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## **Russian Cyber Aggression and the New Cold War**

### **Abstract**

Tensions between the United States and the Russian Federation have broken out into a new Cold War following Russia's actions in Ukraine. Following the seizure of Crimea and the fomenting of civil war in the Donbass, Russia was punished by an international contingent of states following the American lead in sanctioning Russia and isolating it from the world stage. With the sanctions having caused a great deal of damage to the Russian economy, the Russian government struck back by attacking the 2016 US Presidential election. Gambling on candidate Donald Trump, Russia hoped to strike the US at its heart and end this conflict before it becomes a prolonged Cold War.



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# Russian Cyber Aggression and the New Cold War

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### ABSTRACT

Tensions between the United States and the Russian Federation have broken out into a new Cold War following Russia's actions in Ukraine. Following the seizure of Crimea and the fomenting of civil war in the Donbass, Russia was punished by an international contingent of states following the American lead in sanctioning Russia and isolating it from the world stage. With the sanctions having caused a great deal of damage to the Russian economy, the Russian government struck back by attacking the 2016 US Presidential election. Gambling on candidate Donald Trump, Russia hoped to strike the US at its heart and end this conflict before it becomes a prolonged Cold War.

## INTRODUCTION

It is common knowledge that the United States and the Soviet Union battled for decades in a frozen ideological conflict. What is unique is that the United States could overcome superior Soviet numbers with advanced technology by better means of communication and information collection. Nearly 30 years after the Cold War, the focus of technology within the state has allowed rival nations to catch up to the United States, to the point of near parity. One example of this would be the Russian Federation (the successor state to the Soviet Union), which has styled itself a major cyber capable nation. Former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper stated in 2015 that Russia was one of the top cyber threats that the United States faced today<sup>1</sup>. Director Clapper's declaration regarding Russia as a cyber threat reflects their increased abilities and increased disdain towards the United States.

In 2014, the Russian Federation annexed the territory of Crimea from neighboring Ukraine, and began sponsoring a separatist civil war in the southeastern part of Ukraine, known as the Donbass. This seemingly aggressive stance to violate the territorial sovereignty of a neighboring nation led to international condemnation led by the United States and its allies in Europe. In response to Russia's hostilities, the United States and the European Union passed economic sanctions barring trade with Russian banking, defense, and energy companies. Years later, these sanctions are still having an impact. Russian President Vladimir Putin acknowledged that the sanctions are hurting the Russian economy, but has stated that these sanctions are harming the global economy as well since Russia is an integral part of that economy<sup>2</sup>.

The United States and the European Union reviewed these sanctions after multiple legislative sessions since their original inception. Russia, in turn, has responded rather aggressively through militaristic and clandestine means. To sidestep sanctions and retaliate, Russia conducted an operation that not even the Soviet Union was capable of: Coordinating an attack on the American political system by hijacking the 2016 Presidential election through cyber means. Such strong actions from both nations have strained relations to a point not seen since the Cold War. Coincidentally, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev stated at the 2016 Munich Security Conference, "Speaking bluntly, we are rapidly rolling into a period of a new Cold War."<sup>3</sup> Tensions between the United States and Russia have indeed rolled into a new Cold War and Russian cyber meddling of the American Presidential election is indicative of this new frozen conflict.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Tensions, Sanctions, and the Presidential Election*

As previously mentioned, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev declared early on in 2016 the presence of a new Cold War. The significance of this is the fact that he is the second highest-ranking official in the Russian government. While Russian President Vladimir Putin has not openly declared the same, rhetoric from his speeches indicates a similar sentiment towards the current geopolitical climate.

