

978-9934-564-61-1



# DECODING CRIMEA.

PINPOINTING THE INFLUENCE STRATEGIES OF  
MODERN INFORMATION WARFARE

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Published by the  
NATO Strategic Communications  
Centre of Excellence



ISBN: 978-9934-564-61-1

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# ABOUT THIS ARTICLE

In an era set to be defined by persistent contestation between states, of a nature which falls short of open conflict, Western democracies need to adapt. Strategies employed by adversaries are less likely to rely on the direct application of military power and increasingly on the opportunities afforded by new technologies to create effects, shrouded in complexity and ambiguity, in the information environment. Analysts, planners and policy makers facing these threats struggle with limited tools to understand their form and structure.

As a response to this challenge, we propose an addition to the toolkit - a **Taxonomy of Influence Strategies**. This is a comprehensive system which attempts to identify, describe and classify the fundamental units of influence, referring to them as 'plays'.

The purpose of this approach is to provide a system – similar to the periodic table of the elements – which attempts to decode the gamesmanship of peacekeepers and aggressors alike. The 'Playmaker' system seeks to demonstrate that techniques of influence are atomic, knowable, manageable and uniquely revealing. They form a framework with specific definitions, purposes and effects that can be identified and therefore countered.



Taking a different approach to our previous research, we use a RAND Corporation study of the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea as a working example, presenting maps of precise 'plays' employed by Russia. The resulting illustrations shed light on the ploys of Russian propagandists and the motives behind their messages. We provide visual evidence of how individual plays work, their patterns and scope, as well as a vocabulary and lens with which to address such campaigns.

Through this case study, we demonstrate how a taxonomy of strategies might be used to decode real-world scenarios, making sense of evolving influence campaigns while identifying ways to counter or co-opt them. Identifying and understanding the choice of influence strategies can provide invaluable insight into the interests and posturing of an adversary, ultimately leading to more effective and timely policy responses.



# INTRODUCTION

In matters of modern warfare, information is the rediscovered munition. Like a physical asset – a boot, bayonet or battalion – information can be managed and maneuvered for imperious or peaceful potential. It's not kept in a casing or fired through a barrel but its impact and persuasive effects are now inarguable.

Consider the case of The Arab Spring where in late 2010, uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and nearby regions were organized, advertised, amplified and otherwise aided through social media.<sup>1</sup> Or, how the so-called Islamic State has used social media worldwide to disseminate its ideology, promote its successes, recruit and fundraise.<sup>2</sup>

Information in warfare is not new, but the urgency to master it is. The ubiquity of and access to social media, the wind-fall of big data, and the resulting advances in analytics and artificial intelligence have disrupted traditional approaches. As the preceding examples demonstrate - adversaries have been quick to put them to work. It is not that Clausewitz' war is politics by other means or Sun Tzu's all warfare is based on deception concepts are outdated, it is that they are being subsumed by a more dynamic and multi-faceted construct. Military commanders, strategists and planners now envision nuanced outcomes because the game is played at a more nuanced level. Even lethality, the ultimate penalty of physical force, is giving way to abstractions of perception management and behavioral control, a fact which suggests that strategic success, not tactical victory, is the more coveted end state. Thus, as Thompson and Paul argue, "It is imperative that we reorient our approach to operational art toward influencing relevant actor perceptions, behavior, action or inaction in order to address this complexity."<sup>3</sup>

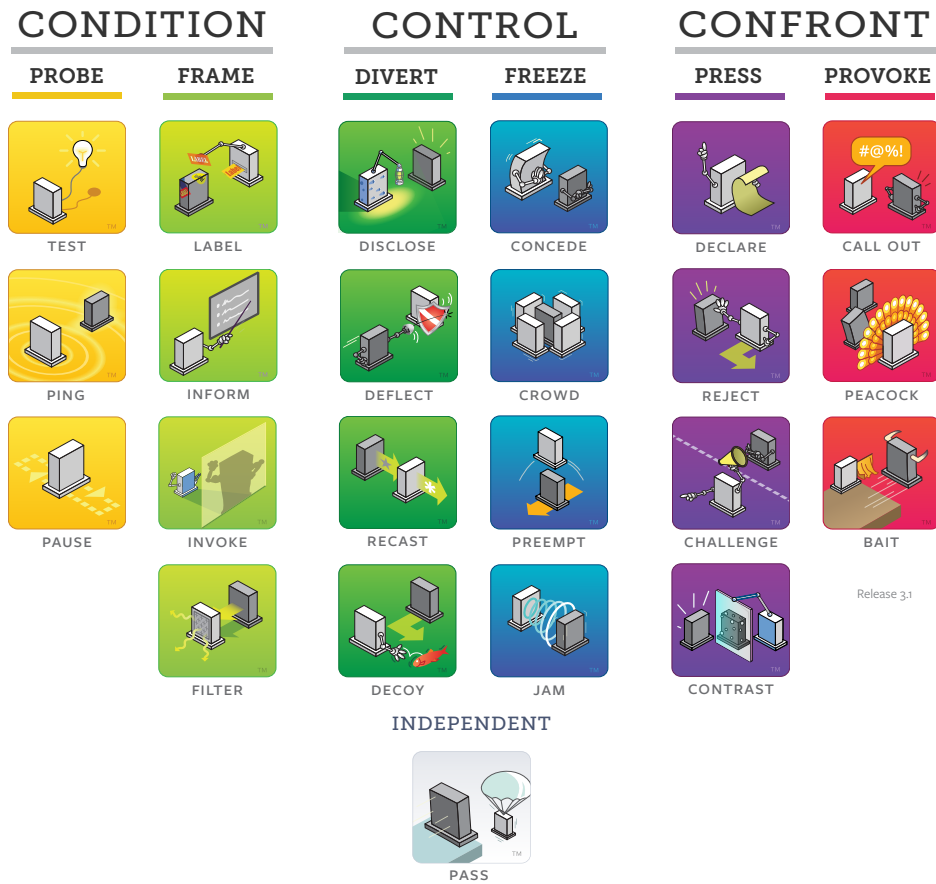
For this paper we write about information in warfare from the perspective of Strategic Communications (StratCom) and the pursuits of the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence. We consider StratCom to comprise not only a suite of capabilities that disseminate messages, but also a basic function of statecraft and a mindset for senior leaders and communicators across government and military organizations.<sup>4</sup> For us, StratCom offers three critical insights:

- Every action and utterance communicates;
- The goal of policy (and actions supporting policy, certainly including communication but also up to and including warfare) is to get others to do what you want, and the English language word for getting others to do what you want is influence;
- Influence efforts (that is, efforts to effect policy) should be planned and coordinated (which is harder than it sounds because of the first point).

This kind of warfare goes by many names – grey, hybrid, influence, information, intangible, irregular, non-traditional, political, propaganda, psychological or unconventional – but all represent warfare of the non-physical sort. In the modern era, hybrid warfare evens the odds, particularly for actors unburdened by tradition and transparency and inspired by circumstance and creativity. Because the tactics and stratagems of physical combat do not necessarily apply, the new models require a precise understanding of information's potentials and the disciplines that control it, notably influence and communication. StratCom demands a framework that can impose order on the strategies that information war fighters employ, a common vocabulary to describe them, and a decision system to support their efforts.



# TAXONOMY of INFLUENCE STRATEGIES™



In collaboration with the NATO Strategic Communications Center of Excellence, we have refined one possible solution to this challenge that is based on a framework, vocabulary and decision support system, originally proposed in *The Elements of Influence* by this paper's co-author. Its centerpiece is a classification of 23 discrete units, called the **Taxonomy of Influence Strategies** (shown above) that serves as the gateway to a broadly-applicable decision system for influencers, influencees and influence operations of any kind.<sup>5-6</sup> This framework reduces the plethora of rhetorical and persuasive techniques to fully-reduced primitives – conceptually similar to species, chemical elements and musical notes – called influence strategies or “plays.”<sup>7</sup> (See the definition and the criteria on pg.7)

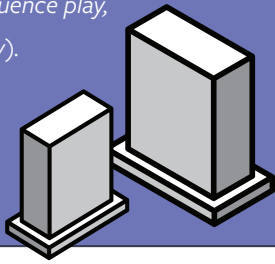
By this taxonomy, the precise underlying strategies of every activist attack, advertisement, legal argument, marketing blitz, political ploy, press release, sales pitch, shared meme and corporate speech can be explained. As can every terrorist's broadcast, every utterance on a state run news channel and every social media post. Any effort to position, reposition, de-position, prod, persuade or simply communicate, whether in collaboration or competition, can be shown to embody combinations, sequences and patterns of the 23 elemental units and three surrogate types comprising this framework. This includes all influence functions employed by, and in support of, military forces as well as all actions taken as part of StratCom.

This paper is particularly relevant to those interested in Russian aggression in Crimea (and in Ukraine more broadly) And those interested in applying this framework to other contexts and circumstances.



## INFLUENCE STRATEGY

*def., n. A social or rhetorical technique, irreducibly unique, employed by a person, organization or surrogate to improve mutual or competitive advantage through methods and means of persuasion (Syn., influence play, social play).*



### TEST 1 UNIQUE

Embodies a single principle of influence (i.e., cannot be described by two or more plays or variables).

### TEST 2 STRATEGIC

Describes an approach, method, motive or plan (e.g., *selective communication* as found in Filter).

### TEST 3 CAUSAL

Effects outtakes and outcomes (e.g., perceptions, opinions); is not a result.

### TEST 4 INTANGIBLE

Exhibits predominantly abstract properties (i.e., no physical makeup or movement).

## Speed Demands Simplicity

Messages tell us what is being communicated, messengers tell us who makes that delivery, and media tell us how it's delivered. What is not so easily identified – and what this influence strategy taxonomy reveals in precise, measurable units – is what the information is trying to accomplish. To know the influence strategy (i.e., the influencer's play) is to move past the message and toward a better understanding not only of our methods and mindsets, but of hostile actors, their logic and motives, and to competently preempt or quickly counter them for competitive advantage.

