

Sofi Oksanen: Russia has already won the media war

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EXCLUSIVELY IN ILTALEHTI

Finland and other western countries don't recognize Putin's real intentions.

This spring the western media has asked me the same questions over and over again, in every country, in every interview:

– What does Putin Want?

– Which country will be the next attacked country?

Not even one reporter has asked me when the occupation in Crimea stops, and the lack of this very question indicates the assumption that Crimea will never be returned to Ukraine. Did the western interest stop because the western journalism's traditional dramaturgy requires action that goes forward, gives a good image and the main actor is famous enough, in this case Putin?

When Putin's focus was deliberately placed elsewhere the whole media followed him. Or is the reason because the west doesn't know Crimea's area well enough or haven't many enough even visited Crimea?

Russia started to invest in changing Crimea's atmosphere a long time ago, after that Russia focused on manipulating opinions against the west and against Ukraine.

The western media didn't follow that story, but it should had covered it later on in the news. It would offer the readers some insight into how a country is invaded, step by step, it would also give the readers information that an occupation is always also a spiritual occupation preceeded by manipulation of opinions, and after the occupation takes place changing public values and changing the context in school books, wiping the original population's history off the map. But because the international media reported only about what presidents and diplomats had said and about how troops were moving, it was easy for Moscow to determine how easily Crimea will be forgotten abroad. Russia has a lot of experiences of these kind of forced annexations, as does the former soviet-countries too.

These repeated questions about speculating over Putin's thoughts and about the next target of an attack also tells about an indirect assumption: The next target already exists, it is a physical nation, we just don't know yet which country it is.

Western puppets

The assumption is based upon old-fashioned and learned ideas about warfare. At the same time the west is sub-consciously repeating exactly those questions that Moscow's oligarch-clique wants the west to repeat. They want us to speculate over Putin's thoughts and hence enforce the Putin-myth. They want to fill our heads with these questions, because that way the west is put in a state of insecurity and instability, in other words in a beneficial state from Russia's POV. Divide and conquer - it works everytime.

Since nobody wants to be the cursed next target of aggression, the countries are forced into focusing on their own safety. and in Finland it means a Nato-debate. In a situation like this resolving the occupation in Crimea isn't that important.

The silent acceptance of Crimea's occupation is bound to raise questions in each nation bordering Russia: Is this how others would react if parts of our country would be occupied? Would that also be silently accepted that quickly?

Demonstrations for the matter would abroad be arranged by our own country's immigrants. Giving back stolen land would not become an international movement. The invasion would just take place and we would let it take place, because Russia's bordering countries and former soviet-countries are mainly small nations never visited by the majority of Western citizens, only a few of them could even find these countries from a map. It's difficult to lose your sleep over these kind of countries, and after the news about Crimea disappeared from the local papers the matter is accepted by forgetting it and the media moves on to the next hot topic, the next troops movements, the next diplomatic speeches etc. in a nano-second.

How other countries reacted to the occupation in Crimea is a message to the rest of us, us who live next to Russia and in East-Europe.

What has not been asked is what or who Russia has attacked since Putin's rise to power.

That nation is the human mind. The western set of values, the western mind and the western values. Putin's clique has attacked those for a long long time and they have succeeded in molding the western mentality the way they want.

### Return to Militarism

When Putin came into power his first regulations were giving immunity to the former president Boris Jeltsin, a new military doctrine, restoring the obligatory military training (which was mandatory after the Perestroika), adding defense expenses with 50 %, a law which allows specific persons to conceal information. Putin's first regulations weren't about enforcing the democracy system or improving the population's conditions who were sinking into poverty. His regulations were about militarizing Russia. In spite of that the western leaders concentrated on praising Russia's path to democracy.

During the first two presidential seasons Putin made 11 regulations, 6 of them concerned the military forces. Now 25 % of the nation's budget goes to the army, during the next two years 33 %. These days at least 70 % of the upper governmental officers belong to FSB, at least 200 000 are known to work in FSB.

Putin's rise to power didn't just meant a new leader for the nation, it meant changing the government system and this new system's character was visible already back then. That's when they also dug up Stalin, who had been banned after his death in 1953. The rehabilitation of this dictator started with Putin's elections. One of Putin's slogans were "Young Stalin". Russia got a face of a KGB-agent in the third generation, who started to put his old KGB-friends into significant positions.

When Kreml started to invest in the media, the western media outlet's were in a crisis.

Western media shut their offices in Moscow, reporters were called home. The west didn't think Russia was so important that they needed their own reporter there, and no attention was paid to the diversity of Russia's media-frontier's grouping, although for Russia's own independent journalists their profession had turned into a suicidal one.

#### War of images

The Russian news agencies had their budget tripled during a time when Russia's economy was in recession. In 2005 they created RT TV-channel, Russia Today, which turned out to be successful, their airings are followed in 100 countries and hotels in many countries have the channel in their selection. Western PR-offices like Ketchum, Gplus and Portland PR were recruited to make sure that the messages Kreml wanted to send out went through without anyone being able to track the background connections. In addition to PR-offices, MSM and outright propaganda, Moscow networked with the far-right and conservatives in the west.

