



Russian Reflexive Control Campaigns Targeting Political Realignment of Ukraine's Democratic Allies: Critical Review and Conceptualization

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ABSTRACT:

This study examines Russia's ongoing reflexive control as part of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict in the framework of political realignment theory that explains tectonic changes in voter and political decision-making behavior in Western Ukrainian democratic allies. The research produces a concept model that suggests the types of attitudes of reflexive control messaging aimed at realigned political leaders and voter blocks. When applied to the USA (biggest donor) and the three top European aid supporters of Ukraine, the model suggests that reflexive control operations messaging will resonate positively with the National Collectivist camp of Trump, Le Pen, Farage, Chrupalla/ Weidel, and Wagenknecht especially in the areas of multipolarity of the world, non-interventionism, distrust of global institutions such as NATO, EU and United Nations and opposition to internationally coordinated sanctions. The messaging is assessed as critical of the policies and positions advocated by the cosmopolitan liberal camp led by Biden, Macron, Starmer, Scholz, Söder, and Merz. The appeal to the Radical Left is more nuanced due to its idealistic globalist platform, historic voter sympathies of Marxism and, in some cases, of the Russian Federation, and the inclination of some of its leaders to oppose the USA being a leader of cosmopolitan values.

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Introduction

Information warfare has become an unalienable part of contemporary conflicts as it is not only run in parallel to conventional operations but is also deployed in advance in order to put pressure on and steer the decision-making process of an opponent on a desired and predicted path. The Russian Federation has revived the theory and strategy of reflexive control as a tool in information warfare and has been applying it with varying but significant success for the last decade during the Russo-Ukrainian conflict.

Reflexive control is a strategy that consists of (1) modeling the adversary's decision-making framework, (2) understanding its decision-making process, (3) feeding the opposing side with information that, once fed into that process, will steer decision-making towards a desired and predetermined outcome, (4) continuously remodeling the input of information while taking into account the enemy's capability to recognize when such measures are taken and attempt to build a counter-model. While it is difficult to assess the Russian Federation's reflexive control *modus operandi*, it would be prudent to assume that given the ubiquitous rule of limited resources, they would be attempting to influence primarily only sections of the public and part of the decision-makers. Consequently, from the vantage point of Ukraine's Western allies, these efforts need to be identified and analyzed comprehensively, including which are the targets of the reflexive control campaigns, what behavior is expected to be triggered, and potentially why.

It is important to note that one of the natural tendencies of democratic societies is to split in camps concerning almost every issue and balance towards a middle ground that can usually be sustained over a significant period. That is why any identification of the targets of the reflexive control strategy should not be automatically condemned as "collaborators" or deficient in any of their own viewpoints, beliefs, or ideologies. Political parties are ultimately supported by voters, who should be respected and given freedom to exercise their choice in free countries as long as it does not violate the rights of other voters. However, in order to counter reflexive control in a democratic but effective manner, both civil and military leaders should be able to predict the adversarial decision-making model behind the reflexive control efforts, especially in one of its main components – determining the targets to be influenced.

This is the point of intersection between information warfare in its specific segment of reflexive control applied in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict and political realignment theory as an element of democratic theory in political science.

Political realignment theory has been developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the context of American politics in an attempt to explain the causes of the observed somewhat abrupt and enduring forms of changes in electoral patterns. Other scholars have gone as far as to claim that the patterns have not only fundamentally changed but that ideologies and electorates in two-party systems tend to reshuffle across newly-created ideological cleavages, even when deeply entrenched and solidified for several decades. While it has

not found a lot of public or even scholarly attention, its essence is often mentioned in public discourse – for example, Republicans abolishing slavery at the time of Lincoln, with many Democrats being skeptical of the move and the parties consequently switching positions on many racial issues. Political realignment has the potential to abruptly and fundamentally change the ideologies and electorates of parties, leading to both their leaders and voters becoming more or less susceptible to information warfare targeted at a respective decision-making outcome.

The deep realignment of ideologies and electorates could offer a better and more cohesive understanding of the effectiveness of reflexive control campaigns levied by the Russian Federation on Western allies of Ukraine compared to a focus on isolated individuals who are often put under investigation for links to Russian assets. The latter, when incorrect or only partially punctual, may lead to critical opportunity costs of the Western efforts to counter the reflexive control campaign or lead these efforts towards a direction that is ultimately rejected by democratic means.

This study will build a model that predicts the attitude of reflexive control campaign messages towards voter camps and political leaders that share respective principles and policies in the United States and the top three European providers of government aid to Ukraine.

Methodology

The study will outline the main message points that Russian information warfare has fed to Western allies (top suppliers of aid) of Ukraine during the decade-long conflict and then review how internal political realignment may have repositioned voter sentiment and political decision-makers positions in order to be more or less receptive of this data. The main message points will be identified through a critical review of existing literature. The authors have carried out an extensive literature review and critically evaluated the contents of multiple analyses of Russian information warfare, critically synthesizing the main information feed of the ongoing Russian reflexive control campaign.

The critical review of the political realignment theory fused with the messages will lead to a conceptualization of a model that may not only identify voter camps, political parties, and leaders targeted by the reflexive control campaign in the top suppliers of government aid for Ukraine but also predict the attitude of the reflexive control messages towards them.

The top suppliers of government aid for Ukraine will be objectively identified by measuring government support for Ukraine – this could be done in total nominal currency or in percentage of gross domestic product (GDP). Taking into consideration that the conflict is ongoing and, from the viewpoints of both Ukraine and Russia, the ally/adversary with the highest weight is the one supplying the most funds in nominal terms, this study will be based on this metric. Naturally, the percentage of GDP metric has substantial implications in measuring the potential of countries to increase their assistance and the level

of political commitment that the countries undertake, providing a venue for further research, especially once the conflict is resolved.

The data for ranking the countries supplying aid is taken from the Kiel Institute for the World Economy – an independent, non-profit economic think tank based in Germany, which has consistently ranked in the top 50 most influential think tanks globally, with its position climbing up to top 20 in the economics analysis niche. Accordingly, the US and the top three European government support contributors to Ukraine in nominal terms (€ billion) from January 24, 2022, to August 31, 2024, are :

1.USA:	75.10
2.Germany:	23.56
3.UK:	13.10
4.France:	11.99

As the political realignment model by Davies has identified three features per voter camp that have been formed according to primary and secondary aligning issues, and under the critical review of the reflexive control messaging, the authors evaluate the attitude towards each feature as strongly negative, slightly negative, neutral, slightly positive and strongly positive, the following equation is used:

$$A_{avg} = (w_1F_1 + w_2F_2 + w_3F_3) / 3$$

where:

- A_{avg} is the expected average attitude
- F_1, F_2, F_3 are the feature values for the group.
- w_1, w_2, w_3 are the weights (based on the attitude of the messages, whereas strongly negative is -2, slightly negative is -1, neutral is 0, slightly positive is +1, and strongly positive is +2)

Limitations

Attempting to predict how an adversary builds its reflexive control model is naturally limited by secrecy and covertness; thus, many of the assumptions the authors use in the paper cannot be proven without insider information about the Russian Federation camp. This is an inherent limitation that cannot be overcome by further research in the near term.

Another limitation is the difficulty in quantifying the process of political realignment in order to remove the intrinsic deficiencies in applying qualitative research methods. While it is possible to pinpoint several benchmarks for realignment, especially ones that are hypothetically of interest for the reflexive control campaign, political realignment is a fluid process with many local variables in some countries whose boundaries and frames are impossible to quantify conclusively.

