

SUGGESTED READINGS

Strategic Communications and Disinformation: Implications for the Circumpolar Arctic

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At a time when many of us find ourselves working from home in social isolation, NAADSN has invited various academic subject matter experts to suggest core readings on topics related to North American and Arctic Defence and Security.

The internet is filled with perspectives and opinions. These lists are intended to help direct policy shapers, practitioners, and academics to credible open access sources, available online free of charge, that reflect leading-edge research and thinking. The compilers of each list have been asked to select readings that are accessibly written (ie. they are not filled with excessive jargon), offer a diversity of viewpoints, and encourage critical thinking and debate.

This reading list stems from a NAADSN Ideas talk on "[Russian Arctic Strategies - Ambitions and Near-Term Expectations](#)" by Bouffard and Lackenbauer on 4 December 2020.

Allan, Iona Mackenzie, (edited by Troy Bouffard). [Arctic Narratives and Political Values: Arctic States, China, and NATO](#). Riga, Latvia: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (StratCom CoE), December 2019.

Narrative analysis is a useful approach to analysing national discourse and the communication efforts of governments and other international actors. Applying this method to the Arctic allows us to look at the different ways' governments communicate their political intent in the region and explore the various social, historical, and value constructs used to express this. In simple terms, it enables us to better understand how these countries perceive themselves, other actors, and the Arctic as a geographical whole. This, in turn, paints a more meaningful picture of Arctic political discourse, shedding light on the perception that each country is trying to create about itself and how it may behave in the future.

Ferguson, Michael. "[Welcome to the Disinformation Game—You're Late](#)," Strategy Bridge, 29 August 2018.

This article by a U.S. Army officer provides an accessible overview of the disinformation circumstances involving Russia versus the West, esp. the United States. Russia has an elaborate propaganda machine within its government, as reports abound concerning Internet "troll" factories, pervasive cyber-attacks, and the proliferation of fake news stories denigrating the United States and its allies. To

the Russian state, disinformation is not only an offensive mechanism used to target the public opinion of adversarial populations, but also a sort of political immune system that protects the state and its apparatchiks from negative press at home and abroad. Although the vehicle of social media has certainly increased the speed by which disinformation reaches its recipients, Russian President Vladimir Putin's efforts to sow internal division among his adversaries is in no way a novel undertaking, and western leaders should be hesitant to paint Russian propaganda as an earth-shaking revelation in the 21st century. This isn't a reinvention of Russia's unconventional warfare paradigm; it's a continuation of it.

Martin, Diego A., Jacob N. Shapiro, and Michelle Nedashkovskaya. "[Recent trends in online foreign influence efforts.](#)" *Journal of Information Warfare* 18, no. 3 (2019): 15-48.

Foreign governments have used social media to influence politics in a range of countries by promoting propaganda, advocating controversial viewpoints, and spreading disinformation. The authors analyze 53 distinct foreign influence efforts (FIEs) targeting 24 different countries from 2013 through 2018. FIEs are defined as (i) coordinated campaigns by one state to impact one or more specific aspects of politics in another state (ii) through media channels, including social media, (iii) by producing content designed to appear indigenous to the target state. The objective of such campaigns can be quite broad and to date have included influencing political decisions by shaping election outcomes at various levels, shifting the political agenda on topics ranging from health to security, and encouraging political polarization. We draw on more than 460 media reports to identify FIEs, track their progress, and classify their features.

Toivanen, Jussi. "[Learning from Finland's Society-Wide Approach to Countering Disinformation.](#)" CDA Institute, 3 December 2020.

Jussi Toivanen, the Chief Communications Specialist for the Finnish Prime Minister's Office, is responsible for coordinating the government's approach to countering disinformation and managing crisis communications for the state. He describes Finland's experience with countering hostile information influence activities perpetuated by Russia, his government's approach to fostering media literacy, and the value of a "whole of society" resilience model that focuses on sustaining trust within a society.

U.S. State Department, "[Pillars of Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem.](#)" GEC Special Report, August 2020.

This report provides state-level analysis and understanding of the Russian global disinformation enterprise. Much of the Russian disinfo activities in the world are not necessarily at the same level in the Arctic, except in cases where application involves legacy purposes, such as continued relations with Norway.

Academy of Information Self-Defence. (Russian Source). [Informations Wars](#), est. 2007, 4 issues per year.

Scientific and practical interdisciplinary journal on war theory, information confrontation, information management, conflict and risk management, information

security, education, mathematical psychology, history issues. Supported by the Russian Academy of Science Center for Security Studies and the Academy of Military Sciences Center for the Study of Strategic Nuclear Forces.

Nordic Perspectives

Norwegian intelligence Service. “[Focus 2020 – The Norwegian Intelligence Service’s Assessment of Current Security Challenges](#)” 10 February 2020.

Within this annual report, Norway outlines several ways in which information is part of national security threat assessments, including systems, access, misinformation and disinformation. Report includes emphasis on Russia and China throughout. Media assessment of this report emphasizing influence summary [found here](#).

Cepuritis, Maris et al. [Russia’s Footprint in the Nordic-Baltic Information Environment 2019/2020](#). Riga, Latvia: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 12 November 2020.

has an elaborate propaganda machine within its government, as reports abound concerning Internet “troll” factories, pervasive cyber-attacks, and the proliferation of fake news stories denigrating the United States and its allies. To the Russian state, disinformation

Aro, Jessikka. “[The cyberspace war: propaganda and trolling as warfare tools](#).” *European view* 15, no. 1 (2016): 121-132.