Year 2011 Russia spent 1,3 Billion Dollars on international propaganda - more than on unemployment.

At the moment Russia's citizens are manipulated against the western set of values and understanding of history. Russia has worked for years on the new history policy. A Russian group of historians are creating a new set of text books as we speak and the group is supervised by Sergei Naryskin, a former KGB-officer.

Recently a new alphabet was introduced in Siberia and the intention is to extend it to all schools in Russia. The new alphabet is teaching both letters and values: the positive things are linked to patriotism and Russia and the negative things are linked to the west, Ukraine and Euromaidan. Wikipedia is naturally labelled as CIA:s invention. This way they create an illusion that only the state can offer their people safe and reliable information.

According to polls the majority of citizens accept that the state molds the news if it is in the advantage of the population.

Soon the population will accept even more, because they have cut the education budget significantly. Opposition leader Boris Nemtsov says that Russia's budget amounts are numbers of a country who is preparing for war and oppression.

"Putin doesn't need the intelligentsia or educated people. Those kind of people only ask unnecessary questions and it's more difficult to turn them into zombies", Nemtsov says.

In other words Russia's president loves the stupid, loves people who are battling with their health, loves alcoholics and people with sexual diseases, because the numbers of these miseries are very high in Russia and there is not going to be any changes to those things, because the money isn't channelled into public health, education and infrastructure. The money is channelled to the army and this is justified by the threatening images from the west.

Brainwashing is cheap

Moscow's silovik-clique (editors note: Siloviks are the group ruling in Russia, consisting of people from different security-, order- and defense -organizations) has already understood that Putin should not look for the popularity from the urban Russians, they have language skills and they have seen the world outside Russia. Hence they are concentrating on getting the popularity from conservative and older parts of Russia, the part who swallows easily the propaganda from Russia's state-channels.

This ruling elite has already understood that modernisizing the physical army is a much more expensive project than brainwashing.

This can be done because Russia is for the first time during it's history completely and utterly lead by the secret police. During KGB the Party was at least above KGB, now there is no Party. Some Russian researchers think that although for example Juri Andropov was the leader of KGB, he wouldn't even had dreamed of bringing KGB to the government. KGB's task was to protect the state and government, not be te government itself.

Information is a cheap weapon

Scientific Communism was studied in Soviet Union, in Putin's Russia they are now fuelling Scientific Patriotism.

After Putin came to power propaganda and media-war became an academic science. During last years they have founded several different research centers related to the matter - Russia has 74 research- and scientific centers founded by FSB.

According to an information safety -doctrine from year 2000 a nation's main threats are Russia and their officials who spread disinformation.

The softer use of power is represented by Russkiy Mir -foundation, which was founded in 2007 on Putin's initiative. A year later foreign minister Lavrov announced that Russia's compatriot-policy would be developed by using "soft force" and that Russkiy Mir would be one representation of it. It's task is to challenge western values outside Russia.

Putin's programs from last years aim to neutralize information attacks from the west. From the POV of Moscow's silovik-cliques, Russia has been the target of the west's information attack for years and their own information-frontier is the answer. One has to keep in mind that in Soviet and in Russia they have an ongoing media-war all the time.

The psychological warfare we see nowadays is based on action plans and techniques which were founded during the Soviet-era. They have tested the reaction-techniques back then and saw that they worked well. The new methods are a professional army of trolls who comment on websites and in the social media.

Russian professional actors zigzag from one Ukrainian town to another and have barely time to let the new role's hair dye dry before they are already giving new statements to the media, always expressing their concern over the locals. The media's indications about concentration camps and Nazi-Germany are popular catalogue. Recently Russia's state-channel presented a normal construction camp in Donetsk claiming it was a concentration camp that was being built for Russian speaking people.

The report was accompanied with sinister music and a shower room. TV-journalist Arkady Marmontov's report was aired immediately after Russia's foreign minister gave his statement . The report expressed deep concern over the construction camps which reminded of Nazi concentration camps.

Russia is having a full-scale media-war in every parts of society and their means are clear: Provocation, intimidation, projection and propaganda. Divide, conquer, rule.

This is how history is erased

Those of us who have personal experience of Soviet occupation, we know that even full-scale occupations can be portrayed to the west as a voluntary annexation. We know that the west was filled with people who all imagined that the Soviet Union's collectivization was based upon our citizens free will, and these same people are astonished when they are told that the truth was exactly the opposite.

We know that the spine of our nation, the values, memories and history can be wiped off the map. That's why the stupid propaganda slogans about East-Ukraine don't amuse at all. Those

who experienced a Soviet occupation knew that every day was filled with just as stupid propaganda slogans from decade to decade.

Moscow's power-clique has already seen how the west believed in the imitation of democracy. Soviet Union also imitated friendship with countries, although there were many outside Soviet who didn't believe in it but they also pretended in public that the friendship is real.