It is also important to note here that the study does not pretend to explain the level of global government aid support for Ukraine that is influenced by Rus-

sian information warfare and reflexive control campaigns to a significant degree. Countries that have not provided government aid but could have done so if not influenced by or resisted Russian information warfare are not included in this sample. This is vital to note as there are major economies that have not provided aid, such as India and Brazil, where further research could hypothetically uncover an impact of Russian influence.

Theory Review

Reflexive control

Reflexive control theory is a type of information warfare theory that attempts to control an adversarial decision-making process by substituting the adversary's own assumptions and model with a predesigned set of information that ultimately changes and leads the way the adversary acts and behaves.^{1, 2, 3} The theory had been introduced and developed continuously throughout the history of the Soviet Union due to its leaders putting a significant emphasis on the control of people through a centralized leadership structure. While being in theory and practice on conventional battlefields and in the information warfare dimension for nearly a century, reflexive control has not been studied as rigorously as one would presume. This has started to gradually change throughout the last two decades with several substantial studies, such as the ones by Vasara⁴ and Thomas⁵ going deep into both the Soviet origins and the current application.

Reflexive control is defined by Smolyan⁶ in a publication for the Russian Federal Research center "Computer Science and Control" of the Russian Academy of Sciences Institute for Systems Analysis as: "an influence on subjects that inclines them to make decisions that have been pre-prepared by the controlling side" with four basic types:

- Manipulation through influence (direct impact)
- Manipulation by changing relationships (between individuals in a group)
- Manipulation by altering the order of importance
- Influence on the unconscious sphere of subjects

One of the older definitions given by the founders of the reflexive control theory in the 1960s, e.g., the Russian scholar Lefebvre,⁷ is as follows:

Reflexive control is the informational impact on objects, for the description of which it is necessary to use concepts such as consciousness and will. Objects of this kind include individuals as well as groups of people: families, groups, strata, nations, societies, civilizations. The term 'reflexive control' can be understood in two senses. First, as the art of manipulating people and groups of people. Second, as a specific method of social control.

In one of the most comprehensive Western studies on the topic, Thomas⁸ defines the reflexive control theory as:

...reflexive control occurs when the controlling organ conveys (to the objective system) motives and reasons that cause it to reach the desired decision, the nature of which is maintained in strict secrecy. The decision itself must be made independently. A “reflex” itself involves the specific process of imitating the enemy’s reasoning or imitating the enemy’s possible behavior and causes him to make a decision unfavorable to himself.

Reflexive control theory, in both its application and roots, is heavily dependent on the understanding of leadership in the Soviet Union and partially in the contemporary Russian Federation as centered on formulating and controlling group decisions and actions in contrast to what many Western scholars suggest as influencing and moderating decisions and setting examples.⁹ Vladimir Lefebvre, one of the creators of the reflexive control theory, has said, as quoted by Chotikul:¹⁰ “while all members of a collective are operating with a reality, the leader operates with a special reality in addition —the collective; he projects this special reality onto a special plotting board: then he transforms this image into a certain plan, and fulfills it.”

Contemporary reflexive control theory and deployment have been studied and/or refined by scholars such as Leonenko,¹¹ who has worked on fusing the military and civilian control aspects of the concept, Bogdanov and Chekinov,¹² who have worked heavily on adapting reflexive control to the modern information warfare framework, defining “an entirely new theatre of war,” which sets the scene for the struggle taking place in the human mind, Kiselyov¹³ and Ionov¹⁴ who has formulated the ways for delivering information to the adversary and substituting their assumptions in the decision-making model.

Reflexive control theory has been ingrained in the Russian Federation’s information warfare efforts, delineating the Russo-Ukraine military conflict for at least a decade.¹⁵ Some authors like Berzins¹⁶ were exceptionally quick to pinpoint the traits of reflexive control in misinformation, disinformation, and deception tactics levied by the Russian Federation even before the Crimea operations in 2014. Berzins¹⁷ also framed this new strategic information warfare in the NATO charter and obligations, speculating that Latvia has to raise the question of whether it activates Article 5 because “Russia has been targeting Latvia and its neighbors Estonia and Lithuania with a massive strategic communication campaign that includes, but is not limited to, information, psychological, and deception operations with the support of reflexive control.” Varzhanskyi¹⁸ suggests not only a more rigorous and detailed study of the reflexive control information warfare theory but also an adequate and quick-footed review of Western information warfare defense mechanisms, as some tools like OSINT could be exploited as a channel for feeding information and forming assumptions by the reflexive control effort led by the Russian Federation. Authors such as Gunnariusson and Bachmann,¹⁹ Kasapoglu,²⁰ and Hosaka²¹ not only analyze the reflexive control messaging, but also partially suggest or review implications for wider political realities in the European Union and NATO, especially migration, the rise of extreme ideologies, fragmentation of decision-making and disintegration of common goals.

Some recent authors such as Bugayova, Kagan, and Stepanenko²² have started linking certain decisions in Western allies of Ukraine to specific reflexive control efforts by the Russian Federation:

- Russia feeding information about its nuclear capabilities and threats in the autumn of 2022 has contributed significantly to the delayed deliveries of tanks, anti-tank weapons, and other important capabilities to Ukraine.
- US hesitancy to increase military support for Ukraine's third counter-offensive after Ukraine had already conducted two successful such operations has led to a missed opportunity in the winter of 2022-2023. This failure allowed Russia to proceed with partial mobilization and strengthen its defenses.
- Russia feeding information and speculation about possible unspecified and vague retaliation capabilities (including alluding to nuclear) in response to Ukraine using hypothetically supplied longest-range systems to strike deep within Russian territory has led to substantial opportunity costs for the Ukrainian side. In retrospect, it is evident that Russia has not used such retaliation capabilities to respond to deep drone strikes and is thus unlikely or even incapable of doing so.
- Western self-deterrence hasn't led to reciprocal self-deterrence on the Russian side, even though the Kremlin has actively advocated for such. Russia has successfully shored up alliances to supply military equipment from North Korea and Iran and, as of October 2024, is extremely likely to also include North Korean regular military personnel in its wartime effort.

Political realignment

Political realignment is a century-old theory in political science, but because it manifested and was applied so rarely, it tends to easily slip back into obscurity or disfavor over the decades.^{23, 24} One of the recent works that has propelled it back to the spotlight of both academic research and public attention is *The Economics and Politics of Brexit: The Realignment of British Public Life* by Stephen Davies.²⁵ Dr. Davies argues that there are salient issues that create "major ideological cleavages"²⁶ which splits societies in ideological camps. In the book, these cleavages are called "aligning issues" (Davies, 2020), and depending on which side of these issues people stand on, they tend to realign as political allies or political enemies regardless of whether they agree or not on a variety of other problems and solutions. The last salient issue in British politics had been economics, namely the size of government and the extent to which the government takes responsibility and permeates the lives of individuals and families; hence, people were either small-government/free-market or big-government/regulation voters with social values posing as a secondary, much less important salient.²⁷ In British politics, these two aligning issues created four camps of political allies and enemies – old labour and red Tories (social conservatism + big government), Thatcherites (social conservatism + small

government), progressive left (social liberalism + big government), and classical liberals (social liberalism + small government).²⁸

The intersections of these four camps are clearly visible from today's vantage point in the movie "Pride," which illustrated the major Miners' Strike in 1984. In similarity to today's podcasts where social conservatives without higher education, such as Charlie Kirk, appear as guests in *The Young Turks* (TYT) with highly educated social liberals, such as Cenk Uygur and Ana Kasparian, agreeing on almost everything in the areas of corporate money in politics, US foreign interventionism and foreign wars, regulating large corporations, etc., *Pride* shows us how gay London protesters stood shoulder to shoulder with Welsh coalminers fighting together. This realignment was possible because the Londoners and Welsh coalminers stood on one side of the primary salient (rejecting small government Thatcherite policies) and thus were able to overcome their split over the secondary social issues.