This article by a Norwegian journalist, explains how Russian President Vladimir Putin’s regime has taken control of the traditional media in Russia, seeing the mass media as a ‘weapon’. Now Russia’s leadership is trying to take control of social media too, and for this massive operation a new information warfare tool has been mobilised—an army of fake social media Putinfans, known as ‘trolls’. Her investigation reveals how coordinated social media propaganda writers are twisting and manipulating the public debate in Finland as well. Trolls and bots distribute vast amounts of false information in various languages, and target individual citizens for aggressive operations. Aggressive trolls have created a feeling of fear, causing them to stop making Russia-related comments online. Trolling has had a serious impact on freedom of speech, even outside Russia. Thus, it should be viewed as a national security threat that needs to be addressed accordingly. The question is: how should the Kremlin’s trolls and disinformation be countered?

Bjola, Corneliu, and Krysianna Papadakis. “[Digital propaganda, counterpublics and the disruption of the public sphere: the Finnish approach to building digital resilience](#).” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (2020): 1-29.

Drawing on the case of Finland and its model of ‘resilience’ to digital disinformation, the article provides an original framework for understanding the logic of digital propaganda and the conditions that may facilitate an effective response. The study shows that Finland’s resilience progress has mostly occurred on the macrosphere level, where effective institutions have been applying transparent and proactive

policies grounded in collaboration and research. However, these efforts are at risk of being weakened by the rise of influential counterpublics unless Finland takes further measures to protect its public sphere by reducing divisions in the microsphere.

Kragha, Martin and Sebastian Åsberg, “[Russia’s strategy for influence through public diplomacy and active measures: the Swedish case](#),” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 40, no. 6 (2017): 773-816.

Russia, as many contemporary states, takes public diplomacy seriously. Since the inception of its English language TV network Russia Today in 2005 (now ‘RT’), the Russian government has broadened its operations to include Sputnik news websites in several languages and social media activities. Moscow, however, has also been accused of engaging in covert influence activities – behaviour historically referred to as ‘active measures’ in the Soviet KGB lexicon on political warfare. In this paper, we provide empirical evidence on how Russia since 2014 has moved towards a preference for active measures towards Sweden, a small country in a geopolitically important European region. We analyse the blurring of boundaries between public diplomacy and active measures; document phenomena such as forgeries, disinformation, military threats and agents of influence and define Russian foreign policy strategy. In summary, we conclude that the overarching goal of Russian policy towards Sweden and the wider Baltic Sea is to preserve the geostrategic status quo, which is identified with a security order minimising NATO presence in the region.

Mackintosh, Eliza. “[Finland is winning the war on fake news. What it’s learned may be crucial to Western democracy](#).” CNN special report, May 2019.

Finland has adopted a multi-pronged, cross-sector approach to prepare citizens of all ages for the complex digital landscape of today – and tomorrow. The Nordic country, which shares an 832-mile border with Russia, is acutely aware of what’s at stake if it doesn’t. Finland has faced down Kremlin-backed propaganda campaigns ever since it declared independence from Russia 101 years ago. But in 2014, after Moscow annexed Crimea and backed rebels in eastern Ukraine, it became obvious that the battlefield had shifted: information warfare was moving online.

Schmidt-Felzmann, Anke. “[More than ‘just’ disinformation: Russia’s information operations in the Nordic region](#),” in *Information Warfare: New Security Challenges for Europe*, ed. Tomas Cizik (Bratislava: Centre for European and North Atlantic Affairs, 2017): 32-67.

This chapter reviews how Russian information operations have targeted the Nordic countries. The aim is to provide an overview and illustration of the methods and tools employed by Russian actors in the Nordic region, with a particular focus on the time period following the Russian annexation of Crimea. By presenting illustrative examples, it indicates how individuals that are targeted by Russian information operations can be influenced in their perceptions and behaviour and ultimately how this may impact political decisions in the Nordic region. Some insights are also provided into response measures and initiatives adopted in the Nordic countries to deal with the challenge of Russian information operations.

Splidsboel Hansen, Flemming. [Russian hybrid warfare: a study of disinformation](#). Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) Report, 2017.

The basic tenet of the Russian disinformation strategy is the claim that all news is constructed and therefore contested. In the best postmodern tradition they claim there is no 'objective news' - only different, rivalling interpretations which purport to show different aspects of what may be called 'reality'. What the Russian media outlets purport to present are merely possible explanations which serve as alternatives to the stories offered by Western media. It is a strategy which is both cunning and elegant as it preys on the enlightenment tradition and on the vulnerabilities of liberal democratic media. The Russian authorities seem to believe that (dis-) information campaigns hold great prospects. In a 2017 article, the Russian Chief of Staff informed the public about the Russian military thinking on the topic of 'war' and on the role of the non-military or "non-kinetic" in this. We should therefore expect to see an increased Russian focus on (dis-) information campaigns designed to bring well-defined outcomes. There will not be any easy or fix-it-all solutions to this development. Rather, liberal democracies, especially vulnerable as a result of their free media culture, should prepare themselves for a long-term commitment to countering disinformation and to building up cognitive resilience to ensure that the former has minimal effect.

Schia, Niels Nagelhus, and Lars Gjesvik. "[Hacking democracy: managing influence campaigns and disinformation in the digital age.](#)" *Journal of Cyber Policy* (2020): 1-16.

How are states responding to the threat of using digital technologies to subvert democratic processes? Protecting political and democratic processes from interference via digital technologies is a new and complicated security threat. In recent years the issue has been most prominent in terms of election security, yet the widespread usage of digital technologies allows for the subversion of democratic processes in multifaceted ways. From disrupting the political discourse with false information to inflaming and stoking political divisions digital technologies allows for a variety of ways for malicious actors to target democracies. This article compares different state experiences with interference in sovereign and contested political decisions. More specifically the article compares the Norwegian approach and experience in managing these challenges with those of Finland and the UK. Mapping both how the problem is understood, and the role of previous experiences in shaping public policy.