Putin has repeatedly made many aggressive accusations regarding the United States over an extensive period. In his address to the Munich Security Conference in 2007, Vladimir Putin blatantly accused the United States of violating international law, expanding its borders without UN approval, and imposing unfair economic and cultural policies upon other nations<sup>4</sup>. In his annual address to the Federal Assembly in 2014, Putin blatantly told members of the Russian government that the United States would have tried anything to contain increasing Russian capabilities on the world stage, regardless of the situations in Ukraine.<sup>5</sup> In his 2017 annual call in and answer, Putin told one citizen that it has been the policy of international actors to try and contain Russia once they have seen it as an international rival, and that this policy by the US Senate (on drafting further sanctions) only highlighted this desire to contain Russia amidst a period of domestic struggle.<sup>6</sup> Beyond the idea of “containing Russia”, Putin has also recently again accused the United States of violating international law (in response to the US missile strike on the Syrian Air Base) in an attempt to further strain United States-Russian relations and deter efforts of combatting global terrorism.<sup>7</sup>

While Putin and the Russian government interpret the current situation as one of freezing tensions, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has voiced the American position on the situation since the previous administration: This situation can only be reversed if Russia changes course on Crimea and stops interfering in Ukraine.<sup>8</sup> The previous administration never openly declared a new Cold War as Russia has, but the rhetoric of President Barack Obama shows a position of freezing tensions.

In December of 2016, President Obama announced that he had signed Executive orders targeting Russian intelligence services in retaliation for harassment of American diplomats in Russia and, specifically, the meddling of the 2016 US Presidential election.<sup>9</sup> The FBI and DHS released a joint statement that said that they were confident that the Russian government used cyber means to meddle in the US Presidential election.<sup>10</sup>

In the detailed Joint Action Report (JAR), the two US government entities attributed the attacks to APT28 and APT29.<sup>11</sup> The JAR details how APT29 began targeting the Democratic National Committee (DNC) in 2015 while APT28 began its attack in spring of 2016. The JAR states that APT29 began its assault by launching a spear phishing campaign that targeted over 1,000 US government personnel. The campaign installed malware on internal networks once personnel opened malicious links under the guise of opening honest and authentic links. The malware included many different Remote Access Tools (RATs) that allowed APT29 unauthorized systems access to these networks. APT28 launched a similar attack in 2016, but the objective was to steal user credentials by having personnel change passwords. This allowed APT28 access to the same networks to work its attack.

These cyber-attacks on the US Presidential election show a brazen effort to scope out a target. In cyber security, this is called “profiling” or conducting “reconnaissance.”<sup>12</sup> This was important for two reasons: It gave the Russian government access to data of American government officials, and that data was then used during a wider information war.<sup>13</sup> The tensions that resulted from the seizure of Crimea ultimately drew heavy economic sanctions from the United States, but it also created a situation where the Russian government spread Anti-Americanism in its strategic information war with the West.

### ***The Information War***

Russia’s cyber experiment started with a Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack against Estonia in 2007. The flood of traffic in Estonian cyber infrastructure was the result of punishment for Estonia altering with their Soviet past by moving a Soviet era statue from one location to another.<sup>14</sup> This successful episode of Russia’s cyber experiment effectively shut down day-to-day online operations in Estonia’s cyber infrastructure for weeks, from news outlets to government institutions, and increased Russia’s confidence to continue experimenting with cyber means as a weapon against adversaries. The next targets would become Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2015. The cyber-attack on Georgia was conducted in tandem with the Five Days War of 2008, whereby Georgia was fighting separatists in a contested region and Russia intervened on the part of those separatists. This attack was another example of a DDoS attack, but the goals were to ensure that the Georgian people had no idea what was going on as well as ensure that communication between Georgian military forces was disrupted.<sup>15</sup> This was achieved with relative ease, as

Georgia's online infrastructure was reliant on connections based in Russia and Turkey. By controlling the flow of incoming traffic to Georgia, Russia was effectively able to counter Georgian defensive cyber actions, going as far as rerouting their attacks, to appear as if originating in China as Georgia attempted to block incoming Russian traffic.<sup>16</sup> The Russian attack on Ukraine went even further than the previously mentioned DDoS attacks of the past.