The cleavages, however, do not endure forever since aligning issues' importance erodes over time as new problems eclipse old ones or society simply finds consensual and working solutions as new aligning issues arise. This is a highly unpredictable and turbulent process that shuffles political camps as old alliances disintegrate, and people who once stood together supporting one party may find themselves pledging allegiance to different political leaders as old ones no longer make sense in a changed world; this is what Davies²⁹ calls "political realignment." Pivoting fifty years forward to the contemporary era, Davies³⁰ argues that Brexit is so difficult to explain and politics did not make sense due to a new realignment taking place – economics and the size of government no longer ranks as the most important aligning issue (developed world government expenses as a percent of GDP seem to be balancing with democracy at around 40-45% across the globe) and takes a step back to a secondary aligning issue (hypothetically) with cultural identity and the locus of decision-making taking the top place in cleavage of localism (or nationalism) versus cosmopolitanism (globalism).

Niemietz³¹ points out that with economists and political scientists struggling to understand why some people voted "Leave" and others "Remain," sociologists were uncovering a treasure trove of hints – for instance, remainers favorite brands were Twitter, Instagram, and Airbnb, while leavers preferred HP Sauce, Cathedral City Cheddar and Richmond sausages. This had nothing to do with international trade, as both camps used these brands both before and after Brexit took place. However, this hinted towards a cultural cleavage between localism and cosmopolitanism.

A relevant example of political realignment in US politics that takes place at the time of writing this study is found in a tweet given shortly after the endorsement of Donald Trump, where Robert F. Kennedy Jr. argues that liberal ideals have evolved and transformed over the last half a century, contrasting himself as a self-described "old-fashioned liberal" to the contemporary values of the Democrat party.³²

The phrase “old-fashioned liberals” is key. I’m one of those liberals! What that term means today is nearly the opposite of what it meant to my uncle and my father. Liberal ideals are equality before the law, freedom of speech, pro-working class policies, transparent government, opposition to war, regulation of large corporations, clean environment, and opposition to authoritarian policies. With some exceptions, old-fashioned liberalism is more at home in the Republican Party now than it is in the Democratic. But really, what this election is about is bigger than a clash of two parties. It is about building a popular coalition to overthrow a corrupt establishment.

While this statement needs to be read taking into consideration that Kennedy is de facto running against the Democrat party and in times of a heated election campaign, it is expected for such opinions to contain distortions, exaggerations, and omissions, it is evident that experienced contemporary politicians are not only noticing and acknowledging the political realignment but also using it overtly for political purposes.

It is extremely hard to find political science arguments about the rate at which realignments happen, but looking at the history of two-party system countries such as the UK and the US (where realignments are the easiest to spot), it is inevitable to gain the impression that such a tectonic shock tends to occur once every 50 years. For example, before Brexit and the Thatcher realignments, Britain experienced one such reshuffle in the 1920s when the Liberal Party declined and Labour arose, and before that, in the 1880s, when Joseph Chamberlain led a significant body of working-class voters to the Tories.³³

According to Davies,³⁴ the emerging four political camps reorganized under a leading cultural salient of nationalism/cosmopolitanism and a secondary salient of economics would be as follows:

Table 1. Realigned political camps.

RADICAL LEFT	COSMOPOLITAN LIBERALS
Globalist	Globalist
State controlled Economy	Free market
Pro-Social Liberty	Pro-Social Liberty
NATIONAL COLLECTIVISTS	NATIONAL LIBERALS
Dirigiste/Interventionist Economy	Nationalist
Nationalist	Free market
Culturally Conservative / Authoritarian	Culturally Conservative

Some examples of realigning political parties and leaders would be Jeremy Corbyn and Jean-Luc Mélenchon for the Radical Left (and TYT Cenk Uygur that is mentioned before), Tony Blair and Bill Clinton as Cosmopolitan Liberal, Marine Le Pen, Georgia Meloni, Nigel Farage and AFD as National collectivists (whose economic program pivot even farther to the left than Corbyn), CDU under Friedrich Merz being on the line between Cosmopolitan liberal and National

liberal (torn between global-ism in defense and EU and nationalism in immigration and culture), and LDP under Shinzo Abe as definitive National Liberals.

Main messages in the Russian Federation's reflexive control campaigns

Sanctions against Russia, Trade, and the Energy/Inflation Crisis in Europe

The ineffectiveness and reverse impact of sanctions against the Russian Federation, and especially limiting Western dependence on Russian energy exports, has been one of the main pillars of reflexive control messaging throughout the last decade.³⁵ The goal has been to impede and delay the imposition of new sanction packages³⁶ and implicitly link whatever economic hardships and challenges each nation would be facing to the sanctions that its government had levied against Russia. Hence, the discourse around inflation, taxation, budget deficits, energy costs, grocery costs, industrial production, and layoffs across the European Union and other Ukraine-supporting countries has started to reconcile towards the sanctions issue. Some of the dominant topics pushed in messaging are as follows.³⁷

- Sanctions will hurt the European economy as Russian resource exports have no alternatives.
- Russia will develop self-sufficiency in response to the sanctions, and this will only strengthen the Russian economy.
- Europe will face an energy collapse, its population will freeze in the winter, factories will stop, cities will go dark, and fuel and electricity prices will skyrocket.
- Europe will face hunger as Russian imports of grain have no substitute, and food will become too expensive for poor people and the middle class to buy.
- Even in sectors where the sanctions bring isolated damage to the Russian economy, the reverse damage to the European economy is even greater.
- There is no market logic in European industry giving up cheap Russian energy imports and substituting them with expensive American natural gas and oil, fueling price increases for European industry production, which then becomes uncompetitive.

A thread that runs through most of these topics is inflation – something that the managers of the Russian reflexive control campaigns have (correctly) envisioned as spiking in the post-COVID period and would create enormous challenges for most economies across the world with little painless decision to remedy that. This has been clear in the budget trajectory of the US, with the Trump administration being forced to run a massive budget deficit exceeding \$3 trillion in 2020 as a response to the pandemic with the Biden administration facing difficulty in fiscal consolidation – budget deficits for 2021 is \$2.7 trillion, for 2022 is \$1.3 trillion, for 2023 is \$1.7 trillion,³⁸ and the deficit for 2024 is expected to be almost \$2 trillion.³⁹ Even with the Federal Reserve conducting a restricting monetary policy by raising interest rates, if the federal government continues

to run budget deficits, this constitutes a relatively rare and weakly studied economic phenomenon called fiscal dominance.⁴⁰ Boccia and Left⁴¹ outline the perspectives for fiscal dominance and how inflation is an easily predictable and difficult-to-handle consequence:

Eventually, the Fed responded to elevated inflation with interest rate hikes and by reducing its asset holdings. While inflation appears to have slowed, it remains a problem, underscoring the challenge of using monetary instruments to deal with a fiscally driven problem. [...] When fiscal dominance reigns supreme, countries experience higher inflation and sometimes hyperinflation (high and accelerating inflation). Several historical examples illustrate the dangers of fiscal dominance. [...] Fiscal dominance has a track record of triggering severe inflation and leading to economic decline. With US deficits at crisis levels in the face of rising entitlement spending, and with the federal debt-to-GDP ratio exceeding its record high of 106 percent in 2028, the risks of fiscal dominance in the United States are rising.