## Influence Needs a Language

Currently, there is no lingua franca to speed understanding and execution of the discipline of influence. In business and government dialects abound that describe the same phenomena but in different terms. Consider the multiple words and phrases that dub the otherwise singular strategy of distraction: bluff, canard, dead cat, false flag, feint, McGuffin, misdirection, red herring, ruse, sandbag, smokescreen and Trojan horse. They are colorful and endeared to their close and sometimes closed communities, but when speed defines the playing field their multitudes confuse. In other words, their abundance and proprietary applications waste time and compromise competitive advantage.

Adding to the problem, strategies of influence are often described in casual, even breezy prose – a convention that reinforces their colloquial use and neglects the precision and understanding that commanders, strategists and planners require. Consider Ben Nimmo's summary characterization of Kremlin tactics: "dismiss, distort, distract, dismay."<sup>8</sup> They are not tactics; they are influence strategies that, in this featured framework, have specific locations and meanings. To dismiss is to employ the play called **Declare**, one of four related strategies that seek to take charge. To distort is to combine two moderately subtle strategies, **Filter** and **Recast**, that edit and reorder content to an actor's liking. To *distract* is to divert actors in an information environment by way of a play called **Decoy** (aka, a red herring). Finally, while dismay is an effect, not a strategy, it can be achieved through a variety of plays that generally confound target actors – influence strategies like **Label**, **Deflect**, **Preempt**, **Jam**, **Call Out** and **Bait** (these plays will be elaborated further in the report).



**CONDITION**  
Strategies that profile, prepare and position players.

**CONTROL**  
Strategies that redirect, salvage, slow and stop play action.

**CONFRONT**  
Strategies that assert authority and excite players.

**PROBE**  
Strategies that calibrate, signal and assess.

**FRAME**  
Strategies that shape players, positions and brands.

**DIVERT**  
Strategies that divulge, evade and reroute.

**FREEZE**  
Strategies that relent, co-opt and confound.

**PRESS**  
Strategies that take positions and take charge.

**PROVOKE**  
Strategies that de-position players and elicit reactions.

**RATINGS & CLUSTERS**

**RISK-REWARD** (Low to high 0-4/4/4)  
**TRANSPARENT** (Low to high 0-1/1)  
**CONTRARY** (Plays that are counter-intuitive, defy conventional wisdom)  
**FIT** (Plays that reconcile, create agreement, are synergistic)  
**FRICITION** (Plays that agitate, create debate, are asymmetric)  
**LURE** (Plays that draw others from preferred positions or points of view)  
**PIVOT** (Plays that shift position or point of view)

**INDEPENDENT**

**PASS PS**  
Retreat to regroup  
The withdrawal from a position or point of view.

**PARTNER PAR**  
A coequal  
A surrogate who operates as a peer in pursuit of a common agenda.

**PROXY DXY**  
A hired hand  
A surrogate who advocates for another player, typically for consideration.

**PLANT PNT**  
A secret ally  
A surrogate whose methods and motives are unattributed or unknown.

**TEST TT**  
Preview to play  
The speculation on preliminary concepts or tentative plans.

**LABEL LB**  
Reduce to its essence  
The purification of an idea, issue, position or point of view.

**DISCLOSE DL**  
Divest to disarm  
The proactive communication of controversial acts or information.

**CONCEDE CC**  
Confess to recoup  
The admission of a flaw, mistake or misdeed.

**DECLARE DR**  
Stipulate to dictate  
The assertion of an idea, opinion or position as decided or true.

**CALL OUT CT**  
Disparage to demean  
The derision of a player, issue, symbol or point of view.

**PING PG**  
Pulse to play  
The exploration or suggestion of implied interests or positions.

**INFORM IO**  
Communicate to educate  
The description or instruction of data, facts, acts and information.

**DEFLECT DF**  
Dodger to redirect  
The sidestepping of a query, negotiation, negotiation or attack.

**CROWD CW**  
Copy to coattail  
The mimicry of an established player, position or idea.

**REJECT RJ**  
Reputate to separate  
The dismissal of or distancing from an idea, event, player or brand.

**PEACOCK PK**  
Preen to be seen  
The brazen or boastful promotion of an idea or novelty.

**PAUSE PZ**  
Delay to play  
The deliberate suspension of play action.

**INVOKE IK**  
Relate to accentuate  
The referencing of an idea, issue, event, player or brand.

**RECAST RC**  
Revise to reposition  
The reinterrogation of information, positions and platforms.

**PREEMPT PE**  
Ploach to surpass  
The adoption of a taken position or idea, sometimes unjustified.

**CHALLENGE CH**  
Encourage to advance  
The invitation to make, take or modify a position.

**BAIT BT**  
Tempt to trap  
The provocation of a player to act against its self-interest.

**FILTER FT**  
Edit to omit  
The selective use of data, facts, acts and information.

**DECAY DX**  
Distract to detour  
The luring of a player from its preferred position or view.

**JAM JM**  
Disrupt to interrupt  
The disabling or disorientation of message, meaning or media.

**CONTRAST CX**  
Reflect to fersal  
The comparison of data, facts, acts, commitments and claims.

**SURROGATES**  
Third parties who run plays with or on behalf of others (see below).

Likewise, the Director of the Communications Division at SHAPE, Mark Laity, writes about efforts to “disrupt, deceive, delay and dismay,” which have homes in the diverting and freezing strategy families (see figure, pg. 6) of the taxonomy and can be recognized in specific plays like **Pause**.<sup>9</sup>

Our results are presented in two parts. The first, beginning on page 13, demonstrates how selected events from Russia’s Crimea campaign can be matched to specific influence strategies and surrogates of our offered taxonomy and thus better understood. The second, beginning on page 17, builds on this approach by decoding the influence plays of Russian message sets (as determined by RAND analysts in our source paper) and then aggregating these strategies into conceptual maps. The resulting illustrations shed new light on the plots and ploys of Russian propagandists, the motives behind the many messages, visual evidence of how individual plays work, their patterns and scope, and a vocabulary and understanding with which to solve such problems. As the famous Charles Kettering quote reminds us, “a problem well-stated is a problem half-solved.”

By this approach we hope to demonstrate how a taxonomy of influence strategies can be used to decode a real-world warfighting case (i.e., Russia’s annexation of Crimea), not only to establish a common understanding of information and its warfighting potential, but to make sense of a developing influence campaign and identify ways to counter or co-opt it.





# CASE STUDY BACKGROUND

Following is an excerpt from RAND Corporation's *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*<sup>10</sup>

In fall 2013, a series of popular protests erupted in Kyiv's central square, the Maidan, in response to the Ukrainian president's decision not to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union (EU) under its Eastern Partnership program. Eventually this protest movement, and the government response, turned violent, resulting in the ousting of then-Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich. A pro-Western coalition of political forces took control in the capital, organizing an interim government, while many of the ruling elites fled the country to Russia. The consequence was a sudden loss of influence for Russia in one of its most important neighbors, one that its leadership likely viewed as a major geopolitical defeat for Moscow.

Rather than wait for the political situation in Ukraine to stabilize, Russian leaders sought to re-exert Moscow's influence over Ukraine and retain the ability to control the country's strategic orientation. The Russian response took shape in the form of two separate and concurrent military operations. First, Moscow chose to invade and annex Crimea in late February through early March 2014. At the same time, Russia fomented a political protest movement that quickly transformed into a violent insurgency in Eastern Ukraine between February and May of that year.

Today, more questions than answers remain about what happened and what lessons should be drawn from Russian actions: Was Russia successful? If so, what did it seek to accomplish? Is it possible to infer military and political objectives from the operations? Are these reproducible events—a possible model of operations—or were the circumstances and conditions unique? Would Russian leadership consider them to be successful? What can we glean for the potential desire of Moscow to replicate a similar course of events elsewhere? Did the combat, social-mobilization, and information-warfare aspects of these operations appear planned or improvised? What lessons about Russia's strategy and doctrine can we take away from the Ukrainian experience?



## Methods and Limitations

This paper seeks to explain information deterrence and warfare through the lens of **The Taxonomy of Influence Strategies** (see figure, pg.6), a comprehensive framework that identifies, describes, and classifies units of persuasion that are elemental to friendly and hostile actors. Developed through a host of real-world applications, this first-of-a-kind ontology features 23 stratagems observed in communications, defense, intelligence, marketing, media, military, politics and sales across professions, governments, regions, customers and cultures.<sup>11-12-13</sup>



In this section we describe how we decoded the plays in the case study. We believe, however, that these methods are easily and broadly generalized and can be applied to almost any context by a practitioner with no particular expertise in the taxonomy (that means *you*, gentle reader). We have thus tried to describe our methods both to account for what we have done and how a future user might approach a different problem.

Our specific case is the information campaigns surrounding Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and the source is a detailed 2017 account of the annexation by the RAND Corporation's Michael Kofman, Katya Migacheva, Brian Nichiporuk, Andrew Radin, Olesya Tkacheva and Jenny Oberholtzer, in *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*. With the Taxonomy and its strategies as a measurement system and the RAND report as our source material, we have applied content analysis techniques to determine the presence and purposes of observed influence strategies (plays).<sup>14-15</sup> Using the excerpt below, here is how we decoded the messages and message sets reported in the RAND study:

*When the Rada (Ukrainian Parliament) repealed Russian as an official regional language, Russia re-positioned what was a hasty legislative mistake as an insult to ethnic Russians and a threat to the Ukrainian way of life.*

To determine which play(s) were in operation we used a three-step process (see our results in the figure on pg.11) to recognize and decode the plays in this example.<sup>16</sup> All that is practically required is a thorough understanding of the taxonomy, its 23 elemental units and organization.

**Step 1.** Beginning with the first tier of the taxonomy, we sought to identify which of three broad categories the Russians were operating within: Condition (strategies that profile, prepare and position players), Control (strategies that redirect, salvage, slow and stop play action), or Confront (strategies that assert authority and excite players). We saw relevance in two: Condition and Control, which house low- and mid-level engagement strategies. In this example there was no indication that Russia was keen to run pressing or provoking plays, which constitute the Confront category. Therefore, we conclude that the Russians were operating in the Condition and Control categories.