In December of both 2015 and 2016, power companies in Ukraine were attacked through cyber means. The 2015 attack targeted the Prykarpattiaoblenergo power facility in Western Ukraine while the 2016 attack targeted the Kyivoblenergo power facility north of the national capital.<sup>17</sup> The Prykarpattiaoblenergo attack was the first attack of its kind on a power company while the Kyivoblenergo attack was an escalation and confirmation of cyber capabilities. These attacks are also only the second ever-recorded cyber-attacks against physical critical infrastructure (the first being the Stuxnet attack on the Iranian nuclear facility).<sup>18</sup> The cyber-attacks targeted Information Control Systems (ICS) for the Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) network, which allow for operations of advanced systems at plants and factories.

The level of sophistication needed for such an operation indicates that there was coordination between a nation state and criminal organizations.<sup>19</sup> To date, there has not been direct attribution to Russian Intelligence services, but a Russian criminal organization, *Sandworm*, has been attributed to be the source of the attacks. The likelihood of this being a Russian operation greatly increases when one acknowledges the fact that Russia has been sponsoring the armed conflict in the Donbass since early 2014. This likelihood also increases when one takes into account the US government attributing the US Presidential election meddling to APT28 and APT29: Groups associated with the Russian Intelligence Services.

When CIA Director Mike Pompeo spoke at the annual security conference at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, he discussed how the Russian meddling in the Presidential election was nothing new and will only increase in the future. He also stated, "Until there is a new leader in Russia, I suspect it will be a threat to the United States for a long time."<sup>20</sup> Director Pompeo also stated that he believed that the United States could expect interference in the 2018 and 2020 election cycles. He also explicitly stated that it is the intelligence community's job to ensure that no one, whether it is a nation state like China or Russia or transnational criminal groups like al-Qaida, can meddle with the Presidential elections. He ended this discussion with saying that they will, "find ways to push back against

it. We are intent on doing that and we have many resources devoted to it. I am optimistic that we will continue to reduce the capacity of anyone to meddle with the election.”<sup>21</sup> Although their technology may have changed and increased, the Russians have found other ways to conduct their information war against the United States.

Just as vital to the information war has been the use of propaganda through online “trolls” at Russia’s online “troll factory.” In 2015, British newspaper *The Daily Mail* reported that the Russian government was sponsoring the fabrication of stories on online social media to draw more attention to Putin and increase his popularity.<sup>22</sup> The article explained that the factory would be open 24 hours a day and teams would operate in groups of three, working 12-hour shifts and fabricating over 100 stories per shift, with the aim of spreading Anti-Americanism and Anti-Western sentiments. Later in that year, *The Guardian* had reported that a Russian court recognized the existence of the troll factory when a free-lance journalist, who worked for the troll factory, sued for damages and won.<sup>23</sup> The economic award was one ruble, but the symbolic award was forcing the government to admit its involvement in the sponsoring of propaganda on a massive scale.

The exposure of the troll factory does not seem to have slowed down the Russian propaganda machine. In fall of 2017, social media mega corporation *Facebook* announced that Russian customers purchased \$100,000 worth of advertisement space during and following the 2016 US Presidential election.<sup>24</sup> *Facebook* announced that the money was linked to over 3,000 advertisements targeting the promotion of controversial domestic issues in the United States, such as race tensions, gun rights, immigration, and LGBT rights. The investment seems to have paid off as public division has increased. One of the ways that this was achieved was through meddling with political activist groups, such as *Black lives matter*, and influencing these social groups to draw negative attention and negative sentiments from their opponents.<sup>25</sup> However, this move may have become a double-edged sword for the Russians as American media focus on Russia quickly increased, and not in a positive manner.

In the United States, mention of the current political climate has been in the news daily throughout 2017. The “Russian Probe” as to whether or not the Russian government hijacked the American election is a question that has plagued American politics since November of 2016 and January of 2017 when Donald J. Trump took office. Currently, the focus of the “Russian Probe” is on Donald Trump’s former Presidential campaign manager who had noticeable ties with former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich: Paul Manafort.