Linking the existing and upcoming inflation to European sanctions is a skillful move in a reflexive control campaign as, at this point in time, the US and EU governments are en route to exhausting their fiscal space over the next decade or two. This means that the costs for servicing the debt will become so high that a fiscal consolidation would be so draconian that legislators and the executive branch will deem it politically impossible, thus reverting to outright monetization of debt, which in turn will fuel even greater inflation.⁴²

However, the underlying causes for this inflation are abstract and difficult to understand and analyze, especially for the overwhelming majority of voters who do not have deep economic education and learning, thus opening an opportunity for the Russian reflexive control campaign to link inflation to Western sanctions against Russia. There is a paradox here as European governments are, on the one hand, motivated to give powerful publicity to the sanctions levied in order to rally public support for them, but on the other, this falls into the model of the reflexive control campaign which links these publicized and easy to comprehend sanctions to the rampant inflation in the respective countries.

Russia and its President Vladimir Putin as Major Nuclear-armed Power/Threat in a Supposedly Multipolar World

The figure of the President of the Russian Federation takes center stage in the messaging in a pattern that is easy to discern, painting him as a strongman who instills fear in his enemies but has a kind heart for his people and allies. Yarova⁴³ argues that this messaging “serves the myth about Russia as a world superpower, with a powerful economy, nuclear weapons and a strong army that opposes aggressive America – allegedly, only Russia provides balance in the bipolar world, no one, except Russia, can oppose the US which seeks to destroy Europe and rule the whole world.”

Messages centered on the President of the Russian Federation are often relayed through him personally and branch out to other information warfare

topics. For instance, during the plenary session of the Sankt Petersburg economic forum in 2023, President Putin went to length to suggest that foreign sanctions are not hurting the Russian economy and, in the long term, are actually fostering autonomy.⁴⁴

Prioritizing private initiative was the third principle I mentioned a year ago. Last year, there were predictions that sanctions would pressure Russia to revert to a closed, command economy. However, as you know, we opted to give businesses more freedom and the way we applied this principle demonstrated that this was the right decision, as experience has borne out. Replacing transnational corporations that have left the Russian market was a notable event and a powerful boost for our businesses. Unfortunately, these corporations were unable to resist the sweeping political pressure exerted by international political elites.

While Putin's messages pit bilateral deals and self-sufficient economies against trade sanctions, the President's speeches on the economy rarely go into economic philosophy but are broadcasted as a product of his omnipresence and strength as a leader⁴⁵ who charts a clear vision for the development of the economy and society in contrast to the chaotic forces in entrepreneurial ecosystems and free markets in the West. In one of its most successful propaganda messages, Putin has been portrayed as a strong and selfless political leader who has brought order to the wild capitalistic and dominated by the oligarchic system in the Russian Federation with fairness and vision, punishing those who do not want to abide by a new patriotic system and giving indulgence to those who agree to work for the benefit of society.

In many of the messages concerning the President, he is portrayed as the most reasonable figure in the Russian government who, despite his strength and posture, is the one who is always open to negotiations, reasoning, and welcoming adversaries and competitors to reach out and reach a deal. As of the time of writing this article, the President is once again reiterating his willingness to conduct peace talks – hours after the Russian Federation bombed civilian infrastructure in Kharkiv on September 1 and 2: “Russia has never refused peace talks, but we need to deal with the bandits who have entered the country.”⁴⁶ In terms of reflexive control theory, this puts pressure on the political leaders of Ukraine's allies as the responsibility for peaceful negotiations and economic sanctions settlement has shifted from the Russian President towards Western governments. Another important aspect of this, however, is the overt willingness of the Russian Federation to lead bilateral talks with Ukraine without including Ukraine's allies or even the other signatories of the Budapest memorandum. This falls within the long-standing philosophy of Vladimir Putin, which also permeates the reflexive control of information warfare, namely that local conflicts should be decided in a bilateral fashion without the dirigisme of global hegemons. Naturally, this de-globalization of the international order would serve the interests of nuclear power such as the Russian Federation, which is assumed to be capable to defeat any other nation in an armed conflict aside

from the US and China (with a mutually assured destruction with UK), but also feed assumptions to the decision-making models of other states and current and potential allies of Ukraine that they can excuse their inaction through interpreting this war as a local conflict that has to be decided in a bilateral fashion.

A recurring theme in the reflexive control campaign is that Vladimir Putin is a strong, masculine leader who emphasizes traditional gender roles in society and is physically and mentally powerful enough to protect his country and people as opposed to weak, feminized, genderless, and powerless Western leaders who have abdicated from their responsibilities to protect their states in favor of transferring sovereignty to the globalist hegemon that is the United States.⁴⁷ While multiple authors have interpreted this broadcasting of manliness in an intersection with gender studies to supposedly uncover instability and a tendency for overcompensation in the Russian President's character and psychology,⁴⁸ from today's point of view and taking into account the concepts of information warfare and political realignment, it is much more probable that this had been a calculated propaganda technique deployed for more than a decade with a level of success and rapport established with other leaders⁴⁹ that should not be underestimated.

The campaign has also shrouded the goals and aims of the Russian Federation, attempting to portray its military moves as defensive and a preemptive strike to defend ancient Russian territories and the homeland against an impending and certain attack orchestrated by American and British arch-nemeses. This fuses tactics such as positive self-representation, negative other-representation, and self-victimization. At some points, specifically earlier stages centered on Crimea and the Donbas cities, Russia speculated about defending Russian populations that are subjected to terror by the Ukrainian government and specifically its fascist and Nazi factions, with diplomats often citing loosely formulated and not necessarily relevant United Nations Charter articles and other isolated international law postulates. Snegovaya⁵⁰ describes this message as "retaining superficially plausible legality for Russia's actions by denying Moscow's involvement in the conflict, requiring the international community to recognize Russia as an interested power rather than a party to the conflict, and pointing to supposedly-equivalent Western actions such as the unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo in the 1990s and the invasion of Iraq in 2003."

Ukraine and Its President Volodymyr Zelensky

While pivotal in terms of importance for the current information warfare campaign, the messaging on Ukraine's President Zelensky is not as relevant for this study due to the time frame of the political realignment that goes back well beyond his election. However, it is prudent to take an overview of how Russia's information tools are targeting Zelensky. According to Yarova,⁵¹ this topic is developed in a multi-pronged way, illustrated by the following examples:

- "Zelenskiy is an actor who has no idea what politics is."

- “Zelenskiy lost the country due to unprofessionalism, and if he had agreed to fulfill the Minsk agreements, he would have had a gas pipeline and a strong ally in the person of Putin.”
- “Zelenskiy is a drug addict; he escaped to Poland a long time ago; he is not in Kyiv.”
- “Zelenskiy is a weak person; he used to dress as a woman or a clown.”
- “National Corps” and “Azov” prepared a coup to overthrow Zelenskiy which is why he escaped.”
- “Zelenskiy should be on his knees asking Putin for negotiations.”
- “Zelenskiy does not agree to negotiations, postpones them because he wants to make money from the war.”

