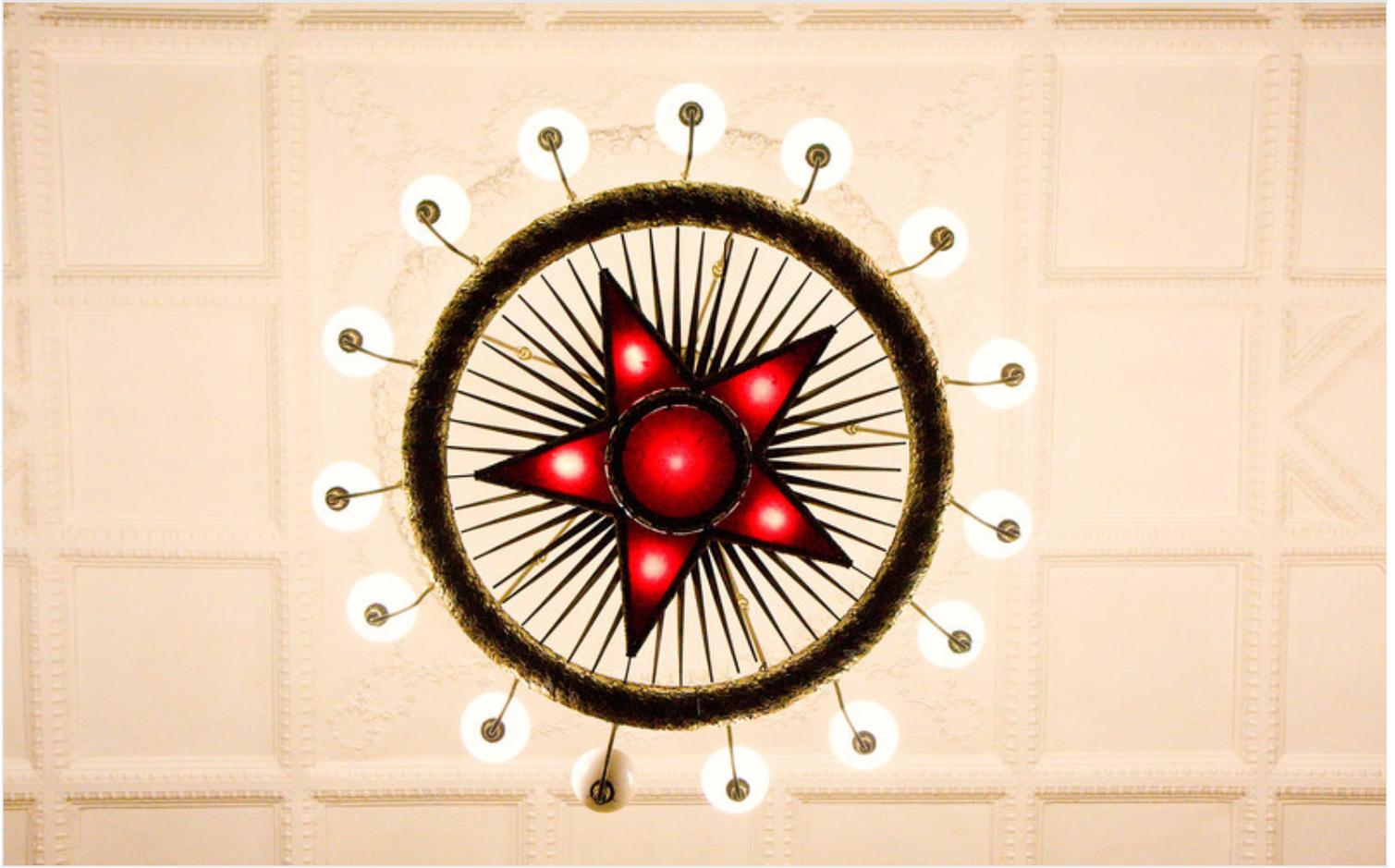


Nato colonel sheds light on Russia 'psy-ops'



The Kremlin's new-model war is less military muscle, more propaganda (Photo: [Garrett Ziegler](#))



Jaeski has co-ordinated info-ops for Nato in Afghanistan and Iraq (Photo: [StratcomCoe](#))

"Basically we were used as cheap labour. I came back from the Soviet army as a pacifist," he told EUobserver earlier this month in Riga, where he is now deputy director of Nato Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, or Stratcom.