The investigation originated with federal investigators looking into Paul Manafort, who was the campaign advisor for Donald Trump until August of 2016.<sup>26</sup> The investigation grew as details of strange interactions between the campaign and Russian officials drew the interest of US intelligence agencies while the FBI was renewing its request for a Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISA) warrant to continue monitoring Manafort.<sup>27</sup> On October 30, 2017, Robert Mueller, Director of the FBI, released to the public the indictment against Manafort and the plea agreement of the former Presidential Campaign Foreign Policy Advisor George Papadopoulos.<sup>28</sup> The investigation also released information of a phone call between Michael Flynn, the then National Security Advisor to incoming US President Trump, and Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak.<sup>29</sup> Flynn and Kislyak spoke on December 29 of 2016, the same day that President Obama signed Executive orders targeting the Russian Intelligence Services involved in meddling with the election. The fallout from this finding led to Flynn's resignation from office and, eventually, the firing of then FBI Director James Comey.

While the "Russia Probe" maybe in American news daily, constant coverage of the situation between the United States and Russia in American media is rather new. Before the idea of the US Presidential election being stolen by Russia, Americans were not nearly as concerned with Russia's moves on the international stage. Indeed, only two administrations ago, then US President George W. Bush seemed to have an amiable relationship with President Putin. In early 2014, following the beginning of the events in Ukraine, former US President George W. Bush remarked on his relationship with President Putin by stating, "Vladimir is a person who in many ways views the U.S as an enemy. He views the world as either the U.S benefits and Russia loses, or vice versa."<sup>30</sup> This idea of "us versus them" can be traced as far back as the 19th century, when Russian international legal expert Nikolai Danilevsky began the view that Russia and the West were destined for a violent clash.<sup>31</sup> This mindset of Russia versus the West has led to conflict with the British Empire and the United States throughout the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and now 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

### ***Military Buildup***

While tensions between the United States and Russia have deteriorated and Russia has been waging an information war, it has also been modernizing and building its military. In 2009, then Russian President Dmitry Medvedev stated that Russia would be dedicated to a new arms race.<sup>32</sup> Since Medvedev's promise, it seems that Russia has indeed been building up its military in the form of increasing naval size, increasing army size, modernization of aircraft, and concentration on buildup of nuclear weapons.

This focus on remilitarization has strained relations to point where former Soviet satellite nations are split ethnically between Pro-American and Pro-Russian sentiments. NATO troops have also become a daily site as these nations prepare for an aggressive Russian invasion styled on the intervention in Ukraine. The presence of thousands of allied troops from Canada, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States being stationed in the region is a direct response to Russia conducting snap exercises with numbers estimated between 30,000 and 80,000 and the announcement of the creation of 3 new divisions in the western half of the country.<sup>33</sup> Further south, the alliance has created a new NATO base in Romania.<sup>34</sup> The base, consisting of 900 US troops, 4,000 Romanian troops and supplemented with additional troops from other allied countries, will be tasked with monitoring Russia in the Black Sea while the force up north will monitor Russia's presence along the Baltic Sea and Baltic States. The increase in troops from the United States to Europe marks the largest force that the United States has sent to Europe since the height of the Cold War.<sup>35</sup> This large force, and large expanse of NATO territory since the end of the Cold War, has only moved to deteriorate tensions and further increase the state of the New Cold War.<sup>36</sup> One of these threats comes in the form of missiles and adhering to international treaties.

In the 2017 State Department report on the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty), the United States found Russia to be in continued violation of the 1987 INF Treaty.<sup>37</sup> The INF Treaty is an international agreement between the United States and Russia to eliminate nuclear capable ground-launches missiles with a range of 500 to 5,500 kilometers. In response to the perceived Russian violations of the INF Treaty, Congress voted to deny funding for the Open Skies Treaty. It also signed a provision in the new National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that the United States would no longer be bound by domestic law to following the INF Treaty if Russia does not return to a state of following the treaty within 15 months of the signing of the provision.<sup>38</sup> The same provision would also halt funding of the START Treaty between the two nations and undo the efforts at reducing the US arsenal of nuclear weapons that helped end the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union.