A notable part of information warfare directed at Zelensky has been a deluge of disinformation claiming his relatives have been purchasing luxury estate and goods using siphoned funds from Western aid, using fake pictures and videos of estate published for sale in various international realtor agencies – debunked by fact-checkers, but nevertheless having spread and received significant attention on social media.⁵² This resonates with the messaging concerning inflation and economic hardship that the reflexive control campaign has attempted to link with sanctions and decoupling from the Russian economy and international trade, thus pitting Western public and voters against both their own government for economic mismanagement and against Zelensky and Ukraine for abusing Western trust and deception.

As far as Ukraine goes, the messaging revolves around the supposedly flawed reasons for the existence of the state based on dubious interpretations of history as laid out by President Putin in his interview with US freelance journalist Tucker Carlson.⁵³ These are often followed by Russian grievances centered on the dissolution of the USSR and the emergence of contemporary independent Ukraine, alluding to the past romanticized greatness of the Soviet Union and triggering anger and bitterness over its fragmentation. In a typical nationalistic and populist rhetoric, the transmitted information is grounded in seemingly detailed and solid historical repudiation of Ukrainian existence and claims that these lands are historically part of Russia, assuming (somewhat correctly) that both voters and political decision-makers in their significant majority will not have the historical education and knowledge or the access to historical resources in order to analyze objectively such claims. Furthermore, Russian information warfare has often been portraying Ukraine as a failed state, taken over by Nazi factions that have served as channels for American interests and manipulation as Yarova⁵⁴ gives the following examples: “In Ukraine, the state supports the Nazis, the president, and his children are also Nazis, and school textbooks write about Nazis from the Azov battalion,” “Victoria Nuland tells about secret laboratories for the production of chemical weapons operating in Ukraine.” This might contrast with some occasional messaging, especially of older reflexive control campaign efforts, where Russia has expressed the need to have a buffer

zone between itself and NATO in some sort of sphere of influence over Ukraine, Georgia, and Belarus.⁵⁵

Dehumanization is another tactic that has been leveraged in line with information warfare history and theory. For example, in an article by Tass, former President and current high-ranking national security advisor Medvedev⁵⁶ states that “enraged beasts from nationalist battalions and territorial defense forces are ready to casually kill their own civilians in a bid to dehumanize Russia and tarnish its image as much as possible.” This tactic is known to decrease moral barriers to killing other human beings and has a long history of deployment in some of the bloodiest conflicts.⁵⁷

In short, the reflexive control campaign has attempted to paint Ukraine and its President Zelensky in a negative light, as a source of aggression that has to be eliminated, as a failed state that has been taken over by Nazi factions, and as an unreliable ally for other governments that would embezzle their aid and pursue its own aggressive goals with the resources, and will ultimately lose at the end versus a nuclear powered Russia that has won World War II and would never allow losing a large scale military conflict especially one that is so close to its borders and triggers reminiscence of WWII.

The USA, NATO, and International Interventionism

Messaging targeted at the image and posture of the United States has been reportedly straightforward, painting the US as a main geopolitical rival which is contrasted to the Russian Federation by its expansionist and aggressive foreign policies, often using other (poorer) states and nations as puppets, pitting them in a self-destructive fashion against larger powers in a multipolar world according to its containment doctrine.^{58, 59} This notes that the Russian Federation information warfare campaign aims to paint Russia as a defending party and the US as an attacking party in a recurring struggle for international dominance, where the US is trying to solidify its monopolistic position of hegemony while Russia fights for the right of multiple nations to create a multipolar world.

The reflexive control campaign seems to illustrate NATO as an unreliable partner, which is fully controlled by the US government, which in turn is known to abandon its allies and, even worse – to lure them towards self-destructive puppet behavior. Yarova⁶⁰ gives the following instances:

- “NATO cannot be trusted; these are frivolous people.”
- “in the French parliament, they advocated leaving NATO.”
- “NATO does not believe in the victory of the Ukrainians; NATO does not believe in itself either because it knows that everything will end with Russia’s victory, but they are just making money on the war.”

This clearly erodes trust in NATO documents and rules-based behavior, associating the union with the much easier-to-slander government of the United States, implying that allied governments are putting irresponsible and delusional blind trust in NATO whereas it behaves only to the extent of US interests, which in turn are painted as egoistic, treacherous, expansionist and aggressive.

Yarova⁶¹ argues that “the main purpose of the stories about the USA and NATO is to convince that not Russia, but the USA and NATO are responsible for the conflict in Ukraine, they provoked it, they put Ukraine under attack, and now they have left it without appropriate help. Ukrainians are not fighting for their country, but are a bargaining chip in the US intrigues.”

Other tangents of the information warfare campaign have been aimed at the *raison d'être* of NATO and the containment doctrine of the US, implying that it is in the selfish interest of the United States to periodically flare military conflicts around the borders of its major geopolitical contenders in order to suppress their development – hence a war initiated by a “US-puppet” such as Ukraine serves a dual goal of containing both the EU and Russia. Such speculations have a long history in Russian information warfare that dates back at least to the early years of the Cold War.⁶²

The reflexive control campaign also broadcasts massive information sets of data about the Russia-supported BRICS as a multipolar alternative to the US globalist hegemony, namely “to communicate Russia’s ‘great power’ status to the international community, and second, to develop a discourse where the unipolar vision of the world can be contested and the hegemonic positions of the West’s economic and political institutions can be challenged.”⁶³ BRICS and the multipolar world are also pictured as a stable pacifist alternative and a solution to the current global turbulence of uncontrolled immigration contrasted with the foreign interventionism by the US, which has caused these waves of migrants, whose burden is mostly carried by the European societies especially when combined with globalist and gender ideologies which reject the requirement for migrants to integrate in nationalist frameworks and “traditional” local values.⁶⁴

“Anti” rhetoric narratives strive to foment sentiments of opposition toward such targets as the EU, NATO, the United States, immigration, or liberalism. Although they appear throughout the Euro-Atlantic area, they are most discernible in EU member states, and they are typically accompanied by subtle and overt Russian efforts to bolster far-right parties. Furthermore, Russia’s ubiquitous and continuous push for conservative values and a nationalist agenda, to a large extent, represents the epitome of modern Russian self-advertisement, which resonates particularly well with nationalistic parties across Europe.

Immigration serves as a wedge in the EU-NATO-US trichotomy and as a source of grievances of most Ukrainian allies against the globalist hegemon. The US has had a solid footing in Russian information warfare that should not be easily overshadowed by its intersecting with other social studies in the area of migration, gender, and economics, but continuously reviewed as a bedrock of a purposeful and, to some degree, successful reflexive control information warfare campaign.^{65, 66}

Germany and the EU, Degradation of the Liberal Order in Europe by Refugee Waves and Gender Ideology

Information warfare directed at the EU and its largest economy, Germany, has been sustainably targeted at eroding the global trust in democracy as a superior social order and describing them as subservient to the egoistic interests of the US. Germany has been a soft target for Russian cognitive campaigns due to its role in World War II – it is speculated that Germany is a source of Nazism which is syphoned towards Ukraine, that support for Ukraine is foolish as the last time Germany dared to attack Russia it faced a catastrophic defeat that will repeat itself, and that German politicians should rather improve the quality of life of their citizens, who are struggling under the burden of long work hours, massive taxes, unfair spending on migrants, etc.: “the main goal of the narrative “Germany and its politicians” is to undermine trust in the country’s government, to cause protests, because Germany does not care about its citizens, only migrants receive benefits, and Germans are forced to work excessively, without rest to ensure this political course of the government; there is no freedom of speech here, the state can take away private property, and henceforth, due to Ukraine’s support, there will also be high fuel prices and food shortages.”⁶⁷ The goal is easily deciphered – scaring German voters towards rebellion against the current course of supporting Ukraine, convincing them that just as Germany lost a war against the Red Army, it is now doomed to lose again.

