

THE CRIMEA, ISKANDER MISSILES, NOVICHOK. ACTIONS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AIMED AT THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND EUROPEAN UNION

Magdalena SKWARSKA

University of Warsaw, MA

Andrzej SKWARSKI

The Jacob of Paradies University

Abstract. The article presents the development of Russian foreign policy towards NATO and EU over the course of last few years. Special attention has been given to the most aggressive measures implemented by Moscow in order to preserve its importance in world political landscape. Author appeals to the Crimea case, military development, hybrid and information warfare and cases of assassinations of Russian emigrants linked to the opposition and business.

Keywords: International security, regional security, Russia, EU, USA, hybrid war, information war.

Introduction

Since mid-2000s Russia tends to play a game with NATO and European Union. Its main goal is regaining status of the great power and preserving and expanding its sphere of influence in Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia in order to manifest its power, keep the control over those regions and establish a buffer between Russian territory and NATO states. Thereinafter are presented measures implemented by Moscow in last few years in order to limit Western domination.

Conquests of Russian Federation as a warning for the West and a personal battle of Vladimir Putin

Analyzing the amount of hero cities and memorials shows that in Russian society remembrance of fallen soldiers, victorious battles and common effort is still zealously preserved. Over the years Russian leaders ruled with an iron hand, getting involved in numerous wars and conquests to show the greatness of their nation to their own society and whole world. The sentiment to strong and charismatic ruler is still alive – Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin.

Ruling with an iron hand is still the guarantee of victory and respect in Russia and Vladimir Putin certainly knows that. Not only he creates his image as an athletic,

brave, strong man, but also he tries to restore Russian power over certain territories that used to be considered Russian (or USSR) area of influence. Putin's firm actions started as soon as he started his presence on political scene. After his swearing in as prime minister, conflict with Chechen separatists escalated. Putin accused them of series of attacks in several Russian cities and declared war on terrorism. His popularity increased significantly and that was the moment Putin learned it was beneficial for his political career to have some kind of a conflict from time to time.

Vladimir Putin cannot afford to lose any territories that are considered Russian area of influence, as he would quickly loose in following elections. All former republics of USSR attract particular interest of Russian ruler. Majority of them became members of Russian driven organizations such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Eurasian Economic Union or the Commonwealth of Independent States. This situation allows Russian Federation to preserve some level of influence on economics and foreign relations of Central Asia states, Belarus, Armenia. Moreover, Putin tries to establish a buffer zone around Russia (especially on the western and southern borders) made of states that are pro-Russian or at least neutral. He quickly reacts on every move of NATO or EU in states neighboring with Russian Federation. Examples of Georgia and Ukraine present Russian attitude toward getting to close with Western Europe and the United States.

In the beginning of the XXI century, Georgia started to appear in the Western consciousness. Firstly, the rise of terrorist attacks all over the world brought attention to the Caucasus as one of hot spots. Secondly, Georgia took actions aimed at strengthening ties with NATO and European Union, simultaneously weakening relations with Russian Federation. Thirdly, Micheil Saakashvili wanted Russian troops in South Osetia and Abkhazia to leave and to restore Georgian control over these two separatist republics. The war did not resolve problem of disputed territories, but led to greater isolation of Georgia in terms of relations with Russia. Although Russian impact on Georgia diminished, successor of USSR heritage achieved its main goal – 10 years after the war Georgia still did not join NATO and is often blamed for starting offensive actions in 2008.¹

In 2008, according to the Levada Center, Putin's rating has achieved the highest score – 83% – and then started decreasing. After elections in 2012, Putin faced real challenge – he had to prove to his nation that he is still the only leader they need. He announced „May decrees” – a set of reforms aimed at increasing effectiveness of industry, growth of number of workplaces, becoming one of the top five economies in the world. The implementation of Putin's new projects turned out not to be as successful as it was expected. The last resort for maintaining image of president was Ukraine, which during Euromaidan protests came out in favor of closer integration

¹ P. Prokopiuk, *Walka Gruzji o niepodległość i integralność terytorialną w latach 1989-2008*, Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej w Lublinie, 2010, p. 94-118.