## **ANALYSIS**

Taken solely by itself, Russian interference of the US election would not necessarily mean that there was a state of cold war between the two powers, but would definitely merit concern due to the history between

the two. Combined with the contextual data the United States has led an international delegation to economically punish Russia for political actions, and including harsh rhetoric emanating from President Putin that goes back to the Bush Presidency, it becomes easy for one to agree with Dmitry Medvedev that the United States and the Russian Federation are in a state of Cold War.

The United States and its allies moving to sanction Russia for interfering in the territorial sovereignty of Ukraine is also an excellent indicator of this new state of Cold War. Having had the sanctions in place since 2014, the question of how much the sanctions were affecting Russia was asked several times. The short answer is, as Putin stated, greatly. The long answer will need further explanation.

Again, Vladimir Putin did state that the Western sanctions were affecting Russia greatly. This is actually an understatement. Before sanctions, the Russian economy was averaging a growth of 7 percent, but post sanctions, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contract by up to 5 percent.<sup>39</sup> What is also important to understand is that five of Russia's eight most important trade partners (Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United States) are economically sanctioning trade and affecting that economic growth.<sup>40</sup> To respond, Russia has had to launch a campaign promoting a renewal of domestic production, similar to the United States' *Made in America* movement, as well as work new agreements with Iran and North Korea: Countries currently at odds with the aforementioned trading partners. Yet these effects on the economy stretch far from trade, they are being felt within Russia itself.

In the first year of sanctions, the Russian currency destabilized and fluctuated to an historical low at roughly 80 Ruble to one US Dollar. A year later, in January of 2016, the Ruble fell to this low price once more.<sup>41</sup> This fluctuation in the national currency was mainly attributed to historically low oil prices. Since August of 2014, oil prices have been falling and, with it, so have Russian bank accounts.<sup>42</sup> Real time wages have become stagnant, poverty levels are increasing, and inflation rates have continued to fall. The bottom line is that Russians are becoming poorer and are suffering because of Putin's decision to interfere in neighboring Ukraine. This led to two significant things: Finally, a chance for Putin to lash out against the United States, but more importantly: A situation where Putin needed to rectify a threat to his status of power.

The chance for President Putin to address these two things came at the end of 2016 due to the US Constitutional restrictions on term limits and lengths of stay in office. By waiting until 2016, Putin knew that he could

outlast the Obama administration and wait to deal with the incoming Presidential administration. The gamble that Putin would have had to face in this instance was ensuring that the next US President would not continue the policies of Barack Obama, which has been shown to significantly hurt Russia. With former Secretary of State under the Obama administration Hillary Clinton running for office as one of the main candidates, this fear of a continuation of President Obama's policies was that much closer to actualization, leaving President Putin in a state of panic and desperation. His next move would have been to do whatever it takes to prevent that from happening, including using state resources to alter the US Presidential election in favor of the route he desired.

To circumvent a scenario where Secretary of State Clinton were to become President of the United States, President Putin chose a path to alter the integrity of the US election by influencing voters. This came through two different attack methods: Direct and indirect. Russian Intelligence Services directly attacked the heart of Clinton's campaign by attacking the information technology architecture of the DNC: The political party backing Clinton's bid in the race. This attack method leaked sensitive information and attempted to sink the DNC's attempts at retaining the presidency while also forcing some senior officials from DNC leadership out of office. The second attack method attempted to influence voters through persuasion and division. This was done through a propaganda campaign that was both legitimate and illegitimate.

The legitimate propaganda campaign divested resources in advertisement space through popular social media platforms to reach a wide audience. The illegitimate propaganda campaign came in the form of the troll factory. This Stalinist tactic ensured that people had to listen because they were being manipulated into joining the discussion. The idea was that these topics would subconsciously stay on the minds of the American public, especially at the time of voting. The results ended up creating a sharp divide between Americans either favoring or rejecting the idea of Hillary Clinton as President. The manipulation behind this campaign also successfully divided Americans on other sensitive issues, primarily race, and diverted the American conscious from international affairs to domestic ones that were rekindling old prejudices and rivalries. It led Americans to start despising each other and attempt to stop Americans from scorning Russia, a growing sentiment that stemmed from Russia's violations of territorial sovereignty in neighboring states. This campaign was also the most successful in Russia's information war against the West as it directly attacked the heart of Russia's mistrust of the West: A powerful nation that had the power to inhibit Russia's national objectives and international prestige.