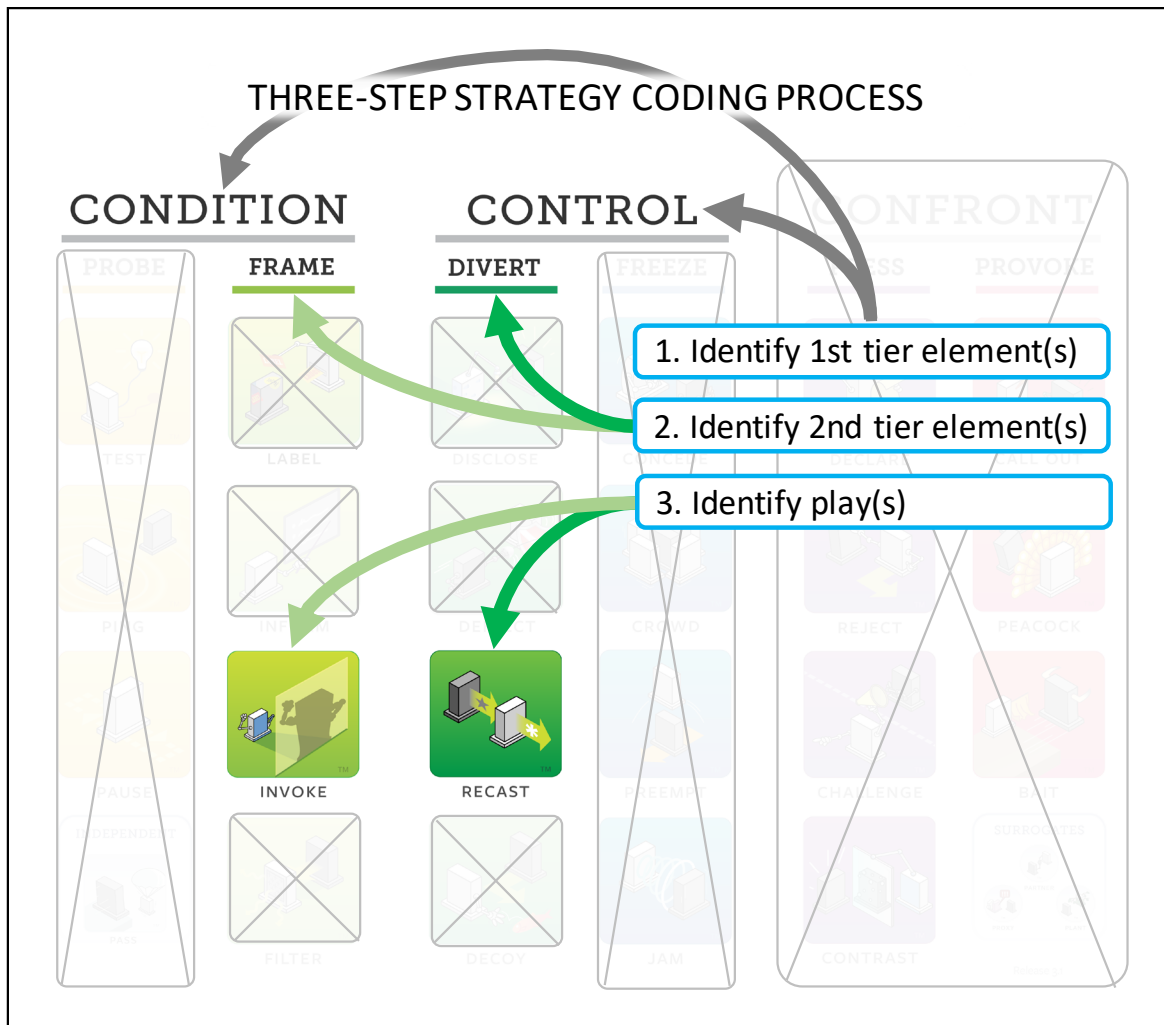
**Step 2.** Within the Condition and Control categories, we were then faced with the choice of four second-tier subcategories, two attached to each: Under **Condition, Probe** (strategies that calibrate, signal and assess), **Frame** (strategies that shape players, positions and brands), **Control, Divert** (strategies that divulge, evade and reroute) and **Freeze** (strategies that relent, co-opt and confound). We chose **Frame** and **Divert** because in this context, Russian actors appeared to shape not shout their position, a telltale sign of framing, and reroute the attention of their target citizenry, which describes a diversionary motive.

**Step 3.** Finally, within the **Frame** and **Divert** subcategories, we evaluated the eight individual plays that support these two strategy families. We chose two: **Invoke** (def., *relate to accentuate*; the referencing of an idea, issue, event, player or brand) for Russia's shrewd reminder that a cherished native language and ethnic pride were assaulted, and **Recast** (def., *revise to reposition; the reinterpretation of information, positions and platforms*) for Russia's strategy to redefine the Rada legislation as hostile, not simply mistaken or incompetent.

The taxonomy's two dimensions of engagement (increasing left to right) and transparency (increasing bottom to top) also offer clues for coders. If, for example, some aspect of an information environment is evident but difficult to discern, it may be the handiwork of a play with a low-transparency rating. Such plays, like **Pause, Filter, Jam** and **Decoy**, are difficult to detect and thus assigned to lower rungs in their ladder columns. This is to say that when a play is elusive, coders might do well to inspect the lower rows of the taxonomy and, similarly, when a play is more subtle than aggressive, it is more likely to be found on the left-hand side of the system.

Every strategy and surrogate of the taxonomy includes a precise definition, representative icon, symbol, related terms, and clusters to which it may belong (e.g., plays that are counter-intuitive, that resonate or fit, that disagree or cause friction, and that lure or pivot). This information is included in **The Glossary of Influence Strategies** (see figure, pg.8) and digital information cards that appear when users select any icon of the online taxonomy.<sup>17</sup>





Each card includes *Standard Guidance*, a curated resource of options, expert tips and best practices that can be used to identify the play(s) in an information environment and to calibrate a user's plans for countering or co-opting hostile influence, collaborating with allies, or initiating their own actions. For example, when a blue force actor detects red force use of the framing play *Invoke*, a list of generally-accepted effects and counterplays (e.g., Ping, Recast, Preempt, Call Out) are displayed for their consideration. Likewise, a list of collaborative strategies can be consulted by an ally to support the blue force actor.

As its name implies, *Standard Guidance* offers only what experts have observed to be generally, but not exclusively, true about the 23 elements of influence and three surrogates of the taxonomy:

**Perspective.** No other experts in the taxonomy were enlisted to confirm or contest our coded results. As a consequence, there may be bias in our criteria and selections due not only to the minimal redundancy of a two-person coding team but because influence plays can be evaluated from multiple perspectives. If, as an example, a targeted actor is judged to have been teased or taunted, **Bait** (def., taunt to trap; the provocation of a player to act against its self-interest) might be chosen as the play that a rival ran. But if viewed from the perspective of the playcaller, the operative play might instead be coded as something less hostile or overt, such as **Challenge** (def., encourage to advance; the invitation to make, take or modify a position). For the purposes of this study, we coded all plays from the Russian





## INVOKE *Relate to accentuate* IK









The referencing of an idea, issue, event, player or brand.

**Standard Guidance**

Profile
Conditions
Neg Effects
Pos Effects
Decode
Counter
Complement
Cases

**Ping:** Cast doubt on the player's motives. "Really? Is that what you think you're like? Is that what you hope to be?"

**Recast:** Reduce the play to something less flattering. "Building an Eiffel Tower in Las Vegas doesn't mean you're now in Paris."

**Preempt + Invoke:** Take back what the player just borrowed. Bank on its inability or cowardice to call you out for your theft and unoriginality

**Call Out:** Accuse the player of exploiting sacred ideas, revered institutions or people.

Counter



**RECAST:** Reduce the play to something less flattering. "Building an Eiffel Tower in Las Vegas doesn't mean you're now in Paris."

perspective, a point of view that our western sensibilities may color, but which we believe can be muted based on our appreciation for information warfare and the strategies that any actor, regardless of world view, must employ to prevail. To limit scope and scale, no plays were coded from the perspective of opposing Ukraine loyalists.<sup>18</sup>

**Coincidence.** Influence strategies can also be recognized in combinations, a fact that can increase a coder's burden, but also the opportunity for accuracy. Take the example of an actor whose motivation is to avoid an enemy's attack. Two plays, **Pause** and **Deflect**, could be identified as the operative plays. The player might pause as a strategy to step away from the conflict. It might try to deflect the matter by way of excuse or pretence for disengaging. When in our analyses more than one play appeared to be in operation, we endeavored to code no more than two. When accuracy was not sacrificed we recognized only the most prominent. While this method limits reported findings, it supports our higher objective to demonstrate the presence and applicability of influence strategies in complex settings.

**Content.** While there are a myriad of analyses of the game and gamesmanship of Russia's annexation of Crimea, we chose the RAND report for the quality and economy of its analysis of messaging and influence. It is a credible, single source against which we felt exemplary results could be drawn. Naturally, this decision reduced our field of view and access to other codable content but, again, our principal interest is to demonstrate the viability of our method and in so doing to inspire similar investigations of heretofore opaque information warfighting strategies.



# 1. DECODED INFLUENCE PLAYS

To demonstrate the presence of influence plays and their purpose in the Russia-Crimea campaign we analyzed and decoded selected excerpts from the RAND report. These were chosen more for their illustrative potential than to demonstrate patterns and preferences of use as we do in the next chapter.

## Opportunistic Plays

**Excerpt:** *Moscow capitalized on several political errors of the Ukrainian government. In particular, it leveraged the Ukrainian Parliament (Rada) vote repealing the official status of the Russian language. [This gave Russia the opportunity to] argue that the ethnic Russian population in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine was in imminent danger.*<sup>19</sup>



**RECAST RC**  
*Revise to reposition*  
The reinterpretation of information, positions and platforms.



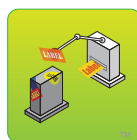
**INVOKE IK**  
*Relate to accentuate*  
The referencing of an idea, issue, event, player or brand.



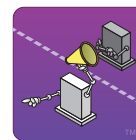
**Decode:** Russia's first play was a **Recast**, a diverting strategy that reinterprets or repositions a player or platform. In this case, it explains how the Ukraine Parliament's repeal of Russian as an official regional language was re-defined as a threat to indigenous Russians. **Invoke**, a framing strategy that borrows images and issues, usually for emotional appeal, was also in play as Russia worked to connect rich Russian history and heritage with Ukraine's legislative house-cleaning.