with European Union. The resignation of Victor Yanukovych meant for Russia losing another subordinate to advantage of the West. Putin's rating had to be improved and decreasing the area of influence would be his nail in the coffin. Russian authorities turned to the approach of conquest that have worked numerous times during history of Russian Empire or USSR. The annexation of Crimea resulted in growth of Putin's rating among the society. However, it gave him so much more – he showed everyone the power of Russian Federation and its army, all coated in „return to the homeland” rhetorics. Moreover, two republics claimed their support for Russia and declared separation from the Ukraine, founding the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic. The conflict was not resolved up to today and measures included in the Minsk Protocol and Minsk II were never fully implemented.²

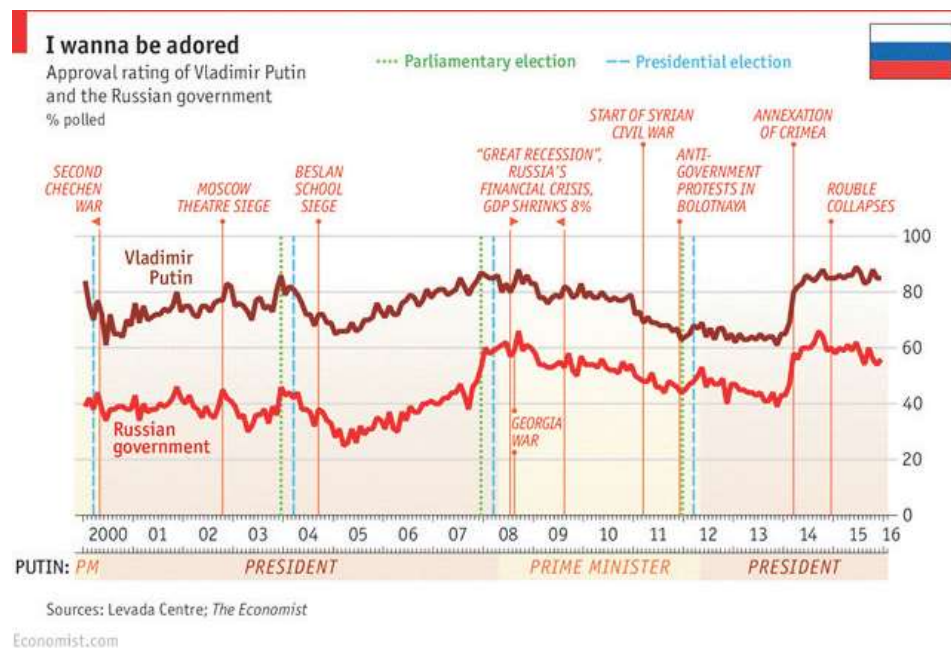


Fig. 1. Approval rating of Vladimir Putin and the Russian government 2000-2016

Source: Levada Centre, *The Economist*

The Ukraine, contrary to Georgia, achieved benefits from EU such as visa free regime and free trade agreement. On the other hand, the conflict in the eastern part of the Ukraine will be in the future the reason for blocking its way to EU or NATO

² R. Zięba, *Ukraina jako przedmiot rywalizacji między Zachodem a Rosją*, „Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne”, 2015, nr 3, p. 5-26.

as it is still not resolved. The West may be concerned about escalation of violence in that area as it is the closest to EU borders armed conflict. However, now no one takes actions aimed at restoring peace in the Ukraine and returning separatist republics to their former homeland.

Both Georgian and Ukrainian cases show that Russian authorities do not accept losing their former allies in favor of EU or the United States and Western states are not that eager to defend weaker states aspiring to become members of NATO or EU. Even though it is impossible for Russia to regain control over those states, the main goal has been achieved – they are not members of Western organizations and they will not be in the near future. Moreover, Ukrainian and Georgian economies have been weakened, Ukrainian political scene is still chaos and Western countries do not get involved fully. The Russian Federation proved that it is ready to risk a lot in fields of economics and foreign relations just to keep its area of influence. Teaching Georgia and Ukraine a lesson was also a personal achievement for Vladimir Putin. His rating got higher, he defended his post in elections and became the most popular and the highest rated politician in Russia since the collapse of the USSR.