By attacking the United States through psychological means, Russia was able to make a mockery of its biggest rival, which stouts the reputation as the most powerful state in the world. Russia was also able to display to all its rivals the complexity in their doctrine of warfare, which allows lengthy study of an adversary to infiltrate one of its greatest strengths and turn it into a weakness. Make no mistake, despite this attack, social media and public opinion in the United States is one of its greatest strengths. It is what separates Americans from totalitarian governments and allows a state of moral high ground when compared to those it criticizes, but that also means that these same totalitarian states, such as Russia, can take advantage of that freedom. In this case, Russia took an unprecedented move by interfering in that freedom in order to advance its national goals by trying to deceive a sacred American process that will decide the fate of its national goals. By appealing to emotion, these attacks had hoped to persuade the American public into moving against itself, which would have subconsciously weakened the United States and strengthened Russia. Essentially, hijacking the American election was the most successful step in Russia's current information war as it embarrassed Russia's most prominent rival.

By embarrassing the United States and weakening the strength of its resolve, President Putin was strategically maneuvering his country out of the wake of the international sanctions led by President Obama's administration. This would have been the case had President Trump, Obama's successor, moved to halt the sanctions and restore relations to their pre-Obama era state. What Putin underestimated was the strength of the US Constitution and widespread distrust for Russia that the US Congress held. When the topic of renewing sanctions came up, the US Congress voted in such overwhelming force that President Trump be legally bound by the Constitution to reinforce the sanctions and enact Congress' decision. While it would seem that hacking the American election was the only way that Russia could get around the sanctions and hoping to end them, Putin essentially became his own greatest enemy and reinforced the sentiments that had voted on the decision in the first place.

Putin has put his country and himself in a state only to further antagonizing the United States, as the United States and the West have done to Russia, and conflate a new Cold War. This has not only come in the form of the election meddling, but in the form of modernizing the military. It should be no surprise that a major country strives to make its military as efficient as it can in order to maintain a status of a major power. What is surprising is that Russia's motivation for modernizing has been to strive to reach a state of parity within some fields of military comparison

with the United States. This has led Russia to refocus on its deadliest weapons, its nuclear arsenal, as well as grow the size of its military. The new divisions of troops in the Western half of Russia indicates that Russia feels that it is at a distinct disadvantage with its rivals and feels extremely vulnerable on the fringes of its territory. This is understandable given Russia's history of invasion in the last thousand years.

The most recent attack on Russia, and arguably the most catastrophic, was the German invasion in the 1940's. The ensuing Cold War saw Russia separated from its rivals by many countries. Today, those countries have joined NATO and become Russia's adversaries, meaning that the threat Russia faces is now directly on its borders. This makes Russia more vulnerable and frantic as the anxieties of a destructive war loom over the minds of the Russian elite. By increasing the size of its forces on the West, it also indicates that Russia is digging in and preparing for an invasion. In the West, these moves are seen as preparation for a preemptive invasion of NATO countries in a quest to restore past Soviet territory and give Russia that buffer zone that its predecessor state once had. These moves leave geopolitics in a state of increasing tension and increasing militarization as each side prepares to defend itself, something that has led to destructive conflicts in the past.

This path to refocus on Russia's nuclear arsenal also gives indications of the current state of things. By adding to its nuclear arsenal and even moving so far as to break the INF Treaty, Russia is indicating that it feels that it no longer shares parity with the United States. This is because the United States has the technology to defend against nuclear weapons in the form of its ballistic missile defense shield and of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missiles. The move towards this technology helped end the Cold War, but it seems that it is a driving force of the New Cold War today. In response to the United States being able to shoot down its nuclear weapons, Russia has seen fit to build more in the idea that it can build more missiles than the United States can shoot down. That said Russia knows that militarily, it cannot just lash out against the United States in a physically destructive way, which can be extremely frustrating for a militarily powerful nation. That directed Russia to find an alternative, which led to the use of cyber means and attacking one of the instruments of power in the United States that leads the instruments of power in the Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic (DIME) application.