## Counterplays

**Excerpt:** *[A campaign] to counter the Maidan movement originated from the Russian-speaking population of Crimea, [which] some alleged the Russian government was behind. Called Stop Maidan, its message relied on visual outdoor ads—tents with logos, in addition to banners saying “no to extremism” and “no to foreign intervention.” The messages used by the anti-Maidan activists in Crimea resonated with Russian-media statements depicting Maidan protests as foreign organized and Maidan participants as fascist extremists.*<sup>20</sup>



**LABEL LB**  
*Reduce to its essence*  
The purification of an idea, issue, position or point of view.



**CHALLENGE CH**  
*Encourage to advance*  
The invitation to make, take or modify a position.



**Decode:** Here, anti-Maidan activists (possibly Russian surrogates) used the **Label**, another framing play, to pigeonhole the Maidan Uprising as extreme and inauthentic. This strategy, in concert with the pressing play **Challenge**, helped foster the perception of and resistance to a Western-puppet Ukraine government.

## Social Plays



**Excerpt:** *Moscow leveraged social media effectively to generate domestic support and spread vast amounts of disinformation about the Maidan protests and the intentions of the new government in Kyiv. One analysis of Russia's information operations in the Ukrainian conflict found five elements of its propaganda campaign. [Two of these include]: emotional agitation (use themes that will make ethnic Russians in Ukraine act out of irrational anger) and clarity (present the Ukrainian conflict in simple terms of good and evil).*<sup>21</sup>

 <p><b>BAIT BT</b> <i>Taunt to trap</i> The provocation of a player to act against its self-interest.</p>	 <p><b>FILTER FT</b> <i>Edit to omit</i> The selective use of data, facts, acts and information.</p>
	

**Decode:** From the high-engagement family of provocative plays, **Bait** was at work in this scenario. Different from the aforementioned **Challenge**, it describes a strategy of taunting, which invites another player to act against its self-interest. Along with **Filter**, the common but unobvious framing play, this dyad gives clues to how Russian-Crimeans were pushed to take sides in a murky environment of mixed loyalties and affiliations.

## Non-Play Plays

**Excerpt:** *It is unclear if annexation was Russia's original goal or became so only after Moscow saw it had seized Crimea without fighting, achieving its initial aim of separating the peninsula from Ukraine. Perhaps the most important factor was the popularity of the invasion at home. It is possible Russian leaders first waited for the domestic and international response to the invasion of Crimea prior to deciding whether to proceed with annexation or another political rearrangement.*<sup>22</sup>

 <p><b>PAUSE PZ</b> <i>Delay to play</i> The deliberate suspension of play action.</p>


**Decode:** The Russian's decision to wait might be thought of as a *non-play*. After all, **Pause** describes the deliberate *suspension* of strategic activity, not its undertaking. But to delay to play, as this strategy's tagline describes, is inherently strategic, particularly when the *play action* of an actor's venue can't be made sense of or is working to the actor's advantage. Placed in the family of low-engagement probing plays, **Pause** is the element of influence that describes this disciplined strategy by Russian planners.



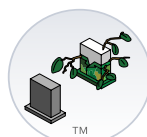
## Staged Plays

**Excerpt:** *Some suggest that the early protests were somewhat staged. One account described a protest as “street theater,” in which both sides would show a mix of on-camera resolve. Even as they clashed they would knowingly flash moments of politeness, mutual respect, and restraint—as if many of them were a common people caught in their divided rulers’ fight.<sup>23</sup> Russian airborne troops also donned police uniforms to help keep order among the population under the pretense of being local security forces.<sup>24</sup>*



**PEACOCK PK**  
*Preen to be seen*

The brazen or boastful promotion of an idea or novelty.



**PLANT PNT**  
*A secret ally*



A surrogate whose methods and motives are unattributed or unknown.

**Decode:** Surrogates are not plays; they are players who run plays with or on behalf of commissioning actors. Even so, they were a prominent dimension of the Russian Crimea campaign, used in this case to run the play called **Peacock**. Of the three surrogate types described in our reference system, **Plant**, which operates in secret, is presumed to have been recruited in volume by and known only to the principal player, the Russians. Whether as paid actors or costumed paratroopers, these disguised Russian allies were used in large numbers to advance an agenda and, as is often the case with Plants, cross ethical lines due to the inherent lack of attribution.

## Dictatorial Plays

**Excerpt:** *Russia began aggressively promoting its message that regime change in Ukraine was illegitimate. This message was advanced by several Russian figures and elites; for example, Sergei Mironov, leader of Russian political party Spravedlivaya Rossiya, on the Russia 24 news channel, and Ramzan Kadyrov, head of the Chechen Republic, on the LifeNews channel, contended that Russians were under threat in Crimea and required protection and that Russia needed to act to secure their safety. The message was straightforward: “[N]ationalists and fascists took power in Kyiv, they will force Russians to abandon the Russian language and present a general threat.<sup>25</sup>*

**Decode:** Unlike Plants, described above, the surrogate type called **Proxy** typically operates inside ethical boundaries. This is because they are known to others to be working on behalf of the principle actor and its interests. While a Proxy is more easily controlled than say another counterpart, the coequal-Partner, it often lacks credibility for the fact that its work is performed for consideration. A proxy, in other words, is bought, paid for, and judged accordingly. As the excerpt above shows, the Proxy was well-used by Russia to advance its Crimea information campaign and to dictate certain points of view all by way of the pressing play called **Declare**.



**DECLARE DR**  
*Stipulate to dictate*

The assertion of an idea, opinion or position as decided or true.



**PROXY PXY**  
*A hired hand*



A surrogate who advocates for another player, typically for consideration.



\*\*\*

With a half-dozen excerpts, we are able to identify nine of the taxonomy's 23 influence plays and two of its three surrogate types. Some are strategies of opportunism, some are used to counter enemy play action, and others are purpose-built for specific media. As well, we can see strategies that are in so many respects *non-strategies* insofar as their purpose is more to wait on or walk away from an information environment. Last, we can identify plays that are fabricated – to shock or show-off – and others that dictate some version of someone's truth. Influence plays are part and parcel to any message or symbol that is projected, protected or coveted by influencers. In the next section, we look for the patterns of their use and meanings behind their collective applications.





## 2. DECODED PATTERNS, PLANS AND SURROGATES

As Part 1 demonstrates, the decoding of influence plays gives insight into an actor's moves and motives. However, this is only a starting point. Once they are known, they can be aggregated to reveal composite maps and for the purposes of this work, a new and unique method for assessing Russia's aptitude for and approach to information war.

### Composite Map: A Two-Headed Player

To reveal these maps, we first applied the coding techniques as described in Part 1 to seven of the nine message sets in the RAND report.<sup>26</sup> As shown in the figure below, this yielded a simple account of the plays we observed and the number of times we observed them.

Next, as shown below, each play was plotted into the Taxonomy of Influence Strategies and tagged with the number of times it was recognized. The icons are enlarged to accentuate their proportional use. **Recast** and **Contrast**, as examples, were each observed five times (e.g., n=5), the most of any play across the RAND report's message sets, so they are correspondingly the largest of any plotted strategies.

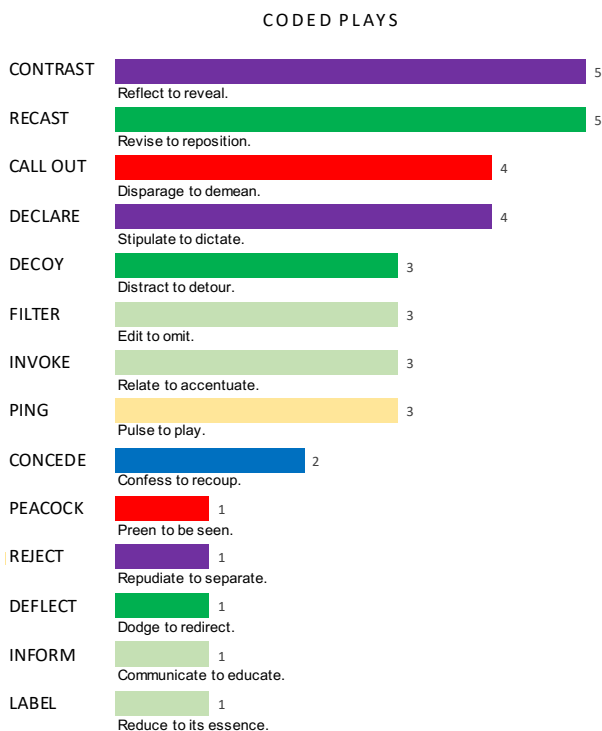
Our summary map yielded the following results.

Fourteen of the taxonomy's 23 elements were recognized and coded, 37 times in total.

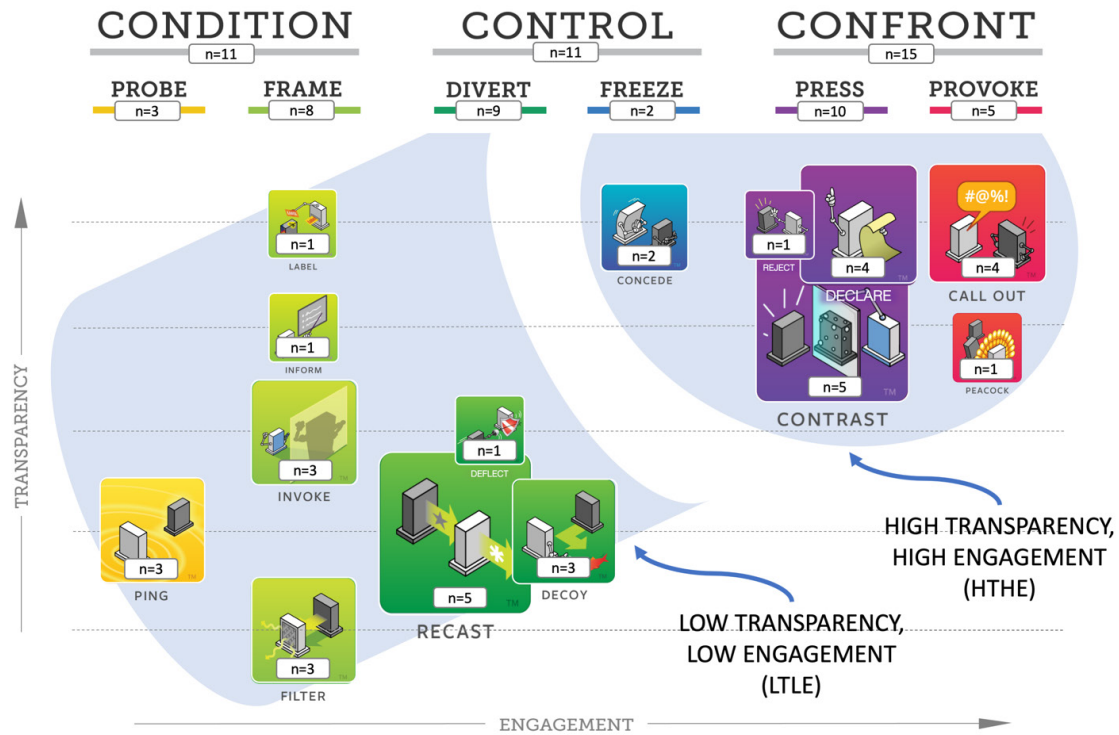
Within the taxonomy's first tier, there is a relatively even distribution of coded plays with a moderate bias for higher-engagement plays: **Conditioning** (11), **Control** (11) and **Confront** (15).