In Moscow they knew that the west would buy the whole democracy-farce, because the west wants to believe in the most easiest things, which is most practical when thinking of financial relations, despite facts and obvious evidence. In Moscow they were sure that the bluff would work, because the bluffing had worked earlier also.

At the same time East-Europe and Baltic countries have been the target of different aggression for years already, not to mention Georgia, who's direction to the west wasn't in Moscow's liking. These countries have constantly been told how Moscow claims again and again that they are only imaginary nations who don't have the right to independence. Forbidding occupation of Baltic countries have been a clear policy. In 1993 before becoming a president, Putin was arranging a referendum in East Estonian Narva, which has a big russian-speaking population. The intention of the referendum was autonomy.

Narva's referendum didn't however get support from Kreml and it was overthrown as an initiative against Estonia's constitutional law.

In Estonia they have talked for a long time about an info-state, where Russia - and also Estonian-Russians live in, because they follow the Russian media aka the state propaganda. Info-state is a word that should be taken into use in the west also. We saw the consequences of it for example in Estonia's traditional slavic festival (24.5), when the youngsters from Ukraine were attacked by Russian-speaking people. This incident happened in an EU- and Nato-country - Russia's info-state has penetrated here also and some measures should be taken in order to dissolve it.

Time for recognition

One often hears how Russia's actions are explained with global politics and they make it sound almost natural. One of the myths has for example been that Ukraine naturally belongs to Russia, although Kiev existed before Moscow and Ukraine has not always been a part of Russia.

The countries Soviet occupied were non-subjects in Soviet and the "new European" countries haven't been in Europe for long after the iron curtain came down. Soviet had erased the history of these countries from Europe's map and they succeeded in creating a world with illusions where it was "natural" that these countries belonged to Soviet's empire.

A similar colonialism would not be allowed to other former empires anymore. It's completely impossible to imagine that Germany would take land from another country with the explanation that it used to belong to Germany.

So why are other countries allowing Russia's actions when they wouldn't allow it from anyone else? Although the violation of Ukraine's borders have been condemned by nearly everyone, many think that due to the Russian population the occupation of Crimea is more "natural" than for example Russia's hypothetical invasion to an area where there are no Russian-speaking people.

Russia is indirectly allowed to have an imperialistic ideology, which should not occur in the 20th century, because the west didn't recognize Russia's imperialistic features. Yet they talk all the time about Russian experts in the west, who are supposed to be several, and especially Finland has wanted to be a country with tough Russian expertise.

If there are so many Russian experts in the west, then how is it possible that the invasion in Ukraine came as such a big surprise?

KGB in the regime

Russia is run by men who have a KGB-education, they are masters of the human mind and experts at propaganda. They are experts in psychological warfare. They know how the western mind works and they know the narrative formulas for news in the west.

They knew that the west wouldn't be interested in Crimea for a longer time, no matter what would happen there. They count on the west not learning their lessons, because it hasn't learned the lessons earlier either.

The patronizing approach to the warnings East-European countries try to tell about Russia's politics also tells that western countries have sub-consciously joined the old Russian illusions about East-Europe being the home for some kind of sub-humans, federations of ignorance.

Sometimes the west reacts to the Russia-warnings from East-European and Baltic countries like they would be stories told by traumatized patients. Those who have experienced violence - which is exactly what an occupation is about - are often invalidated, as if they wouldn't have "real" information, only colored and subjective experiences from an oppressive history. The real information comes instead from countries who lack this kind of history. Yet at the same time it would be impossible to imagine that for example the upset of some Jewish organizations for the public use of swastikas would be taken as "holocaust stress".

In the 19th century the story of a dominating evilness is related to Gestapo and Germany, because we persecuted Germany and have seen several movies and read a lot of books about

the matter. In the 20th century the story of a dominating evilness is Al-Qaida and Osama Bin Laden in the west.

In this territory the Moscow silovik-clique has acted easily in the West.

They are white men who don't wear turbans, their wives don't wear headscarfs, they wear high heels. They didn't seem to be intimidating in the 20's. The western films have portrayed KGB-agents as funny men who wear fur hats and stand on the Red Square, also books about the Gulag are read much less than the Holocaust-literature.

The occupation that lasted for 50 years also meant that the post-colonial countries first had to reconstruct their past, look for facts and learn a language so that they could tell about all the silenced matters during 50 years. Russia's regime has constantly tried to interfere with this dealing-with-the-past -process and they have for years tried to infiltrate in the neighbouring countries secret services, not to mention how they deleted the files. All this has made it more difficult for East-Europe to transfer matters from their past to the west.

If KGB would have been judged the same way as Gestapo or Al-Qaida, then Moscow's silovik-clique would never have got power.

Former KGB-agents would not run Russia and Russia's new upper class would not be FSB. Because Russia's colonialism hasn't been explained in our school books and because their patterns haven't been broken they didn't recognize Russia's post-modern imperialism when they should have paid attention to the first steps.

May this be an example of how important it is to persecute people who have in the past committed crimes against humanity, as well as recognizing them.

Sofi Oksanen spoke in Legacy of Totalitarianism today -seminar on Thursday in Prague.

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