The centre recently carried out a study of Russia's propaganda war on Ukraine.

Jaeski, who also oversaw Nato information operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, described Moscow's campaign as "a psy-op" which uses "very carefully selected messages for targeted audiences in Ukraine, inside Russia, and in the West".

He said its main tools are false "facts" and images, as well as glorification of Russian military power and political leadership.

He added that "everything we've seen so far is driven by the statement made by [Russian leader Vladimir] Putin in 2005, that the 'greatest geopolitical catastrophe' of the century was the collapse of the Soviet Union".

He noted that Russia already used psy-ops in its invasion of Georgia in 2008.

It is part of what Russian general Valery Gerasimov, the chief of the Russian general staff, later called "hybrid warfare".

But a comparison between the open assault on Georgia and the covert attack on Ukraine using "little green men" - Russian soldiers in unmarked uniforms who occupied Crimea prior to its annexation - indicates that Russia has invested effort and money to make its tactics increasingly sophisticated.

Gerasimov introduced the concept of keeping blurred lines between a state of war and peace, between professional soldiers (whether in uniform or not) and armed civilians.

The Russian general also put more emphasis on winning the "media war" alongside any military gains.

The advance of social media, and its use of images which go viral without any

background checks, in the past few years has helped the Russian side.

Fake images, which have been photoshopped or copy-pasted from reports on other war zones or even from movies, purporting to show atrocities committed by the Ukrainian army abound on Twitter, Facebook, or its Russian equivalent VKontakte.

"Perhaps the most impressive tool in psy-ops is the image of a crying child. There are some theories which say that the Americans lost the Vietnam war because of the [image of a] crying [naked child](#) after a napalm strike," Jaevski says, referring to one of the iconic pictures of the 1960s conflict.

The Ukraine conflict also has its 'napalm child' - a picture of a [crying baby with a swastika](#) carved onto his arm.

It was posted on the social media page of "Antimaidan" - a popular pro-Kremlin group - amid allegations that Ukrainian maternity workers did it to humiliate the mother, a woman from the Donbas region in east Ukraine and the widow of a pro-Russia fighter.

"It's been three months, and the scar is still visible," the caption reads.

In fact, the picture is an internet stock photo.

It also appears in an [article](#) posted in 2008 on the US website Popsugar, but without the swastika, which was photoshopped in at a later stage.

The website [StopFake](#) is full of such examples.

It also tries to expose Russian state TV lies, such as its use of actors to play various roles in its reports of Ukrainian "war crimes", with the same faces appearing now as an activist, later as a widow, then the mother of a deceased soldier, a refugee, or an anti-Maidan participant.

Counter-propaganda?

The EU foreign service is currently drafting proposals on how to react to the Russian media campaign.

The move came after more than a dozen foreign ministers, including from Denmark, the Netherlands, Poland, and the UK, called for EU counter-measures at a meeting in Brussels on Monday (19 January).

But for Jaeski any EU or Nato fight-back must address the whole spectrum of Russian disinformation.

"If we want to counter Russian propaganda today, not just about Ukraine, but also about the fake accusations they make about Europe, we have to unite our lines and speak with the same voice," he said, referring to Russian reports of how the EU and US sponsored a "coup" in Kiev, or about human rights abuses, economic meltdowns, and homosexual aberrations inside Europe.

"We have to be confident", he added.

"Our message should be clear. We should continue to reveal the lies coming from that large propaganda machine. And for all of that we should invest more into our capabilities and skills".

Jaeski admits it is easier said than done, while predicting that Russian state lies will remain a problem for the West for years to come.

But, looking back at his own memories of the shoddy reality of the Soviet armed forces, he says "we shouldn't overestimate the power of lies".

"I still believe the truth will win. We should keep telling the truth and stick to freedom of speech".