1. Grey zones: the role of non-state actors (PMC, adhoc actors) and the case of *de facto* states**

With an objective of regaining its power, Russia has strengthened its military capabilities and increased the number of operations. Before 2022, the Russian army invaded the Ukrainian territory to annex Crimea. After this, the destabilization of the Donbass from 2014 onwards has seen the emergence of a new type of actor: private military companies and "semistate" or "adhoc" actors who, without falling under the umbrella of PMCs, present themselves as such. Such is the case of Wagner. Indirectly linked to the state, this type of player enables Moscow to attain its political goals while minimizing its exposure on both the domestic and the international stage. These actors enable the Kremlin to justify human casualties during military or paramilitary operations for which the population has not been consulted.. Moreover, the use of these actors is part of the academic and strategic debate on "hybrid warfare", in which Russia plays a major role.

The case of Donbass also raises tactical and operational similarities with events in Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the 1990s. For example, in Moldova, the *de facto* state of Transnistria is a practical tool for influencing the content of Moldova's security policy and undermining Moldova's population and elites' aspirations to participate in Euro-Atlantic structures, thus keeping the country within Russia's traditional sphere of influence<sup>6</sup>.

### **2. Economic strategies (hydrocarbons, investments, cereals)**

---

<sup>4</sup> National Endowment for Democracy, *Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence*, Décembre 2017, <https://www.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Sharp-Power-Rising-Authoritarian-Influence-FullReport.pdf>, 156 pages

<sup>5</sup> Dimitric Minic, *Pensée et culture stratégiques russes. Du contournement de la lutte armée à la guerre en Ukraine*, Paris, Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 2023, p.365-366

<sup>6</sup> Agnieszka Miarka, "Transnistria as an Instrument of Influence of the Russian Federation on the Security of Moldova in the Second Decade of the 21st Century—Selected Aspects", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol.53, N°2, 2020, p. 61–75

After the decade of successive crises that followed the collapse of the USSR, Russia gradually rebuilt its economic capacities based on the production and export of hydrocarbons. By playing on the energy dependence of its customers and states dependent on oil and gas transport revenues, Moscow has made hydrocarbons one of the central instruments in the projection of its power in Europe and Asia. Russian-Ukrainian relations have thus been subject to recurrent gas-related conflicts (specifically between 2005 and 2009). This interdependence also applies to many economic sectors (energy, infrastructures, weapons, tourism...) and tends to make Russia indispensable. This is the case for work related emigration from Central Asian countries. Nonetheless, the war in Ukraine has highlighted the limits of the economic partnership with Russia, especially because of the instability it provokes in the region<sup>7</sup>.

Since the early 2000s, Russia has also regained its status as an agricultural superpower, ranking among the world's top exporters of foodstuffs such as wheat, and signaling the return of a cereals power on international markets. A final element concerns Russia's foreign direct investment and its evolution, particularly affected by the events of February 24, 2022.

### **3. Diplomacy and influence (foreign policy doctrines, public diplomacy, informational influence and "entrepreneurs of influence")**

The "color revolutions", particularly the "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine, prompted Russia to develop public diplomacy to project its influence beyond its borders, in opposition to Western influence. This public diplomacy includes both a cultural component (supported in particular by the state agency Rossotrudnitchestvo and the Russkiy Mir Foundation), specifically based on the promotion of conservative values or the neo-imperial ideology of the "Russian World", and an informational component (state-run media such as RT and Sputnik).

More recently, Russian influence has focused on French-speaking Africa, using these same media and their local relays to promote an anti-neocolonial stance. Besides public diplomacy, more aggressive and coercive practices have emerged in the information space. Some of the activities of RT and Sputnik, as well as the informational activities of Wagner and the Russian services, fall outside the realm of public diplomacy, and have been described as sharp power.

In addition, the term "entrepreneurs of influence" has been developed to describe unofficial actors who use their financial resources and social capital to develop their influence abroad, with a view to being rewarded by the Kremlin<sup>8</sup>.

### **4. Effects of Russian influence and their limits**

Most of the literature, whether scientific or strategic, focuses on the actors of Russian influence<sup>9</sup>. One of the approaches proposed here is to look at the relational chain of influence, in order to study local relays as well as the targets and receivers of this influence. The challenge is to shift the focus from the study of the resources of Russian state influence to the

---

<sup>7</sup> H  l  ne Thibault, "L'impact de la guerre en Ukraine en Asie centrale : instabilit  , m  fiance et perte d'influence russe", *Le Rubicon*, 14 d  cembre 2022, <https://lerubicon.org/limpact-de-la-guerre-enukraine-en-asie-centrale-instabilite-mefiance-et-perde-dinfluence-russe/>

<sup>8</sup> Marl  ne Laruelle et K  vin Limonier, "Beyond 'hybrid warfare': a digital exploration of Russia's entrepreneur of influence", *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol.37, N  4, , 2021, p.318-335

<sup>9</sup> Yet, some works have underlined the dynamics of engagement of Ukrainian citizens and their perception of the war which started in 2014. See for example Oksana Mikheieva, « Engag  s volontaires de la guerre du Donbass. Les motivations pour combattre des deux c  t  s de la ligne de front », *Revue d'  tudes comparatives Est-Ouest*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2018, p. 21-64

study of targeted individuals, and thus to address the question of the reception, effectiveness and limits of Russian influence<sup>10</sup>.