Within the second tier, **Frame** (n=8), **Divert** (n=9) and **Press** (n=10) dominated two-to-one. Only **Frame** was represented by all of its constituent plays (i.e., Label, Inform, Invoke and Filter)

**Recast** (n=5), **Contrast** (n=5), **Declare** (n=4) and **Call Out** (n=4) garnered half of the 37 total coded plays.



These plotted plays formed two groups at roughly opposite diagonal corners of the taxonomy. The first, which is dominated by framing and diverting plays, includes strategies with relatively low-transparency and low-engagement in the classification, labeled LTLE. The second is a tighter constellation of six plays that are more distinctly high-transparency and high-engagement, labeled HTHE.



While the sample size is small, these groups form the outlines of a kind of two-headed player driven by its own sets of purpose-built plays:

1. By way of framing strategies, a player that likes to shape the narrative. And, by way of diverting strategies (most notably Recast and Decoy), a player willing not only to frame storylines but to *reframe* them as necessary, even to the point of misdirection.
2. By way of punctuated plays like **Contrasts**, **Declares** and **Call Outs**, a player who is determined to engage without apology, perhaps politely, and with unmasked intent.

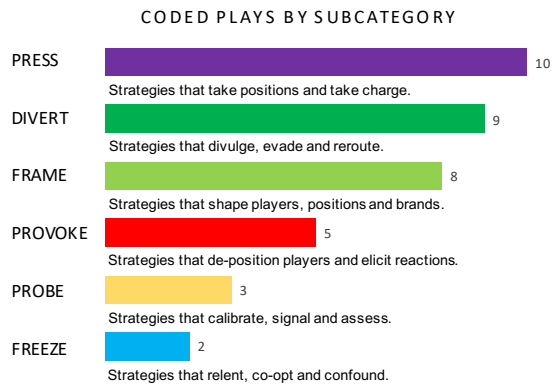
These formations reveal a Russian playbook that is broad, serves many purposes, and reflects a range of competencies and skills. Less experienced actors typically operate against narrower or less diversified signatures, such as Donald Trump, whose blunt plays live on the right side of the Playmaker taxonomy, or the Pope, who prefers rhetoric of the low-engagement quadrants. Not Russia. The LTLE and HTHE groups point to a player whose plan is to do the talking and storytelling through many means, and to do so through influence strategies that are bimodal, sometimes subtle and hard to detect, sometimes bold and easily read.<sup>27</sup>



## A Preference to Press, Not Provoke

In the search for influence strategies and the patterns they often form, it can be useful to abstract individual plays into their taxonomic subcategories. The chart below represents this attempt and offers these findings:

- Strategies from all six subcategories were coded, a finding that reinforces our conception of a Russian campaign with strategic range.
- Codings for pressing, diverting and framing plays out-scored provoking, probing and freezing plays by about two-to-one.
- Because pressing plays fall in the broader **Confront** category, diverting in **Control**, and framing in **Condition** there is no obvious grouping to report from the perspective of the taxonomy's subcategories. Their distribution is somewhat uniform.



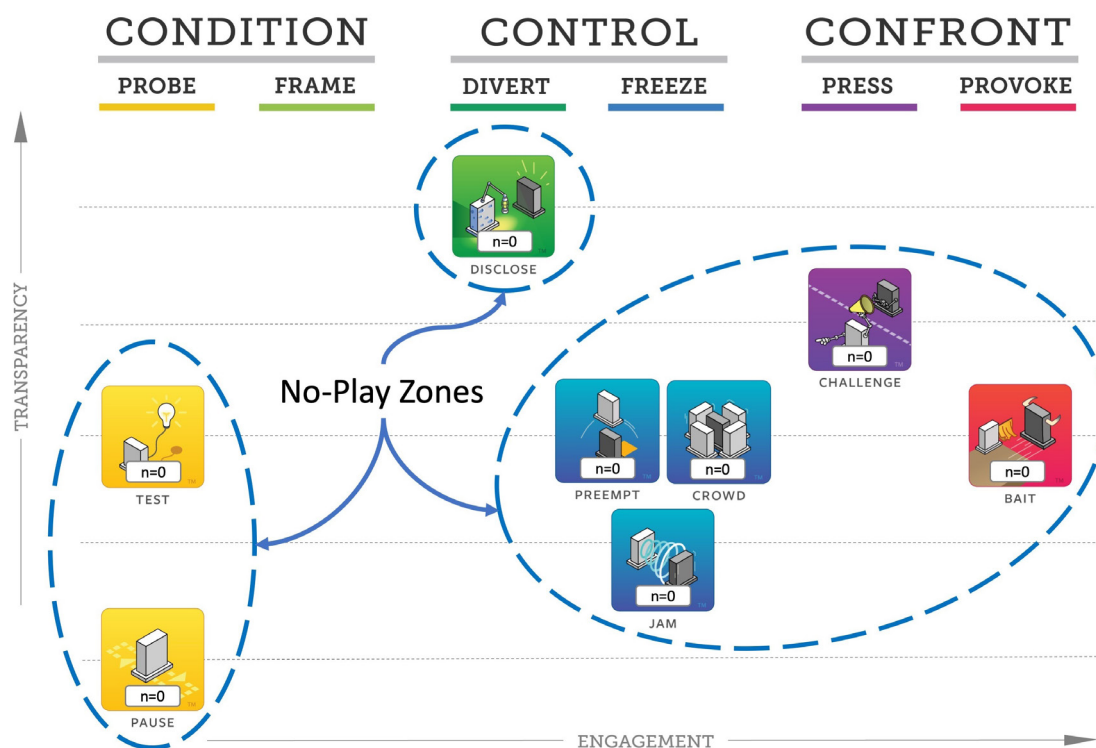
This exercise reinforces our view that the Russian playbook was built for a range of applications and suited to resources that could run a variety of plays. They would employ pressing, diverting and framing strategies as a preference and provoking, probing and freezing plays only as necessary – a pattern that largely matches the composite map and further illuminates Russia's policy to be assertive with its story, sometimes to the point of practicing misdirection, but to eschew aggressive maneuvers.

## No-Play Zones

Musicians sometimes say that the beauty of their art comes more from the rests between the notes than the notes themselves.<sup>28</sup> In that regard, it can be useful to plot the plays that have *not* been run in an information environment. Image on the next page shows a reverse image of the composite map (see figure, pg. 20), which we call the *no-play zones* of the Russians in their Crimea campaign:

- More than 40 percent (8) of the 23 plays of the taxonomy were not observed in the RAND message sets. (Pass, which is an independent play and as such does not lend itself to this biaxial diagram, was not observed and is not shown.)
- Many are confrontational and difficult to detect. **Pauses**, **Jams** and **Preempts**, for instance, are usually employed for asymmetric advantage – in other words, not necessarily to be advertised. Given the Russians' reputation for covert action, plays such as these could well have been run in the annexation.
- By contrast, **Test** and **Disclose** were observable in our method. However, the fact that neither materialized in the message sets suggests that the Russians were loath to float rhetorical trial balloons (i.e., Test) or volunteer unflattering information (Disclose). Given the findings of the composite map (see figure, pg. 18) we expected to see Test among the results since the plays that Russians *did* run – particularly framing plays – were by their nature careful and patient.





By this analysis the Russians didn't intend to be cute or mean. That the hyper-aggressive **Bait**, self-effacing **Concede** and three members of the freezing subcategory (i.e., Crowd, Preempt and Jam) were undetected is evidence that the broader Russian play was to win through persuasion not obstruction.

## Message Set Maps

As featured in the appendix, smaller-scale maps feed into the composite map, shown on pg.18. These are based on seven of nine RAND study message sets, which are essentially select words, ideas and symbols that Russian actors developed and aimed at various constituencies, both friendly and hostile. It is this line-by-line content that has been coded to provide the scores and plays for all maps.

In most respects, the plays of each message set correspond with one of the two formations of the composite map, either the low-engagement, low-transparency (LTLE) or high-transparency, high-engagement (HTHE) groups.

## Crimea and the Maidan Uprising (see tables and maps on page of the appendix)

Messages developed and aimed by Russia at Crimea's indigenous populations were more defined with the LTLE group. With the exceptions of the **Peacock** and **Call Out** (both in red, and having been observed only once each), a low-engagement, low-transparency formation emerges in the lower-left quadrant of the taxonomy. The high-engagement, high-transparency **Contrast**, **Declare** and **Call Out** plays that characterize the HTHE group map are only represented by the low-scoring **Peacock** and **Call Out**.



Looking next at the message set for the *Maidan Uprising*, the infamous protest, a similar picture forms. Each map gives weight to the possibility that, on the matters of ethnic Russian-Crimeans and the Maidan Uprising, Russia was prepared to take the proverbial low road with comparably covert and subtle plays. **Pings, Recasts, Filters** and **Decoys** are, after all, designed to condition an environment more than to control or confront it.