The Cold War of 21st century – Russia vs NATO

The threat to preserving the control over former USSR republics is, inter alia, the development of NATO and EU structure, especially in the eastern Europe. The Russian military doctrine, published in 2014, states that its main potential opponent is NATO. The expansion of its structure and rise of military potential in the states neighboring with Russia is still considered a threat to the national security.

NATO enlargement in eastern Europe and Balkans has always been a bone of contention in relations East-West. Russia claims that in 1990 NATO obliged not to expand beyond the borders of Germany and adopted this statement as the part of own anti-Western identity. Although Russia reluctantly accepted NATO membership of its former allies – Poland, Hungary, Baltic States, nowadays Moscow feels that its main opponent came too close to Russian borders. Kremlin did not agree to Ukraine or Georgia to place a membership in NATO structure as it would limit the territory of Russian sphere of influence. In 2017 Russia announced taking actions if Montenegro joined NATO. It is inevitable that Russia will oppose every step towards greater NATO enlargement as it is afraid of losing its impact on neighboring states and of American military presence in Europe.³

Kremlin states that NATO violated the „NATO-Russia Founding Act” as its regulations forbid „permanent stationing of substantial combat forces” in Eastern

³ L. Vukadinovic, M. Begovic, L. Jusic, *NATO in Europe: Between Weak European Allies and Strong Influence of Russian Federation*, „Croatian International Relations Review”, Volume 23, 2017, p. 5-31.

Europe. In fact, these troops are supposed to rotate, so they will not be stationed in the region, but it is one of arguments of Russia against NATO involvement. Nowadays in the Baltic States, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria there are deployed 7000 troops from 28 countries. Ukrainian case brought attention to eastern Europe and encouraged NATO officials to involve former members of Warsaw Pact into NATO activities on much greater scale. The example is Washington's initiative 4 x 30 – by 2020 members are supposed to be ready to field 30 mechanized battalions, 30 air squadrons and 30 battleships in less than 30 days.⁴

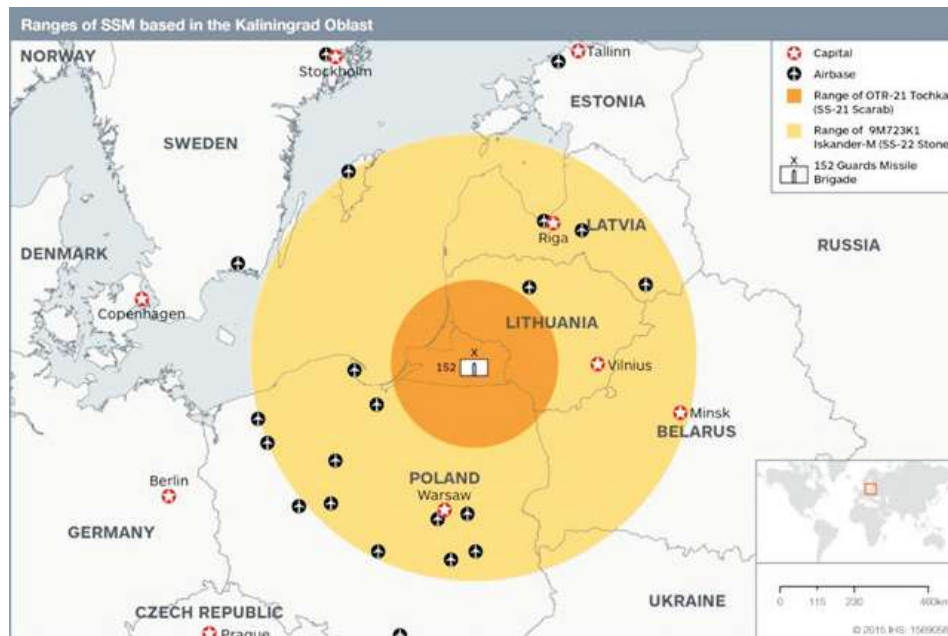


Fig. 2. Comparison of ranges of Tochka and Iskander systems

Source: IHS Jane's

The Kaliningrad Oblast has always been the apple of Kremlin's eye. As the most western territory of the federation, surrounded by NATO members and with an easy access to the Baltic Sea, this region's importance for Russian foreign relations and defense policy will be rising. Nowadays, it is a base for the Baltic Fleet and marines, ground and air forces, strategic missile troops, electronic warfare forces or special forces. The infrastructure constantly undergoes modernization to increase its effectiveness and number of troops. In order to increase the military potential in the region Russian authorities declared in 2008 that they will exchange Tochka