Recent work has also focused on analyzing audiences' reactions to influence campaigns, their engagement with the narratives promoted and their integration with their own beliefs<sup>11</sup>, particularly through the prism of media and communication studies. Indeed, civil societies, especially Ukrainian citizens, are not only targets of Russian influence; they are also channels for its propagation. By using social networks, ordinary citizens express their political opinions and can contribute, even unintentionally, to the spread of Russian disinformation<sup>12</sup>. On the other hand, many voice out against this influence. Proposals can be structured around these issues of reception by target audiences and distribution networks (both in the digital space and through relays set up by local actors).

## **5. Transversal axis: geographical comparison with other areas where Russia deploys its leverages of influence**

Since the collapse of the USSR, the efforts of Russia's leaders have focused primarily on maintaining or regaining influence in all the states that emerged from the Soviet Union. The study of Russian leverages of influence and the comparison of their use with the Ukrainian case cannot therefore be made without returning to the former Soviet states of Central Asia, the Caucasus and Eastern Europe. However, it is equally important to decentralize the analysis to include other regions of the world. The 2023 Foreign Policy Concept sets out for the first time the priority countries or zones of Russian foreign policy, and reflects a willingness to act outside its peripheral space. Russia's military operation in Syria in 2015, in support of the Bashar al-Assad regime, marked the first military intervention outside the borders of the former USSR since the war in Afghanistan. It also symbolizes the return of Russian influence in regions outside what it considers its "near abroad" and embodies, for example, the opportunity to promote a religion-based narrative to legitimize military intervention in Syria<sup>13</sup>.

On the African continent, Moscow is asserting its Soviet heritage by offering its support to regimes denouncing "Western neo-colonialism". Russia's return to Africa is largely due to Evgueni Prigogine's Wagner Group, which, after developing its activities in Ukraine and Syria, is now focusing on Mali, Burkina Faso and the Central African Republic.

We are also witnessing a reinvestment in the Arctic, a region in which Moscow is using international law to lay claim to resources and wealth against other states. The stakes are not only related to new transport routes and climate change, but also to the development of submarine cable networks for data routes and satellite surveillance of the region. Submarine cables are at the crossroads of several projects involving the use of fiber optics and the modification of the "lower layers" of cyberspace to ensure the sovereignty of the Russian Internet, an issue reiterated in Russia's 2016 information security doctrine<sup>14</sup>.

---

<sup>10</sup> Joanna Szostek, "The power and limits of Russia's strategic narrative in Ukraine: the role of linkage" *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol.15,N°2, 2017, p.379-395

<sup>11</sup> See for example Robert A. Saunders, Rhys Crilley, Precious Chatterjee Doody, "ICYMI: RT and Youth-Oriented International Broadcasting as (Geo)Political Culture Jamming", *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol.27, N°3, 2022, p. 696-717

<sup>12</sup> Yevgeniy Golovchenko, Mareike Hartmann et Rebecca Adler-Nissen, "State, media and civil society in the information warfare over Ukraine: citizen curators of digital disinformation", *International Affairs*, Vol.94, 2018, p.975-994

<sup>13</sup> Natalia Timus, "Religious Narratives and Russia's Soft Power in the Middle East", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.14, N°6, 2022, p.1006-1027

<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Doctrine of Information Security of the Russian*

Finally, recent studies have focused on Russian influence in Latin America, particularly its informational component, and its role in the rise of illiberalism in the region<sup>15</sup>. While the latest foreign policy concept focuses on Russia's objective of ensuring the sovereignty of Latin American countries, which, according to Moscow, are under pressure from the United States, these studies highlight the role of public diplomacy and its media dimension, as well as its evolution towards more offensive strategies.