## Vilifying Ukraine and the West (see tables and map on page of the appendix)

With limited data, we merged the coded plays of two similar message sets: *Vilifying Ukraine as a State* and *Vilifying the West*, a plotting that suggested a strategy of somewhat low-transparency given the high incidence of the **Filter** play. Little can be teased out of this anemic map except perhaps to observe the obvious: That Russia wanted to demonize its detractors in the West and Western-friendly Ukraine.

What is unusual, however, is that it relied on tepid filtering and recasting plays to do this. **Preempts, Call Outs** and **Baits**, as examples, are normally more effective for such missions. However, the fact that Russia seemed intent on using the wrong tool for the right job leaves the impression that the strategies by which vilification might be achieved took priority over any raw desire to position Western interests as evil. Russia would take what it could get because it was more important to vilify through cautious low-engagement strategies than to be seen running more obvious or aggressive plays.

## Weakening Ukraine and the West (see tables and map on page of the appendix)

In the same way and for the same reasons that Russia's vilification messages were consolidated, we collapsed the coded plays of *Weakening Ukraine as a State* and *Weakening the West*. What emerged was a low-resolution picture of a small and diverse formation that hints at a rational, Socratic and comparison-driven influence policy. More structurally similar to the HTHE group of the composite map.

Whereas in the preceding analysis Russia preferred framing plays to make villains of its opponents, here it relied largely on a single and less subtle strategy, **Contrast**, to weaken them. The difference is curious because the objectives don't intuitively match the plays. Whereas *vilification*, an overt and punitive goal, was supported by low engagement strategies, the objective of *weakening* was enabled by higher engagement plays.

One explanation may be rooted in Russia's determination to advance its conflict with minimal drama and to do so on the backs of narratives that would convey and endure as factual, not finessed. Thus, when in pursuit of a pointed goal, it would rely on less pointed plays and vice-versa – all to keep a check on its broader objective of a no-drama (if not peaceful) annexation of Crimea. The presence of the out-lying **Call Out** points to a kind of option play (no sports pun intended) where Russia was willing to run the single most transparent and engaging play, but only sparingly and perhaps only when the facts could not deliver a fix.

## Glorifying Russia (see tables and map on page of the appendix)

As detailed above, the strategies Russia undertook to de-position Western interests and Ukrainian nationalists were obviously necessary; the negative case has to be made, the opposition's story had to be framed, re-framed and prosecuted. However, a case for a better way had to be made too. Without a way forward, the annexation would hold little perceived value for native Crimeans and Russia's motives might be called into question.



Shown in the appendix, is a small selection of coded plays that Russia ran, all to glorify the *motherland*, the prospective welcome mat and host to the underserved cultural orphans of mother Russia. Taking the HTHE form, the plays were plotted as relatively high-engagement and high-transparency strategies. Most dominant was Russia's application of the play **Declare**, a form of gaslighting, where an actor stipulates what is right and worthy.

What these plays suggest is a broader effort by Russia to achieve the benefits of the provocative play called **Peacock**. This is the strategy of shock and awe where an actor attempts to win over a market through sheer promotion or showmanship. That Russia avoided more factually-dependent strategies, such as **Contrast**, points either to arrogance or simple laziness to educate through information (i.e., to run the Inform play). Additionally, that Russia used **Declare** to dictate a new panacea hints at an underlying impatience by its operatives to affect the annexation.

Efforts to glorify Russia were not exclusively ham-handed, however. The presence of the play called **Concede** suggests that Russia knew that without concessions it could not credibly flatter itself. Concessions, they must have figured, would retain or buy back the credibility they needed to tout the homeland.

## Weighted Risks and Rewards Reveal Russia's Aggression

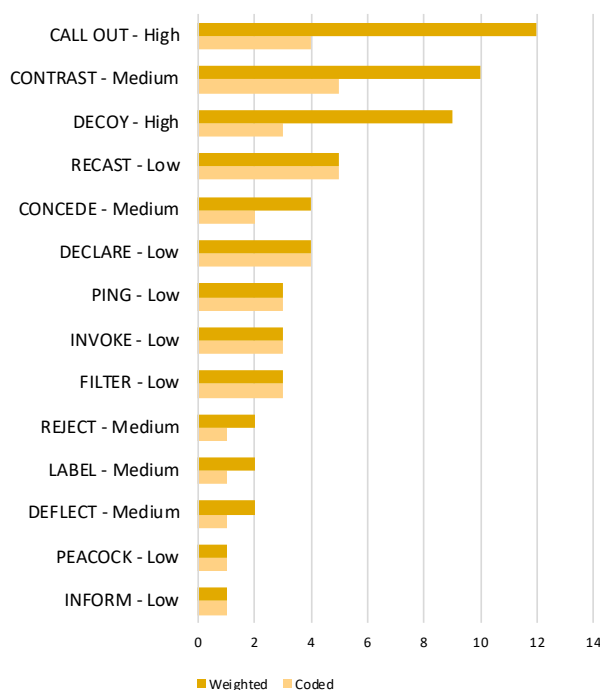
From CEOs to politicians to NGOs to terrorists, influencers are prone to play their games with risk and reward always in the balance.

With that in mind, two exercises were performed against the coded data to understand the upsides and downsides of the Crimea campaign and the plays that Russia ran to execute it. Both Figure B and C include the number of times each play was identified and coded (the lighter brown bar) multiplied by a number that represents the assigned rating of each play's risk and reward profile (the darker brown bar, where 1 = Low, 2 = Medium, 3 = High).<sup>29</sup>

With respect to risk, the figure, right, demonstrates that when the Russians ran **Call Outs**, **Contrasts** and **Decoys** they may well have been working outside their crafted brief, something they might not have known since the frequency of these plays was comparable to most others. However, this is the outcome when actuals are multiplied by risk factors, at least by the values we have assigned. A similar observation can be made of the figure on pg. 23, where **Contrast**, **Recast**, **Invoke** and **Call Out** record far higher weighted scores than the ten other featured plays.

The common elements to each exercise are **Contrast** and **Call Out**, pressing and provoking plays, respectively, that both belong to the highest-engagement category of the taxonomy's first tier: Confront. This means that the tight grouping in the upper-right quadrant of the composite map (see pg. 18) might be more dominant than it already is. It is difficult within the scope of this paper to determine by how

CODED PLAYS BY RATED RISK

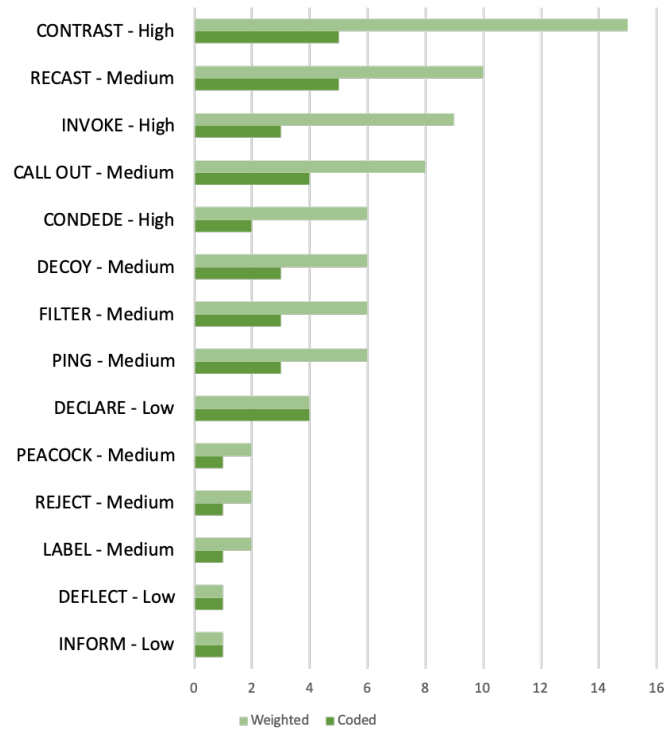


much, but whatever the expanded value might be it tips the estimation of the Russian play-book decidedly toward strategies of higher engagement and transparency. In other words, the incorporation of risk and reward paints a picture of a more aggressive and less subtle Russia, not necessarily how Russia might have preferred to project its handiwork onto the Crimean theater of conflict, but as it might have been perceived by its Western counterparts.

### Clusters Reveal a Side View

To provide orthogonal views of persuasive strategy, the Playmaker system supports five *clusters* of influence plays called Contrary, Fit, Friction, Lure and Pivot (see below a diagram of the plays assigned to these non-exclusive groups). Using this subsystem, we matched the coded data set to produce a kind of side view of the Russian annexation campaign.

### CODED PLAYS BY RATED REWARD



**CONTRARY CLUSTER** Plays that are counter-intuitive, defy conventional wisdom conventional wisdom



**FIT CLUSTER** Plays that resonate, create agreement, are symmetric



**FRICION CLUSTER** Plays that agitate, create debate, are asymmetric



**LURE CLUSTER** Plays that draw others from preferred positions or points of view



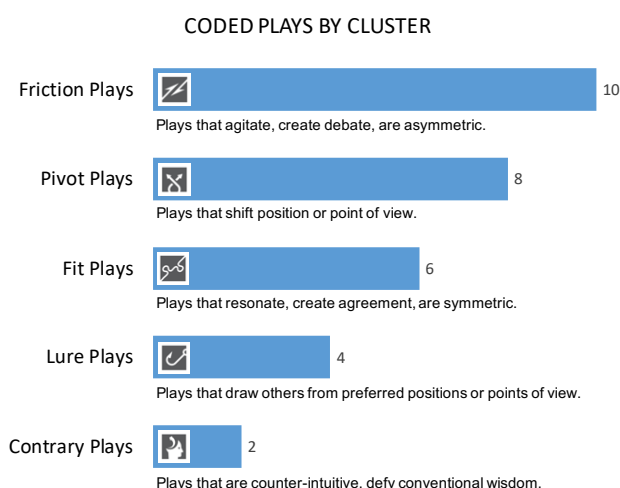
**PIVOT CLUSTER** Plays that shift position or point of view



While not all of the coded plays have homes in these clusters (i.e., Label, Deflect, Ping, Filter and Declare), most of the observed plays in our study could be matched to these specialty groups (a total of 30 times). As the chart below indicates, ten were found to be members of the Friction cluster, eight from Pivot, and so on.

This produced modest but informative findings that a two-dimensional taxonomy could not:

- More than half (18) of the coded Russian strategies conform to clusters that agitate and are asymmetric (Friction) or shift position or point of view (Pivot).
- A minority of plays conformed to clusters that draw in other players (Lure) or are counter-intuitive (Contrary).