The topic of refugees has been effectively developed within the reflexive control campaign to associate the wave of Ukrainian refugees with earlier waves of Middle Eastern and African refugees to Europe, which have already become a controversial topic in European politics, splintering to extreme parties across the political spectrum. Multiple subtopics have been elaborated, such as speculating that Ukrainian refugees are already rich (often accompanied with pictures of expensive cars) and are needlessly taking advantage of EU social systems, that Ukrainian refugees contain many military-aged men that are deserters underlying the corruption in the Ukrainian government, that Ukrainian women refugees are joining the sex industry across EU countries, that Ukrainian refugees put excessive pressure on those already burdened by Middle Eastern refugee support systems, ultimately resulting in higher taxes, inflation, etc.⁶⁸

Russian Nuclear Weapons Doctrine as an Ultimate Threat

A major recurring theme in Russian information warfare has been a perpetual shift between suggested clarity and supposed ambiguity in the country’s nuclear weapons doctrine. While the clarity has been used mostly for diplomatic purposes and maintaining Russia’s reputation among the wider international community as a predictable nuclear power, the ambiguity has been leveraged as a threat toward Ukrainian allies to put limits to their support and a long list of strings to how Ukraine might use West-ern weapon systems. These limitations have gradually loosened as Western allies and Ukraine slowly tested the limits of Russian ambiguity. Still, the tempo has come at a great strategic and human cost for Ukraine itself.

The latter has become repeatedly apparent after each missile barrage of the Russian Federation that intentionally or accidentally hits civilian objects and/or

infra-structure. As of the time of writing this study, one such attack has been unfolding in real time – the hit on the Kharkiv sports hall and subway station. Several prominent Ukrainian journalists, analysts and international supporters of Ukraine have immediately directed scathing criticism at Western political decision-makers who have imposed limits on Ukraine using Western weapons against targets on Russian territory, contrasting these with the steep human cost on civilians that the Kharkiv hit has taken.^{69, 70, 71, 72} Gary Kasparov, a prominent Russian dissident and Ukraine supporter, goes as far as to directly blame the Biden administration for enabling the hit in two consecutive tweets.^{73, 74}

Special delivery from Russia and its partners, North Korea & America. This is now Biden's foreign policy legacy. Ukrainian civilians today and the US & European NATO soldiers that will be on the front lines next.

The Biden admin has blood on its hands for refusing to let Ukraine defend itself. ...

Ukraine can never rebuild the lives lost and the terror inflicted by Russia.

The nuclear ambiguity reflexive control campaign has had an all-encompassing impact on virtually all types of weapon support. Western allies had been delaying at stages deliveries of tanks, rocket artillery, anti-aircraft installations, contemporary fighter jets (F-16s), and various types of middle and long-range missiles that are capable of striking targets inside Russian Federation territory.

It is important to note that nuclear threats by the Russian Federation have been a recurring theme in its reflexive control campaigns both in the field of information warfare and the real deployment of arms. Snegovaya⁷⁵ describes this tool as “simultaneously threatening the West with military power in the form of overflights of NATO and non-NATO countries’ airspace, threats of using Russia’s nuclear weapons, and exaggerated claims of Russia’s military prowess and success.”

Conceptualization and discussion

Conceptualization

Building on the critical review of the messaging, it is possible to put the reflexive control campaign in the context of the main features of the realigned political camps in the Western-developed liberal economies, revealing the attitudes and assumptions that the Russian Federation transmits to their decision-making models at both the individual leadership levels and the collective voter groups:

Now, it is possible to build a predictive model for the targets of the reflexive control information warfare campaigns – both in terms of approval/affirmation (inviting potential allies and demotivating potential support for Ukraine) and disapproval/rejection (sowing discord and undermining current support for Ukraine):

Table 2. Reflexive control campaign transmitted attitudes and assumptions vis-à-vis features of realigned camps.

Feature	Attitude of the reflexive control campaign messaging	Main assumptions transmitted
Globalist	Strongly Negative (-2)	<p>The globalist order of the USA as a hegemon with NATO and EU as puppets is unfair and unraveling. Sanctions against the Russian Federation are a product of globalist dirigisme and weaken the economies of everyone but USA.</p> <p>Sanctions create inflation in the West, which is the bane of the poor and the middle class but makes the rich – richer. Inflation will lead to people freezing in the winter, gasoline shortages, hungry children and families, etc.</p> <p>Uncontrolled migration has ruined Western nation states.</p> <p>Ukraine’s President Zelensky is a globalist puppet.</p>
State controlled / interventionist economy	Slightly Positive (1)	<p>Energy and mining are predominantly state-controlled sectors where cooperation with the Russian Federation is prospective.</p> <p>Leaders should strike bilateral deals in state-regulated and controlled sectors such as energy, mining, resources, farming.</p> <p>A strong leader is omnipotent and can take clear and visionary decisions for the economy, in contrast to liberal market chaos.</p> <p>A strong and interventionist leader can steer an economy to be self-sufficient and combat inflation.</p>
Pro-Social Liberty	Strongly Negative (-2)	<p>Gender ideology has ruined Western society.</p> <p>Uncontrolled immigration that does not require immigrants to respect “traditional” local nationalist values has ruined Western society.</p> <p>Tolerance to crime has ruined Western society.</p> <p>Weak “feminized” political leaders lack the strength and vision and have ruined Western countries.</p> <p>Putin’s populist messages however stress citizenship rather than ethnic or religious belonging.</p> <p>LGBTQ people and, by extension, their nation are dehumanized.</p>

Free market	Neutral (0)	Sanctions as barriers to free trade are negative products of globalist decisions. The free market as an engine for globalization and cosmopolitanism should be cautioned.
Nationalist	Strongly Positive (2)	Russia is a leading force in a multipolar and unfair world; BRICS is born from the disintegrating unfair globalist system under the US hegemon. Local conflicts should be decided bilaterally without involving and inflicting harm on other countries. A nationalist and historical interpretation proves that Ukraine has no right to exist and there is no Ukrainian nation; most of these lands are historic lands of Russia. People can identify with a nation and be proud of their citizenship in contrast to the opaque and chaotic forms of Western peoples, blurred by gender ideologies and mass migration. An almost cult reverence to the nuclear arms (and to a lesser extent other “wunderwaffe”) as a guarantee for the existence and protection of the nation-state.
Culturally Conservative	Strongly Positive (2)	Praise of “traditional” gender roles juxtaposed by gender ideology in the West and visual caricature images of Zelensky in his previous role as an actor. Praise of strong masculine leaders at the helm of the state and warriors at the battlefield. Strong emphasis on identity through history. Preserving cultural identity is a logical step to a multipolar world where countries will preserve their identity and autonomy in contrast to the vision of the globalist hegemon USA.