⁴ Ibidem.

ballistic missile system for much more modern Iskander. For years the game was being played – the closer NATO was getting to Russian borders, the more expressively Kremlin was announcing the implementation of the new system. In 2016 Russian Ministry of Defense declared that first Iskander missiles has been successfully deployed in the Kaliningrad region for the permanent use. The full Iskander deployment is announced to be completed in 2018.⁵

Apart from military issues, Russian doctrine implies that threats to the state security include the application of new technologies of influencing the society with an information and activity of social movements and military groups managed from the outside. This way Russian authorities not only presented their anti-Western position, but also they created an argument for tightening regulations concerning NGOs, funds and mass media. The Doctrine of Information Security of the Russian Federation states even more clearly that threats are expansion of foreign media in Russian public space and interference of foreign intelligence services. In 2012 the State Duma introduced the bill "On Amendments to Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation regarding the Regulation of the Activities of Non-profit Organisations Performing the Functions of a Foreign Agent". It states that any non-profit organization or media company financed from abroad and involved in political activity is required to accept the status of „foreign agent”. However, the explanation of terms on which the status is granted is not specified, especially the part concerning the political activity. In fact, this piece of legislation allows authorities to control NGOs and media on a greater scale as „foreign agents” are obligated to present reports on their activity and financial status. They are also restricted from cooperation with authorities and some representatives of business. In May 2015 Duma voted for another bill concerning foreign or international NGOs operating in Russia – Federal Law of 23.05.2015 N 129-FZ "On amendments of some legislative acts of the Russian Federation". It enables to acknowledge the organization as undesirable as a threat to the security or constitutional order of the Russian Federation. Being granted the aforementioned status, the organization is obliged to cease its activity and suspend financial operations. Nowadays, the list of undesirable organizations includes 11 subjects such as National Endowment for Democracy, Open Russia and Institute of Modern Russia. Majority of them are American, but on the list appears also the organization founded by one of the greatest opponents of Putin – Mikhail Khodorkovsky.⁶

⁵ M. Gawęda, *Rosyjski bastion w Kaliningradzie rośnie w siłę [ANALIZA]*, defence24.pl, 27 February 2017, <https://www.defence24.pl/rosyjski-bastion-w-kaliningradzie-rosnie-w-sile-analiza> (access: 3 August 2018).

⁶ S. Brechenmacher, *Civil Society Under Assault: Repression and Responses in Russia, Egypt, and Ethiopia*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2017, p. 7-36.

Russian approach towards NGOs and foreign media becomes more and more hostile year after year. The authorities introduce these measures to limit the influence of Western civilization on the society and to be prepared to attack social movements, think tanks and businesses linked to the United States or EU member states if it will be necessary or at least convenient.

Hybrid and information warfare

In last few years Kremlin takes actions aimed at spreading its propaganda throughout the world. As it was not a challenge to influence media in Russian-speaking former USSR republics, the real challenge was to introduce Russian voice in the West. The problem with mis- and disinformation, fake news and involvement into political scene will be growing. The case of American elections and Russian bots shows that Moscow does not focus only on developing countries in Eastern Europe or Balkans.

The goals of Russian propaganda are persistent – weakening and destroying solidarity and consensus of NATO and EU members, lampooning Western values, empowering of Russian position in the sphere of economics, detaching its allies from the West. Kremlin uses government media operating in the West, media financed by Russians, selected opinion makers, social media and Internet trolls. Its aim is to influence public opinion in other countries, granting it the possibility to change political and social life depending on current needs. Moreover, Russian viewpoint is strengthened by diplomacy, economics, cultural and social centers and is strictly controlled by intelligence and counterintelligence services, that are granted broad scope of legitimation.