### **Organizing Committee**

Maxime Danielou (CRPM – Paris Nanterre University)

Gabriel Porc (CRPM – Paris Nanterre University)

### **Scientific Committee**

Maxime Audinet (IRSEM), Yann Breault (Collège Militaire Royal de St-Jean), Maxime Daniélou (Paris Nanterre University), Thomas Da Silva (CERCEC), Julie Deschepper (Utrecht University), Caroline Dufy (Sciences Po Bordeaux), Clémentine Fauconnier (Université de Haute-Alsace), Kévin Limonier (Institut Française de Géopolitique), Dimitri Minic (IFRI), Gabriel Porc (Paris Nanterre University), Jean-Robert Raviot (Paris Nanterre University).

### **Key References**

Dmitry Adamsky 2017. « From Moscow with coercion: Russian deterrence theory and strategic culture », *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 41:1-2, p. 33-60.

Maxime Audinet, *Russia Today : un média d'influence au service de l'État russe*, Paris, INA, 2021, 188 pages

Maxime Audinet et Emmanuel Dreyfus, *La Russie au Mali : une présence bicéphale*, Étude 97, IRSEM, septembre 2022

Armando Chaguaceda, Johanna Cilano Pelaez, and Maria Isabel Puerta, "Illiberal Narratives in Latin America: Russian and Allied Media as Vehicles of Autocratic Cooperation," *Journal of Illiberalism Studies*, Vol.3, N° 2, 2023, p.111-123

Igor Delanoë, *Russie : les enjeux du retour au Moyen-Orient*, Paris, L'Inventaire : Les Carnets de l'observatoire, 2016, 124 pages

Caroline Dufy, *Le retour de la puissance céréalière russe. Sociologie des marchés du blé 2000-2018*, Peter Lang, 2021, 276 pages

Clémentine Fauconnier, "Circulations et appropriations de pratiques démocratiques en situation autoritaire : quel rôle pour les experts en stratégie électorale en Russie ? », in Pascal Bonnard (eds)., *Faire, défaire la démocratie. De Moscou, Bogota et Téhéran au Conseil de l'Europe*. Karthala, 2021, pp. 159-187

---

Federation, Title IV, Section 29-e, December 5, 2016,  
[http://www.scrf.gov.ru/security/information/DIB\\_eng/](http://www.scrf.gov.ru/security/information/DIB_eng/)

<sup>15</sup> Armando Chaguaceda, Johanna Cilano Pelaez, and Maria Isabel Puerta, "Illiberal Narratives in Latin America: Russian and Allied Media as Vehicles of Autocratic Cooperation," *Journal of Illiberalism Studies*, Vol.3, N° 2, 2023, p.111-123

Marlène Laruelle et Jean Radvanyi, *Russia Great Power, Weakened State*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2023, 265 pages

Marlène Laruelle et Kévin Limonier, "Beyond 'hybrid warfare': a digital exploration of Russia's entrepreneur of influence", *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol.37, N°4, , 2021, p.318-335

Kévin Limonier, *Ru.net : géopolitique du cyberspace russophone*, Paris, L'inventaire : Les Carnets de l'observatoire, 2018, 128 pages

Kimberly Marten, "Russia's use of semi-private security forces: the case of the Wagner group", *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol.35, N°3, 2019, p.181-204

Agnieszka Miarka, "Transnistria as an Instrument of Influence of the Russian Federation on the Security of Moldova in the Second Decade of the 21st Century—Selected Aspects", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol.53, N°2, 2020, p. 61–75

Dimitri Minic, *Pensée et culture stratégiques russes. Du contournement de la lutte armée à la guerre en Ukraine*, Paris, Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 2023, 632 pages

Dimitri Minic, « How the Russian Army Changed its Concept of War, 1993-2022 » *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Mai 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2023.2199445>

Jean-Robert Raviot (dir.), *Russie, vers une nouvelle guerre froide ?*, Paris, La Documentation française, 2016, 183 pages

Thomas Da Silva, « Le combattant irrégulier à l'épreuve des guerres post-soviétiques », *Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2021

Timothy L. Thomas, 2004. « Russia's reflexive control theory and the military », *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol. 17, n° 2, p. 237-256

Anne De Tinguy, *Le Géant empêtré. La Russie et le monde de la fin de l'URSS à l'invasion de l'Ukraine*, Paris, Perrin, 2022, 496 pages

Natalia Timus, "Religious Narratives and Russia's Soft Power in the Middle East", *EuropeAsia Studies*, Vol.14, N°6, 2022, p.1006-1027

Andrey P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy (Fifth Edition)*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2019, 336 pages

Marcel Van Herpen, *Putin's propaganda machine : soft power and Russian foreign policy*, Lanham : Rowman & Littlefield, 2016, 317 pages

Julien Vercueil, *Economie politique de la Russie, 1918-2018*, Paris, Seuil, 2019, 268 pages

## **Calendar**

Deadline for applications: January 15

Responses week of January 29 - February 3

Submission of papers on March 4, 2024