Table 3. A predictive model for the targets of the reflexive control campaign – valued features.

RADICAL LEFT	COSMOPOLITAN LIBERALS
Globalist (-2)	Globalist (-2)
State controlled Economy (1)	Free market (0)
Pro-Social Liberty (-2)	Pro-Social Liberty (-2)
NATIONAL COLLECTIVISTS	NATIONAL LIBERALS
Dirigiste/Interventionist Economy (1)	Nationalist (2)
Nationalist (2)	Free market (0)
Culturally Conservative / Authoritarian (2)	Culturally Conservative (2)

Using the equation, it is possible to expect that the reflexive control attitude towards the voter groups after the political realignment and as function their political leaders and parties is as follows:

- (RADICAL LEFT) Aavg = - 1
- (COSMOPOLITAN LIBERALS) Aavg = -1,3
- (NATIONAL COLLECTIVISTS) Aavg = 1,6
- (NATIONAL LIBERALS) Aavg = 1,3

Using this model, it is possible to expect that the Russian reflexive control campaign will provide positive messages to voters in the national collectivist and national liberal camps, building a favorable view of the respective policies and the Russian Federation as sharing and promoting them and the respective local political leaders that share these realigned principles and negative messages to voters in the radical left and cosmopolitan liberal camps, convincing them of the ineffectiveness of the respective policies, sowing distrust towards Western political leaders that share these principles and promote such policies.

United States of America

The political realignment process in the US has taken place in parallel to that one in the UK with little fundamental divergences, culminating in the election of President Donald Trump against multiple odds and, to the dismay of political scientists, pollsters, and pundits, completely solidifying and becoming the new norm in the 2024 Presidential election with President Trump picking J.D. Vance for his new vice-presidential candidate, who is explicitly a national collectivist according to the realignment model of Stephen Davies.⁷⁶ The salient of localism/globalism is especially evident in the US realignment as the Republican Party since Ronald Reagan has been a staunch supporter of globalism, having forged a steadfast and successful alliance with European powers against the USSR and established rapport with China to contain Russia under Kissinger. The GOP has also championed free trade and soft power through internationalizing business, which has also led them to support big business and entrepreneurs' (led mostly by white CEOs and founders) access to cheap immigrant labor hand over regulatory and anti-free market raise of wages that has been supported by labor unions. These principles have been almost completely negated by the realigned voter coalition under President Trump, who has rallied a nationalist philosophy of non-interventionism, isolationism, "anti-woke" policies in education, protectionist trade policies, and bilateral trade and military deals, personifying China as the new nemesis of the USA.⁷⁷ With the Democratic Party realigning on its own to promote loosely-controlled immigration, Trump has seen a massive influx of support from Latino voters (running equal with Vice-President Kamala Harris in this voter group according to some polls) and a significant boost in Black voters who have seen their wages and home affordability come under pressure from undocumented immigrants.

On the other side of the isle, Barack Obama and President Biden have presided over tectonic realignment processes in the US left as well. With the previous realignment having concentrated working-class voters, labor unions, and suburban citizens in the Democratic Party under principles of moderate protectionism, regulated migration, pacifism, and non-interventionism and expanded state intervention in the economy, Barack Obama's initial adherence to this principle at the beginning of his first term ultimately collapsed in the early 2010s with the Arab spring, the big-tech boom, and the dominance of US multinational corporations both at home and abroad. Under Obama, the Democratic Party built a powerful coalition of corporate executives and successful IT entrepreneurs with urban socially liberal voters who favored a massive liberalization of immigration and integration and proliferation of racial and gender studies and ideology in both government policy and private sector operations. In areas such as pacifism and immigration, President Obama actually issued significantly contradictory positions at the very start of his first term and going into his second. In complete juxtaposition to the contemporary Democratic Party position, Obama opposed Romney's suggestion that Russia is the biggest geopolitical threat to America, arguing that the Cold War has been over for more than twenty years.⁷⁸ President Biden has solidified this realigned coalition, especially in the area of execution, as many of his self-professed qualities and intentions have been eclipsed by adherence to liberal Congress members and Secretaries (though a Harris presidency might bring a higher degree of intervention, as pointed by Dalio,⁷⁹ while moving the liberal party towards a typical neoconservative stance on foreign interventionism.^{80, 81}

Using the conceptualized model, it is possible to suggest that President Trump, especially after choosing J.D. Vance as a running mate in 2024, is a national collectivist leader building an increasingly diverse voter coalition of both national collectivists and national liberals is expected to be targeted by reflexive control operations and messages that reaffirm his and his voters' principles and policies in the area of non-interventionism, bilateral conflict resolution, cultural identity and distrust of cosmopolitan structures such as NATO and the EU in the strongest and most positive way (value 1,6).

Yet, President Biden, with his voters and policies as a cosmopolitan liberal, is expected to be targeted by the reflexive control campaign in a strongly negative way (value -1,3). Biden's reliance on global unions such as NATO and EU to advance US and allied interests at the international stage as well as in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, his willingness to dedicate massive US funds to foreign interventionism while silently supporting advocates of extremely liberal positions in Congress would be harshly criticized by Russian information warfare campaign efforts.

Germany

The political realignment in Germany has been very evident in the rise of AFD led by Tino Chrupalla and Alice Weidel, which aligns with the national collectivist definition, fusing Euroscepticism and non-interventionism in international

relations with a moderate domestic economic platform and a varying opinion of NATO and transatlantic partnership, emphasizing its role as a defensive alliance and not intervening in conflicts that do not involve NATO members.⁸² However, the AfD has taken nationalist positions in terms of staying away from the Russo-Ukraine war, urging a peaceful solution (without any explanation of what this means), and including Russia as a bilateral partner in the EU security structure.⁸³ Mirroring AfD's position on Ukraine and Russia is the new party of Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance – Reason and Justice (BSW) led by Sahra Wagenknecht, which has splintered from the German far left in order to advocate for less globalism and more nationalist solutions to immigration, environmentalism, social and cultural value identification and economic policies.⁸⁴ Therefore, even though BSW self-identifies as a radical left party, in the political realignment model, it fits far better in the nationalist collectivist block especially vis-à-vis the Russo-Ukraine war and the historic roots of its voters (along with those of AfD) in Eastern Germany as Pfeifer⁸⁵ points out: “The demand for rapprochement with Putin’s Russia is particularly successful in the eastern German states that made up the former nation of East Germany; it was closely allied with the former Soviet Union until the end of the Cold War and German reunification.”

An extremely problematic party and voter block to classify under the realignment model is Die Linke led by Wissler and Schirdewan. While its program aligns effectively with the radical left designation, its views and goals in the area of globalism are so idealistic and impossible to apply in practice (complete global disarmament, for example) that it is difficult to decide whether they indeed pursue a globalist principle or are just using that label and long shot suggestions as a mask for a nationalist agenda that they intend to implement in short to medium term – exiting and even dissolving NATO, opposing US interventionism across the board, canceling all bilateral security agreements, among other.^{86, 87, 88}

The globalist salient in Germany is strongly supported by the currently governing coalition led by SPD's Olaf Scholz and in terms of international institutions, international support to Ukraine and free trade by its main systemic opposition coalition of CDU/CSU, though the latter is touching the social conservative features and nationalist features in terms of cultural identity and immigration reform. The problem with Scholz maintaining the current course of the SPD has been clearly evident in the regional elections in 2024, where the ruling coalition's party collapsed due to the inability to realign effectively and, to a large extent, be suppressed by stagflation cues that would be devastating to the German society.^{89, 90} Scholz's plan to build a firewall uniting all parties against AfD would likely even further disintegrate the SPD's ability to realign effectively, and its voter base may splinter further between the cosmopolitans in CDU/CSU (assuming they continue this course) and the nationalists and radical leftists in Linke, AfD, and BSW.