Military doctrine of the Russian Federation includes elements concerning the concept of information war. This concept includes methods and means which are an indication of militarization of Kremlin's politics – they allow to mobilize the society, legitimize undertaken internal and external actions. The means that are supposed to be introduced are subversion, diversion, disinformation, state terror, manipulation, aggressive propaganda, exploitation of protest potential among local populace. In order to determine active methods of intelligence and counterintelligence Russian authorities introduced terms of Anglo-Saxon origin such as asymmetric, non contact and indirect warfare. Although Russians implement Western terms, they give them absolutely new meaning in order to mask their goals and equalize their actions with those of their Western counterparts. The whole overtone of new doctrine is Russian way to manifest its combat readiness to fight with the West, potential of modern warfare, readiness to escalate tensions with NATO and EU.⁷

⁷ J. Darczewska, *Diabeł tkwi w szczegółach. Wojna informacyjna w świetle doktryny wojennej Rosji*, OSW, May 2015.

Offensive propaganda used by the Russian Federation to persuade Western countries to leave its zone of influence was presented for the first time during the Crimea annexation. Kremlin aimed at persuading local and foreign societies that demands towards Ukraine are based on legal, historical and social terms. In order to achieve so, Russian media introduced tools such as Internet trolls, reflexive control, alternative realities, conspiracy theories and pure lies. All those methods carried one message – Russian Federation is a victim of this conflict as it is falsely accused, although its only aim is to take care of own citizens.

Internet trolls became the basis of Russian influence in social media during Ukrainian conflict, American elections, war in Syria and many events on a smaller scale, e.g. in Baltic States or Germany. This term means people who anonymously publish on the Internet statements aimed at persuasion or change of thinking by using false information or half-truths. Their actions are based on fake accounts and include spamming, circulating certain materials and vilification of their opponents. One of the most important „troll farms” is Internet Research Agency (IRA) based in Olgino in Saint Petersburg. Nowadays it employs about 400 people divided into sections according to tools they are using – social media (Facebook, V Kontakte, Instagram, etc.), traditional media or foreign language media. Probable owner of the agency is Yevgeny Prigozhin, oligarch operating in restaurant and catering businesses, called „Putin’s chef”. IRA got its big time after presidential elections in the United States as it was accused of interference in favor of Donald Trump. 118 groups managed by trolls were analyzed – number of their followers reached 6 mln people in 2016 and their post coverage totaled to 30 mln people per week. Main topics exploited by Russian trolls were racism, illegal migration, right to keep and bear arms, Texas secession.⁸

Reflexive control is a set of tools that transfer to opponents information prepared deliberately for them. Its aim is to induce them to make a decision that would be beneficial for the information sender. It may include for example false excuses that make third parties react in the certain way. Both Soviet and Russian Armed Forces conducted many researches on the reflexive control, especially on the tactical and operational levels. Nowadays, this measure is used as a key part of the information war. The war in Ukraine is one of the best examples of reflexive control in Russian media and diplomacy. In 2014 Channel One Russia published footage of allegedly Ukrainian woman who in a very detailed way presented a story of 3 years old boy crucified by Ukrainian soldiers in Sloviansk. The material aroused controversy not only in Ukraine, but also in Russia. Journalists soon found out that woman was Galina Pyshnak, who was also a supposed witness of bus fire in Volnovakha and explosion in Donetsk. The message shown in Russian media was aimed at manipulation

⁸ Y. Cherniak, „Agencja badań internetowych” – czyli propaganda po rosyjsku, mil.link, 1 stycznia 2018, <https://mil.link/pl/tzw-agencja-badan-internetowych/> (access: 24 July 2018).

of public opinion in order to present Ukrainian soldiers as brutal aggressors and Russians as saviors of Crimea and eastern Ukrainian republics.⁹

In order to spread their propaganda Russian authorities in 2005 decided to establish an international TV channel called „Russia Today”. It was supposed to be an answer to CNN or BBC aimed at presenting Russian vision of the world in Western states. As distinct from former actions in media sphere, „Russia Today” (or RT) broadcasts not only in Russian, but also in English, Arabic, German, French, Spanish. This move enabled to promote Russian point of view beyond former USSR republics. The channel was repeatedly accused of following Kremlin orders, spreading propaganda and lack of objectivity. Even its editor Margarita Simonian admitted that RT has a „pro Russian point of view”. She also states that the channel presents controversial message as an alternative to the mainstream media.¹⁰

Russian authorities seem to be fully adapted to modern information environment. Their actions and methods present high level of diversity and advancement. Although they generate massive expenses, Kremlin treats this sphere of public life as another battlefield and does not spare money nor energy to be victorious in this encounter.