While the sample begs for larger numbers it is intriguing to see (1) a preference for asymmetric plays like **Contrasts** and **Call Outs**, (2) a willingness to adapt a narrative through plays like **Recast**, and (3) an aversion to unconventional plays like **Concede**. Such findings support the strong-armed, determined and unapologetic Russian stereotypes and give credence to the HTHE formation of the composite map.

## The Surrogate Equation

Seldom in games of influence are actors able to succeed without the support of third parties. We call them surrogates, described in figure, right. They are not plays; they are players – actors who with varying degrees of control and credibility employ influence strategies on behalf of a principal. Using the RAND study's list of Russian speakers, we have coded each of the various Russian actors as one of the three surrogate types: **Partner**, **Proxy** and **Plant**.

Partners and Proxies appeared to dominate. But Plants could be orders of magnitude more numerous because they came in the forms of hundreds and thousands of recruited, largely anonymous professional soldiers and protesters.<sup>30</sup> Russian oligarchs and paramilitary Russian soldiers (aka, Little Green Men), which were largely unaccounted in the RAND paper, were added for completeness.

Russia's use of surrogates was well-developed and prominent, likely for two reasons: First, Russia could not afford to be seen to be meddling in Ukraine's state affairs, at least not in a direct or heavy-handed way, and not initially. To have gained this reputation would have undermined



\* Added actor





the abiding concern that Russia sought to portray. Second, on the Russian side there was but a single focal player, Russian President Vladimir Putin, who in anything but small doses would have galvanized the pro-Ukraine cause. Thus, Putin was forced to speak in generic, unattributed terms, such as through news reports, and to entrust recruited Proxies, like Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Partners, such as Russian politicians and oligarchs, and Plants, which included paid protesters and the so-called Little Green Men.<sup>31</sup>



## CONCLUSION

As asserted by the authors of our sourced RAND study, Russia might be luckier at information warfare than it is good. Nonetheless, there is ample evidence to suggest that Russia's commanders, strategists and planners conceived and carried out their information operations with some degree of mastery. Given their natural advantage of proximity and the relative disarray of so many Ukrainian regimes, they might have defaulted to conventional recipes of force. Instead, Russia formulated a hybrid mix that ensured not only the physical annexation of Crimea but a perception by pro-Russian populations that its work and words were just.

The Russians didn't mine the edges of the taxonomy as amateur activists often do: coy **Pings** and **Pauses** that insinuate wrongdoing followed by caustic **Call Outs** and **Peacocks** that condemn a rival. Using every play in the framing family (e.g., Label, Inform, Invoke and Filter), their operations were represented by strategies that conditioned instead of controlled. And in place of old-school covert measures, such as **Jams** and **Decoys**, they ran plays of a more detectable quality, like **Contrasts** and **Declares**. This is to say that Russia's application of influence strategy was driven by a desire to be more overt than covert.

The casual reader might expect something less sophisticated or surreptitious of Vladimir Putin and his penchant for spin. After all, Russia's reputation for expediency and its flouting of western-style ethics doesn't support the image of a patient, cautious and principled persuader. However, by this analysis, Putin and his surrogates exhibited range in their play selection, a greater trust in transparency, and a retreat from the strategies that are more typical of latter-day propaganda machines.

It is fair to ask if what Russia achieved in its annexation of Crimea is unique or scalable. After all, its proximity to Ukraine and the Crimean peninsula, its intimate understanding of the area's indigenous populations, and the deep, shared history of the region all provided out-sized advantages. But conditions and cultures notwithstanding, the raw experience that Russia gained is something most nations do not have. It is true that by the standards of most war planners, Ukraine-Crimea was inelegant and sometimes crudely opportunistic. But that Russia's information-based campaigns were planned, attempted, sometimes failures and sometimes successes amounts to first-hand experience that no simulation, wargame or research paper can replicate. However tilted the playing field may have been for Putin, the game was real, risky and thus invaluable from the Russian perspective.

Beyond the object lessons this analysis offers about Crimea, we have sought to demonstrate that the discipline of influence strategy is emphatically not binary. The influence taxonomy of 23 elements all but validates this assertion. Still, whether due to training, lack of experience or dogma, the default in business and government is too often given to black-and-white terms: *Pass or attack, educate or eliminate, high road or low road, etc.* A middle ground is typically ignored, when in fact influence campaigns and operations can feature multiple strategies at various stages for diverse audiences with nuanced effects. The analysis of this paper offers an example of the Russians' advances in this regard. With practice, strategic communicators can eliminate the false choices, like ignoring or trashing competitors, because strategies that influence come in many graded shades and when correctly applied achieve sophisticated ends.<sup>32</sup>

We also hope to have shed light on the relationship between messaging and strategy, and the roles that each assumes in chains of command. In our engagements with IO strategists and planners, it is often observed that multiple layers of approval constrain an officer's tactical agility. By the time a given message is approved, the opportunity it presents is often lost because the information environment has changed. This is not surprising; bureaucracies create bureaucracy but the speed of news is minute-to-minute. Consider, too, that when messages are debated the offensive capability of information gets muted. This can earn information-based disciplines, particularly StratCom, an unwitting reputation as defensive or responsive because in-theater personnel can neither tune nor deliver their messages on time.



Because the presented taxonomy describes strategies that are specific to information, influence and communication, we believe it can be used as an appropriate shorthand for up-stream commanders that frees down-stream improvisation and execution on-script. Instead of a three-page brief of master messages and core narratives, planners can outline *master strategies* for higher ranks to review that are abstract but conceptually accurate. Instead of a recommended tweet at 0800 over a hostile network about, say, a new lottery system for water well access, an operator's brief might seek the approval of a strategy to *recast* the discussion of water access in terms more favorable to the good guys.

This might represent a large shift in process and a significant expansion of the trust that is given to the field, but because influence strategy can be precisely defined and abstracted to tactics, the oversight that is required of ranking decision makers can be maintained and the value that in-theatre tacticians can bring to their IEs can be unlocked. Opportunities can be met in a timely manner and offensive capabilities can be restored and expected.

Whatever insights or inspiration this paper generates, we see this work as a table-setter. Where most of our data are presented in snapshot format, dynamic timelines can be developed to reveal not only who ran plays, but in what order or sequence and with what effects. While we endeavored to identify the plays of specific actors in specific situations, it is possible to broaden coding criteria to capture the moves and motives of larger and more diverse constituencies. As findings and use cases amass, correlations can also be made that reveal home truths, or *proofs*, of repeating patterns and sequences of plays and their predictable effects. Their discovery might, in turn, accelerate the uses and benefits of wargames and simulations –not to mention the predictive potential of machine language and artificial intelligence platforms.

Overall, the **Taxonomy of Influence Strategies** is a fresh and practical resource for cracking the code of today's modern wars. Not unlike the periodic table of chemical elements or biology's phylogenetic tree, it is the centerpiece of a decoding system and decision framework that makes tangible what has heretofore been intangible, and thus emerges as a potentially indispensable tool for winning what is hardest to win – hearts and minds.

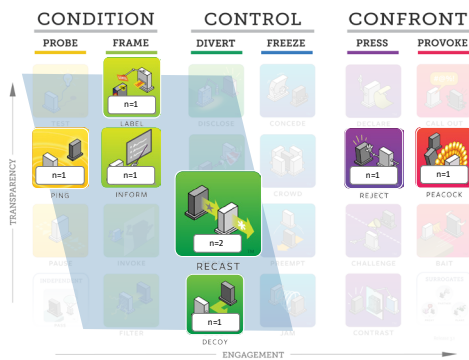


# APPENDIX. MESSAGE SET MAPS

## MESSAGING: CRIMEA

MESSAGING: CRIMEA	CODED PLAYS
Land historically belonged to Russia.	Inform
The acquisition of Crimea by Ukraine in 1954 was a historical mistake.	Recast
KrymNash ("Crimea Is Ours" [КрымНаш]) campaign).	Label
Ethnic Russian and all Russian-speaking populations of Crimea are under severe ultra-nationalist threat.	Ping
In no way was Russia involved in events in Crimea.	Reject
Cont... the referendum was initiated and carried out by the people of Crimea.	Decoy
Crimean soldiers voluntarily gave up their weapons and pronounced their allegiance to Russia.	Recast
Bright images of oppressed "Russian population," "Berkut" heroes, "polite green men."	Peacock

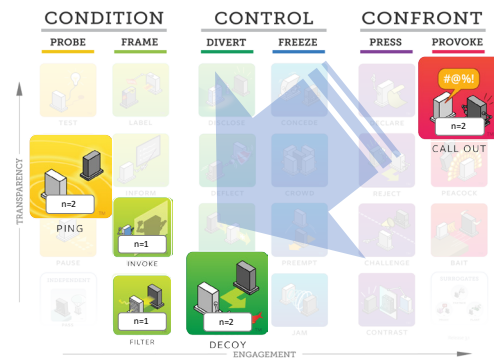
Messaging source: "Lessons From Russian's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine."  
RAND Corporation, 2017, p. 79



## MESSAGING: MAIDAN UPRISING

MESSAGING: MAIDAN UPRISING	CODED PLAYS
The West orchestrated the uprising.	Decoy
Majority of protesters were violent anti-Russian ultra-nationalists.	Decoy
Yanukovich fled as a result of a violent coup d'état against his government; cont...	Filter
Cont...the new government of Ukraine is illegitimate.	Call Out
Signing the association agreement would betray Ukraine's relationship with Russia.	Ping
Signing the association agreement would have devastating consequences for Ukraine.	Ping
In fear for their lives, hundreds of thousands of Russians fled Ukraine.	Invoke
Maidan revolution is fascist, nationalist, and anti-Semitic.	Call Out

Messaging source: "Lessons From Russian's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine."  
RAND Corporation, 2017, p. 80