United Kingdom

In the UK, realignment has been advanced and possibly finishing on the left with the Labor party of Keir Starmer solidifying its grip on cosmopolitan and a portion of the radical left voters, but on the right, it is still ongoing with the Conservative party in an existential crisis as it tries to reinvent itself as a slightly interventionist on the economy salient and a moderately globalist on the primary salient party but is contested by an aggressive Reform national collectivist party led by Nigel Farage. With the Conservative party currently in the leadership elections process and having eliminated Priti Patel from the contest on September 4, 2024,⁹¹ it is difficult to pinpoint whether the party will manage to realign and in which direction. All three outcomes, excluding Radical Left, are possible, to a large extent depending on which leader will emerge among Robert Jenrick, Kemi Badenoch, James Cleverly, Tom Tugendhat, and Mel Stride.

France

French realignment advancement is quite the opposite of the UK – the right is close to completing its reversal and reshuffling as a national collectivist major party that pulls other parties to the right of the isle to its positions and values. The cosmopolitan salient currently hosts the cosmopolitan liberals around President Macron and the large Front Populaire coalition, which includes radical leftists and some moderate cosmopolitan liberals who are currently split on the issue of whether to impeach Macron). What is rather defining of the French realignment is that, on the one hand, the National Rally economic program is extremely leftist and collectivist when compared to that of Reform in the UK and the GOP in the US, but on the other, La France Insoumise is less globalist than expected – holding soft Eurosceptic positions, suggesting withdrawal from free trade agreements such as TTIP and CETA, even going as far as discussing the withdrawal from NATO and resist being drawn into US foreign interventionism.⁹² Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the leader of La France Insoumise, is known to have expressed tepid support for Ukraine, voicing some support over leaving Crimea under Russian authority and having opposed security arrangements and agreements between Paris and Kyiv on multiple occasions.⁹³

Marine Le Pen, the leader of the National Rally, and falling perfectly within the political realignment camp of national collectivists, has traditionally expressed positive assessments of the Russian Federation and its President Putin, claiming he is a “defender of the Christian heritage of European civilization”⁹⁴ and has opposed sanctions by the international community.⁹⁵ Le Pen has used rhetoric concerning sanctions, inflation, the multipolar world and US interventionism that are extremely close to the discourse of the original messaging of the reflexive control information warfare leveraged by the Russian Federation.⁹⁵

As per the predictive model, Marine Le Pen and its voters fall perfectly under a national collectivist umbrella and would be aligned with the principles and policies advocated by the reflexive control campaign in support of the Russian Federation’s position on all features. With President Macron’s party and follow-

ing aligning as cosmopolitan liberals, the model suggests that they will be targeted extremely negatively, while the variations in the globalist alignment of the French Radical Left might suggest a caveat at the prediction of negative targeting and may prompt a slightly negative or even neutral stance.

Table 4. A predictive model for the targets of the reflexive control campaign – valued national leaders (also signifying the managed parties and the voter blocks realigned thereto).

RADICAL LEFT (-1) Jean-Luc Mélenchon Janine Wissler/ Martin Schirewan	COSMOPOLITAN LIBERALS (-1,3) Joe Biden Emmanuel Macron Keir Starmer Olaf Scholz Markus Söder/Friedrich Merz UK Conservatives (in leader elections)
NATIONAL COLLECTIVISTS (1,6) Donald Trump Marine Le Pen Nigel Farage Tino Chrupalla/Alice Weidel Sahra Wagenknecht UK Conservatives (in leader elections)	NATIONAL LIBERALS (1,3) UK Conservatives (in leader elections)

The model suggests that reflexive control operations messaging will resonate positively with the national collectivist camp of Trump, Le Pen, Farage, Chrupalla/ Weidel, and Wagenknecht, especially in the areas of multipolarity of the world, non-interventionism, distrust of global institutions such as NATO, EU and United Nations and opposition to globally coordinated sanctions. The messaging is suggested to be critical of the policies and positions advocated, especially by the cosmopolitan liberal camp led by Biden, Macron, Starmer, Scholz, Söder, and Merz. The appeal to the Radical Left is more nuanced due to its idealistic globalist platform, historic voter sympathies of Marxism and, on occasion, the Russian Federation and the inclination of some of its leaders to oppose the US being a leader of the globalist values.

Conclusion

Multiple studies have investigated the Russian Federation’s information warfare campaign as mainly reactive in an attempt to justify the invasion of Ukraine and confuse and stagger political decision-makers and voters in Western allies, slowing down their reactions and the rate at which they provide aid. For instance, de Boer⁹⁶ notes that “the Kremlin primarily employs disinformation strategies to retroactively react to the events caused by conventional warfare; as a result, disinformation narratives adapt to the current war by presenting

justifications for the invasion and polluting the information available about the events of the war.” Yet a deeper inter-sectional look vis-à-vis the political realignment theory provides more context and reveals aspects beyond reactivity and retroactivity, suggesting that the Russian Federation’s reflexive control campaign considers future trends that will influence the Western allies’ decision-making models. For instance, messaging concerning the economic impact of sanctions and refugees with explicit and implicit tangent to inflation indicates a forward-looking tactic that expects the increase in money supply and signs of fiscal dominance in large Western economies to sustainably generate inflation in consumer prices and/or assets which will in turn put sustainable pressure on both low-income and middle-income families. The latter is highly likely to react by looking to externalize guilt and responsibility (in this case correctly) to external agents with their governments imposing sanctions and increasing refugee waves by supporting Ukraine as a prime target for the Russian Federation’s information warfare efforts. This has rallied voters in recently realigned voting blocks to at least some electoral success (for instance, in Germany and France) that has served the strategic goals of the reflexive control operations of the Russian Federation – to slow down the rate at which Western allies provide aid to Ukraine.

It has been tempting for political decision-makers in the West to lay the blame either at the feet of anti-democratic voters and leaders to which there is little statistical evidence⁹⁷ or at the feet of Russian human intelligence operations and some political leaders being recruited by Russian spy agencies; however, even if this is true in limited cases (so far, EU and US counter-intelligence agencies have successfully uncovered spies only at low aid and few members of legislative bodies level), it may blind us to the real effectiveness and agenda of Russian information warfare efforts in exploiting the democratic realigning electorate and the emerging political cleavages. Consequently, Western counter-measures might be too concentrated on intercepting human intelligence and invest insufficient time and effort at the information warfare battlefield. In the realm of the cognitive war, the Russian reflexive control campaign may reap huge results with limited investment by simply being smarter and playing the game of democracy better than the democracies themselves.

Further Research

A systemic discourse analysis of the messages deployed in the reflexive control campaign may yield a quantitative and systemic justification of the attitudes and assumptions synthesis as well as the allocation of political parties and leaders to the predictive model. Furthermore, the political realignment theory evolves continuously and will undoubtedly uncover more features of the political camps that can be reviewed.

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