Assassinations of Russian regime critics

In the mid-2000s Russian opposition was almost non-existent. Lack of charismatic leaders and common program, no public trust, limited consent of the authorities for involvement on federal and regional levels – all these factors eliminated opposition from the political life of the Russian Federation. Although in 2018 the situation looks different, in 2000s many critics of the regime engaged in politics or business were forced to leave their homeland and seek refuge in the Western Europe or the United States. The majority of dissidents went to the Great Britain, which granted refuge to some key figures of Russian political life such as Alexander Litvinenko, Boris Berezovsky, Alex Goldfarb, Akhmed Zakayev and Oleg Gordievsky.

In the mid-2000s Russian security services started their operation of elimination of unwelcome figures. As assassinations of dissentients, businessmen and journalists in the territory of the Russian Federation were quite common, first attacks on refugees undertaken abroad caused concern of both authorities and societies. In November 2006 in London Alexander Litvinenko was poisoned with polonium by two former KGB officers. In February 2008 in the United Kingdom Arkady Patarkatsishvili died of coronary complications resembling heart attack. His family

⁹ T. Thomas, *Russia's 21st century information war: working to undermine and destabilize populations*, „Defense Strategic Communications”, Volume 1, Number 1, Winter 2015.

¹⁰ I. Yablokov, *Conspiracy Theories as a Russian Public Diplomacy Tool: The Case of Russia Today (RT)*, „Politics”, Vol. 35, 2015, p. 301-315.

accused FSB of poisoning him with untraceable substance. In March 2008 in the territory of Latvia Leonid Rozhetskin went missing. His body was found in 2013. In January 2009 Umar Israilov, Chechen political refugee, was shot in Vienna by two unknown culprits. In 2013 in the United Kingdom Boris Berezovsky died. Some assume that his death was also an operation of Russian security services. The most recent example is the case of Sergey Skripal, who was poisoned in 2018 with „novichok”, a nerve agent causing paralysis and convulsions.¹¹

Kremlin has never admitted that all aforementioned people were killed with the consent and by order of Russian leaders. However, undertaken measures, used substances and involved people speak in favor of blaming the Russian Federation. Reasons for planning and completing such operations are highly diverse. First of all, it is a kind of a warning to all the critics of the regime that they are and never will be safe and no state of NATO or EU will guarantee them safety. This rhetorics plays important role also in manipulation of public opinion as societies are much more aware about weaknesses of state's border control, security policy, asylum granting, etc. Secondly, it is a manifestation of power of Russian security services in order to scare NATO and EU off, especially in terms of possible involvement in internal affairs. The message is clear – if Russia can be so powerful outside its territory, its power inside the federation is much greater, particularly in case of effectiveness of intelligence and counterintelligence services. Thirdly, Kremlin discerns substantial differences in approach of the Great Britain, Germany or France in terms of relations with Russia. Creating tensions may result in either support for the Great Britain from other European states or distancing from the conflict between Moscow and London. The weaker European Union as a whole, the easier it is to manipulate its weaker members in order to seek support and make business. Operations like the one aimed at Sergey Skripal have also internal dimension for the Kremlin. Seeing outrage of the Western states in state controlled media, Russians get an impression of foreign danger that seeks a possibility to destroy values, authorities and society of Russian Federation.¹²

Kremlin learned that it is not necessary to eliminate many people to regain control over the society. A few carefully planned operations can eliminate the whole environment from interfering into internal affairs. Since his leadership has begun, Putin was struggling to maintain balance between all people interested in sharing the power – government branches, oligarchs, security services, system and non-system

¹¹ R. Mendick, *UK may exhume Russian billionaire dissidents in suspected poisonings*, „The Sydney Morning Herald”, 19 March 2018, <https://www.smh.com.au/world/europe/uk-may-exhume-russian-billionaire-dissidents-in-suspected-poisonings-20180319-p4z517.html>

¹² W. Rodkiewicz, *Rosyjski atak na Wielką Brytanię: cele i konsekwencje*, OSW, 14 March 2018, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2018-03-14/rosyjski-atak-na-wielka-brytanie-cele-i-konsekwencje>.

opposition, journalists. Elimination of just one representative of the group lets keep the rest in control and silences them for some time.

