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Russian military admits significant cyber-war effort

23 February 2017 | [Europe](#)



Russia's military has admitted for the first time the scale of its information warfare effort, saying it was significantly expanded post-Cold War.

Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said that Russian "information troops" were involved in "intelligent, effective propaganda", but he did not reveal details about the team or its targets.

The admission follows repeated allegations of cyberattacks against Western nations by the Russian state.

Nato is reported to be a top target.

During the Cold War both the USSR and the West poured resources into propaganda, to influence public opinion globally and sell their competing ideologies.

Speaking to Russian MPs, Mr Shoigu said "we have information troops who are much more effective and stronger than the former 'counter-propaganda' section".

Keir Giles, an expert on the Russian military at the Chatham House think-tank, has warned that Russian "information warfare" occupies a wider sphere than the current Western focus on "cyber warriors" and hackers.

"The aim is to control information in whatever form it takes," he wrote in a **Nato report** called "The Next Phase of Russian Information Warfare".

"Unlike in Soviet times, disinformation from Moscow is primarily not selling Russia as an idea, or the Russian model as one to emulate.

"In addition, it is often not even seeking to be believed. Instead, it has as one aim undermining the notion of objective truth and reporting being possible at all," he wrote.



Russia has been testing Nato in various ways, including targeting individual soldiers via their social media profiles, Mr Giles told the BBC.

"They have been reaching out to individuals and targeting them as if it comes from a trusted source," he said.

There have been reports of Russian information attacks targeting Nato troops in the Baltic states, the Polish military, and Ukrainian troops fighting pro-Russian rebels.

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'Bloodless paralysis'

Russia rejects Western narratives about its "disinformation", instead accusing Nato of aggressive expansion and support for anti-Russian nationalists in Ukraine.

Russia's effort in cyberspace is under intense Western scrutiny following high-level US accusations that Russian hackers helped to swing the presidential election in favour of Donald Trump.

According to Mr Giles, the Russian military decided to prioritise information warfare after the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict. The country's security apparatus drew lessons from its "inability to dominate public opinion about the rights and wrongs of the war", he said.

Commenting on Mr Shoigu's remarks, former Russian commander-in-chief Gen Yuri Baluyevsky said a victory in information warfare "can be much more important than victory in a classical military conflict, because it is bloodless, yet the impact is overwhelming and can paralyse all of the enemy state's power structures".

The EU has a special team to combat Russian "myths" spread on social media, called the **East StratCom Task Force**.

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