By attempting to control the source of US power before it could begin, Russia revealed just how tense relations are right now, and how far they

are willing to take this conflict with the United States. Russia also revealed that the United States does still have superiority over it in many fields, but that Russian cyber capabilities have come to a point where they may actually be Russia's greatest asset, allowing Russia to attack the United States without facing dire consequences. What the election meddling also revealed was that in today's age, the resolve of the American Government will not be shaken when faced by a moment of great weakness, and the principles that formed that government originally will overcome attacks from outside influences. Attacking the election process of the United States was an unprecedented move and is definitive proof that tensions between the United States and Russia have escalated to new Cold War. As Prime Minister Medvedev stated it shows that, while technology may have changed, the way we view the world has not and the contest for power is one that remains constant.

## CONCLUSION

Tensions between the United States and the Russian Federation have reverted to a state not seen since the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. This renewed rivalry stemmed from Russian actions in neighboring Ukraine and other nations and the American reaction in the form of sanctions. By building an international coalition to sanction Russia, the United States renewed a state of geopolitics where it was Russia versus the West. The United States essentially backed Russia into a corner that President Putin and his government felt was threatening their existence. The implications have become widespread and vary across a wide spectrum, but focus on the aspects of cyber influence, military buildup, and disregard for previous international agreements.

The first implication has been a major focus on cyber capabilities and the influence of cyber operations. This field was virtually nonexistent during the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, yet in today's Cold War, it may be the most pivotal. This is because in today's environment cyber actors can attack targets from anywhere and with as much speed and ferocity as they desire. Both the United States and Russia have shown that their capabilities are among the best in this field across the entire world. Both countries have attacked foreign rivals and done physical damage to physical infrastructure. Russia took this a step further by attacking the United States and attempting to alter the legitimate results of the US Presidential elections by using propaganda to sway the opinion of the American public. This act of information war was an attempt to control the way in which US foreign policy was conducted

abroad: Including with the way the US chooses to deal with Russia. Should the United States decide to respond, like measures of using cyber propaganda to reach the Russian population during the 2018 Presidential election in Russia maybe the best option, as it is believed that President Putin will run for re-election and fears losing the presidency to a liberal opponent.

The second implication has been to a major military buildup. The Russians have dedicated themselves to adding tens of thousands of troops near their Western border, where their territory makes contact with that of NATO aligned countries. The United States response has been to send thousands of its own troops to the Eastern borders of NATO territory to counter the growing presence. NATO's overall response has been to ensure that it can monitor Russia in both the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. This increase in US troop presence has reversed the American policy of leaving Europe and led to the largest US troop presence in Europe since the Cold War in the 1980's. At the edge of this military buildup is also the idea of rearming and refocusing on nuclear arsenals, which has gone so far as to infringe upon the state of previous international agreements.

The final implication has been a disregard for international agreements. Russia has long accused the United States of disregarding the sanctity of UN ruling by acting on the world stage unilaterally. When Russia chose to do the same, it caused a backlash that led to the current state of affairs in today's world. With the current situation, one side feels more vulnerable than the other does, and that makes it less predictable. For these reasons, Russia has sought to seek some sort of parity with the United States. This quest for parity has led to Russia to disregard the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty it signed with the United States, and the US responded by voting to do the same. The United States also stepped back from provisions in the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, which helped end the Cold War between itself and the Soviet Union in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

I am a graduating senior at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), earning my bachelor's degree in Security Studies under the university's National Security Studies Institute. I transferred to UTEP from the College of Mount Saint Vincent in New York City in 2015. I also studied abroad at the University of Tartu in Estonia where I went to learn Russian and further my understanding of Russian and Eastern European cultures.



## ENDNOTES

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