Conclusion

After almost 30 years of USSR collapse, Russian Federation more and more often objects the post-Cold War order. It cannot compete with the West in terms of new technologies, political and economic development. Russia is not a part of developed powerful international structures of military, political and economic character. Although Russian authorities are conscious about the weakness of their country compared to the West, Kremlin searches for new measures that will reassure public opinion that Russia is still the great power. They perform actions that are not acceptable in terms of international agreements and are a reason for deterioration the image of Russia as it seems aggressive, dangerous, unpredictable and unfit of cooperation.

In next few years Russian activity in the international arena will be rising as Western states limit their efforts to imposing sanctions and expressing concern that do not deter Russia. The case of Crimea and Eastern Ukraine shows that Kremlin is almost completely unpunished and may perform a similar scenario against e.g. Moldova.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1] BRECHENMACHER S., *Civil Society Under Assault: Repression and Responses in Russia, Egypt, and Ethiopia*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2017.
- [2] CHERNIAK Y., „Agencja badań internetowych” – czyli propaganda po rosyjsku, mil.link, 1 January 2018.
- [3] DARCEWSKA J., *Diabeł tkwi w szczegółach. Wojna informacyjna w świetle doktryny wojennej Rosji*, OSW, May 2015.
- [4] GAWĘDA M., *Rosyjski bastion w Kaliningradzie rośnie w siłę [ANALIZA]*, defence24.pl, 27 February 2017.
- [5] MENDICK R., *UK may exhume Russian billionaire dissidents in suspected poisonings*, „The Sydney Morning Herald”, 19 March 2018.
- [6] PROKOPIUK P., *Walka Gruzji o niepodległość i integralność terytorialną w latach 1989-2008*, Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej w Lublinie, Lublin 2010.
- [7] RODKIEWICZ W., *Rosyjski atak na Wielką Brytanię: cele i konsekwencje*, OSW, 14 March 2018.
- [8] THOMAS T., *Russia's 21st century information war: working to undermine and destabilize populations*, „Defense Strategic Communications”, Volume 1, Number 1, Winter 2015.
- [9] VUKADINOVIC L., BEGOVIC M., JUSIC L., *NATO in Europe: Between Weak European Allies and Strong Influence of Russian Federation*, „Croatian International Relations Review”, Volume 23, 2017.
- [10] YABLOKOV I., *Conspiracy Theories as a Russian Public Diplomacy Tool: The Case of Russia Today (RT)*, „Politics”, vol. 35, 2015.
- [11] ZIĘBA R., *Ukraina jako przedmiot rywalizacji między Zachodem a Rosją*, „Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne”, 2015, nr 3.

**KRYM, RAKIETY ISKANDER, NOVICHOK. DZIAŁANIA
FEDERACJI ROSYJSKIEJ WYMIERZONE
W STANY ZJEDNOCZONE AMERYKI I UNIĘ EUROPEJSKĄ**

Abstrakt. Artykuł przedstawia rozwój rosyjskiej polityki zagranicznej wobec NATO i UE w ciągu ostatnich kilku lat. Szczególną uwagę poświęcono najbardziej agresywnym środkom zastosowanym przez Moskwę, aby zachować jej znaczenie w światowym krajobrazie politycznym. Autor odnosi się do sprawy Krymu, rozwoju militarne, wojny hybrydowej i informacyjnej oraz przypadków zabójstw rosyjskich emigrantów związanych z opozycją i biznesem.

Słowa kluczowe: bezpieczeństwo międzynarodowe, region bezpieczeństwa, Rosja, UE, USA, wojna hybrydowa, wojna informacyjna.