## MESSAGING: VILIFYING UKRAINE

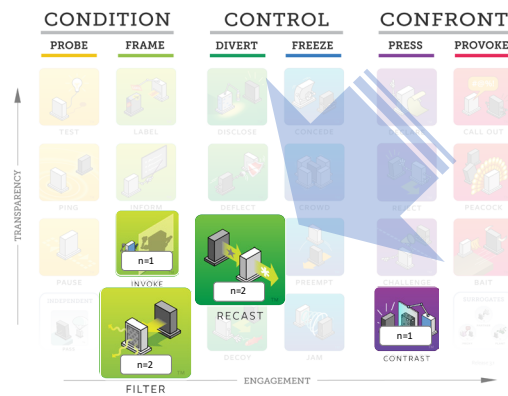
MESSAGING: VILIFYING UKRAINE AS A STATE	CODED PLAYS
The Ukrainian government acts in the interests of the United States and other foreign powers.	Recast
The Ukrainian government is overrun by violent ultra-nationalists.	Filter
The pro-European population of Ukraine are ideological descendants of Nazi supporters and fascists.	Filter

*Messaging source: "Lessons From Russian's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine."  
RAND Corporation, 2017, p. 80*

## MESSAGING: VILIFYING WEST

MESSAGING: VILIFYING THE WEST	CODED PLAYS
Western countries, and especially the United States, are the core orchestrators of the events in Ukraine.	Invoke
NATO expansion and limiting Russia's capabilities are the main motivations for the actions of most countries in the EU, the United States, Canada, and Australia.	Contrast
The United States is pressuring European countries to continue sanction policies against Russia.	Recast

*Messaging source: "Lessons From Russian's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine."  
RAND Corporation, 2017, p. 81*



## MESSAGING: WEAKENING UKRAINE

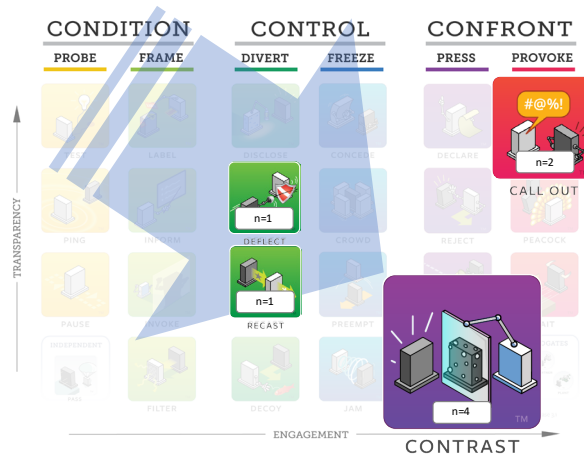
MESSAGING: WEAKENING UKRAINE AS A STATE	CODED PLAYS
Ukraine is an economically failed state.	Call Out
Ukraine is an artificial state that did not exist before 1991.	Contrast
The Ukrainian language is nothing more than a combination of Russian and Polish.	Recast
Ukraine has no viable future without Russian subsidies and patronage.	Contrast

*Messaging source: "Lessons From Russian's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine."  
RAND Corporation, 2017, p. 80*

## MESSAGING: WEAKENING WEST

MESSAGING: WEAKENING THE WEST	CODED PLAYS
The morality of the Western world fundamentally differs from the morality of the Russian people.	Contrast
European countries are gravely dependent on Russia for gas and import-export relationships.	Contrast
The time of Western civilization is decadent and has come to an end: It is rotting from the inside.	Call Out
Western countries and the United States are simply displeased and afraid of Russia's rising power, hence their reaction to its actions and their isolationist policies.	Deflect

*Messaging source: "Lessons From Russian's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine."  
RAND Corporation, 2017, p. 81*



## MESSAGING: GLORIFYING RUSSIA

MESSAGING: GLORIFYING RUSSIA	CODED PLAYS
Russian history and tradition necessitate its own Russian Path—a unique approach to human rights and development trajectory.	Invoke
The fall of the Soviet Union was a disaster of global proportions.	Concede
Russia constitutes the center of the Slavic/ Orthodox world.	Declare
Russia is the principal fighter of fascism.	Declare
Russia stands for truth and against the world domination and hegemony of the United States.	Declare
Russia bears the responsibility of protecting Russian diaspora (Russkiy Mir) everywhere.	Declare
Russia has finally gotten off its knees and mustered strength to resist the greedy and self-serving policies of the West.	Declare

*Messaging source: "Lessons From Russian's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine."  
RAND Corporation, 2017, p. 81*



# BOOKMARKS

1. Aday, Sean, Henry Farrell, Marc Lynch, John Sides, and Deen Freelon. "Blogs and Bullets II: New Media and Conflict After the Arab Spring." *Peaceworks*: United States Institute for Peace. July 2012.

2. See Chapter 11 in Christopher Paul, Colin P. Clarke, Michael Schwille, Jakub P. Hlavka, Michael A. Brown, Steven S. Davenport, Isaac R. Porche III, and Joel Harding, *Lessons from Others for Future U.S. Army Operations in and Through the Information Environment: Case Studies*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1925z2.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1925z2.html).

3. Scott K. Thomson and Christopher E. Paul, "Paradigm Change: Operational Art and the Information Joint Function," *Joint Force Quarterly* 89, April 19, 2018. <http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1490645/paradigm-change-operational-art-and-the-information-joint-function/>

4. NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, *Hybrid Threats: A Strategic Communications Perspective*, Riga, Latvia, undated. As of April 24, 2019: <http://www.playmakersystems.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Playmaker-System-Three-One-White-Paper-vZ16.pdf>

5. Alan Kelly, *The Elements of Influence: The New Essential System for Managing Competition, Reputation, Brand, and Buzz*, New York: Dutton, 2006 and Plume, 2007.

6. See an interactive online version of the taxonomy at <https://www.playmakersystems.com/playmaker-system/the-taxonomy/>

7. Playmaker Systems, LLC, "Playmaker System 3: An update of the Playmaker Influence System. For analysts, strategists and students of influence," white paper, Playmaker Systems, LLC, 2018, p. 8, <https://www.dropbox.com/s/jojvn0orxbxkin7/Playmaker%20System%20Three-One%20White%20Paper%20vZ16.pdf?dl=0>

8. Ben Nimmo, "Anatomy of an info-war: How Russia's propaganda machine works, and how to counter it," Central European Policy Institute, n.d.

9. Mark Laity, "NATO and Strategic Communications: The Story So Far." *The Three Swords Magazine*, 33/2018, p. 68.





10. Michael Kofman, Katya Migacheva, Brian Nichiporuk, Andrew Radin, Olesya Tkacheva and Jenny Oberholtzer, "Lessons From Russian's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine." RAND Corporation, 2017, pp. 1-2.
11. Alan Kelly, *The Elements of Influence: The New Essential System for Managing Competition, Reputation, Brand, and Buzz*, New York: Dutton, 2006 and Plume, 2007.
12. Development of the taxonomy has included engagements with Fortune 500 companies, including Abbott, AbbVie, Bayer, Dell, GSK, HP, Hewlett Packard Enterprise, Intel, Pandora Media, Royal Dutch Shell, SAP and VMware, and instruction of the Playmaker system at The George Washington University Graduate School of Political Management and USC Annenberg School for Communication.
13. Since its introduction in 2006, the taxonomy has received updates in 2012 and 2018, each the result of continuing research, testing, teaching and engagement. Two white papers, available at [www.playmakersystems.com](http://www.playmakersystems.com), detail these advances. Experience and time may initiate further updates and skew or refine this paper's findings.
14. Playmaker Systems, LLC, "Playmaker System 3: An update of the Playmaker Influence System. For analysts, strategists and students of influence," white paper, Playmaker Systems, LLC, 2018, p. 4, <https://www.dropbox.com/s/jojvn0orxbkin7/Playmaker%20System%20Three-One%20White%20Paper%20vZ16.pdf?dl=0>
15. Michael Kofman, Katya Migacheva, Brian Nichiporuk, Andrew Radin, Olesya Tkacheva and Jenny Oberholtzer, "Lessons From Russian's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine." RAND Corporation, 2017.
16. This three-step process is featured in the free iOS application Playcaller, based on System 2 of the Taxonomy of Influence Strategies, at <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/playcaller/id536201802>
17. To access a play's digital information card, including Standard Guidance, select any play of the online Taxonomy of Influence Strategies at <https://www.playmakersystems.com/playmaker-system/the-taxonomy/>
18. Such a study can be performed using the same techniques and additional source material on the constituent opposition of Eastern Ukraine. Comparison of these data would further illuminate the play action of the respective sides of the Russia-Crimea conflict.



19. Michael Kofman, Katya Migacheva, Brian Nichiporuk, Andrew Radin, Olesya Tkacheva and Jenny Oberholtzer, "Lessons From Russian's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine." RAND Corporation, 2017, p. xii

20. Ibid., p. 15.

21. Ibid., p. 28.

22. Ibid., p. 27.

23. Ibid., p. 33.

24. Ibid., p. 10.

25. Ibid., p. 13.

26. Two of the nine message sets, Strengthening Russia and Identifying Internal Enemies, lacked the content necessary to produce coded plays. For details, see Michael Kofman, Katya Migacheva, Brian Nichiporuk, Andrew Radin, Olesya Tkacheva and Jenny Oberholtzer, "Lessons From Russian's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine." RAND Corporation, 2017, pp. 79-82.

27. Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews, The Russian "Firehose of Falsehood" Propaganda Model: Why It Might Work and Options to Counter It. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE198.html>

28. The early impressionist composer, Claude Debussy, is often credited with the quote, "Music is the silence between the notes." Trumpeter Miles Davis is also recognized for similar statements about jazz. See [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/claude\\_debussy\\_204265](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/claude_debussy_204265)

29. Each of the 23 strategies of the influence taxonomy are rated for the relative risks and rewards they present generally when employed. These ratings, which have been adjusted over the evolution of the Playmaker Influence System, are based on best estimates and experiences by a collective of analysts familiar with the plays and system.

30. Michael Kofman, Katya Migacheva, Brian Nichiporuk, Andrew Radin, Olesya Tkacheva and Jenny Oberholtzer, "Lessons From Russian's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine." RAND Corporation, 2017, p. 82.



31. "Little Green Men: A Primer on Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013–2014," The United States Army Special Operations Command, Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

32. Alan Kelly, *The Elements of Influence: The New Essential System for Managing Competition, Reputation, Brand, and Buzz*, New York: Dutton, 2006 and Plume, 2007, p. 289.





Prepared and published by the  
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