

Report

Russian Disinformation in Libya

Kraków 2024

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About the project



Instytut Badań
nad Turcją



Disinformation
in MENAT



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Introduction



Image from the official @mfa_russia account on "X"¹

Libya, which captured global attention in 2011, has gradually faded from the spotlight as the revolution transformed into a protracted and devastating civil war. External interventions exacerbated the difficulties of rebuilding a state divided and deeply entrenched in tribal structures. While Arab states quickly pursued their security interests in Libya, Russia acted more cautiously, opting to stay on the periphery. However, through a gradual increase in its presence, Moscow managed to achieve most of its tactical and strategic objectives, avoiding strong reactions from the West.

As U.S. policymakers began scrutinizing Russian activities, they primarily focused on private military and security companies linked to the Kremlin, such as the Wagner Group. Yet, even after numerous reports documenting Russian intervention, the U.S. response remained tepid, limited to official disapproval and criticism of Moscow's use of mercenaries. Russian actions in Libya, however, extended well beyond deploying Kremlin-controlled mercenary groups or occupying strategic oil fields. Detailed analysis of Russian intervention reveals parallels with previous operations, providing insights into how Moscow might act in other regions with security gaps in the future.

This report aims to thoroughly examine and document Russia's disinformation activities in Libya and their impact on the country's political, social, and international dynamics. It seeks not only to identify the techniques and tools of disinformation employed by Russia

¹ Post on the "X" platform dated 18 March 2021, [online:]
https://x.com/mfa_russia/status/1372570221593161733 (access: 20.12.2024).

but also to present the current state of Libya, including its media landscape and internal conflicts. **A specific objective of the report** is to analyze the nature and structure of information campaigns conducted by the Russian Federation through traditional media such as *Russia Today Arabic/RT Arabic*², *Sputnik Arabic* and other pro-Russian platforms, including selected social media. The report focuses on analyzing the impact of these activities on local public opinion, including their role in intensifying polarization and deepening Libya's internal crises. Additionally, the report highlights Russian disinformation efforts concerning Poland and how Poland is portrayed in pro-Russian media in Libya.

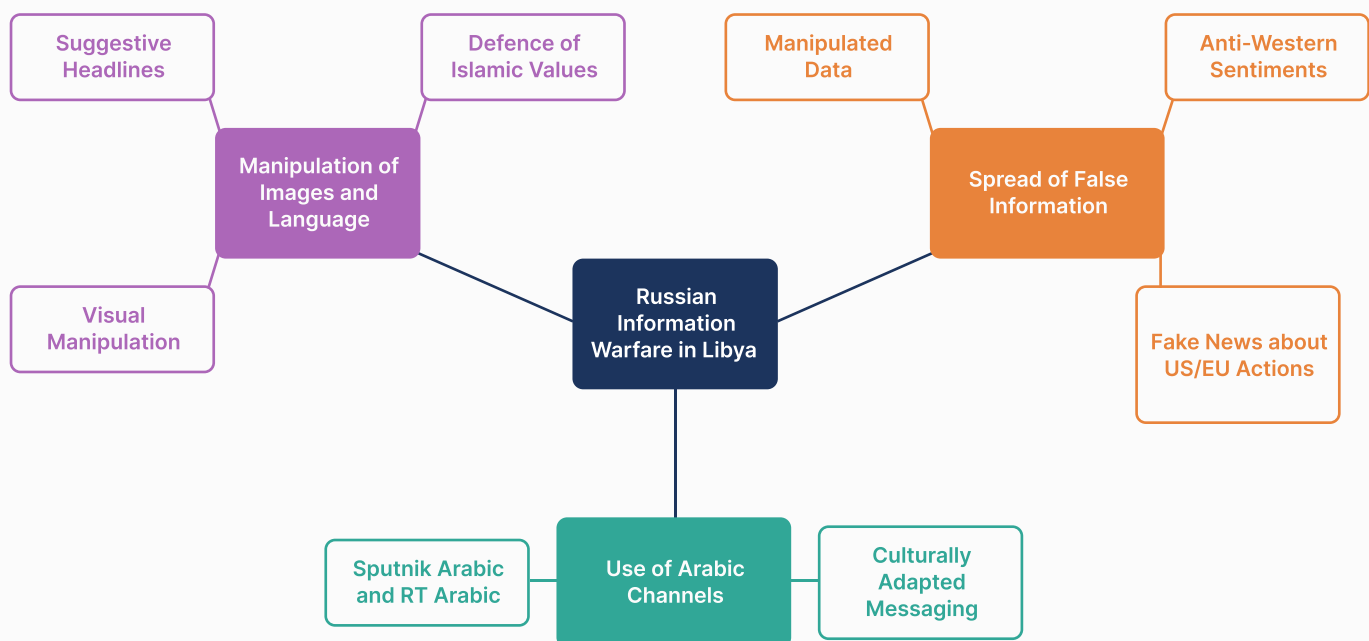
The document concludes with recommendations for limiting the reach of Russian disinformation and effectively countering narratives that undermine the broader security and perception of Poland and Central Europe.

² The service is available at: Arabic.RT.com (access: 20.12.2024).

Chapter 1.

Russia's Information Strategy in Libya

Russia's information strategy in Libya is based on the principles of hybrid and information warfare, which hold a central position in the Russian Federation's military doctrine and foreign policy. These principles aim to enable Moscow to achieve its political objectives with limited military involvement by enhancing its influence over Libya's internal dynamics and international perception.



Graphic 1: Mind map – Russian Information Warfare in Libya.
Source: Author's Elaboration.

An analysis of Russia's activities in Libya highlights key strategic objectives of its disinformation efforts, including **weakening Western and NATO influence, creating Russia's image as an alternative leader, and supporting pro-Russian political actors**. Russia portrays Western actions as destabilising and contrary to Libya's interests, aiming to limit the influence of the United States and the European Union. In the context of internal conflicts, Russia promotes anti-Western narratives that foster alliances with local political actors while diminishing public support for the West. Through its disinformation campaigns, Russia positions itself as a neutral mediator and stabiliser, contrasting its actions with the West's unsuccessful interventions. By emphasising its strong relationships with regional states, Russia seeks to build an image of a trusted partner that can rival Western influence. Supporting selected Libyan factions, often those opposed to internationally recognised authorities, Russia aims to strengthen its position in the region while delegitimising solutions proposed by the so-called international community.

Russia's collaboration with General Khalifa Haftar is a prime example of such actions. Russia supports Haftar's operations, including through propaganda efforts, while simultaneously undermining trust in other Libyan leaders.

The Russian information war in Libya employs the following disinformation techniques:

Dissemination of false information

Russian media outlets and pro-Russian online platforms publish manipulated information that distorts reality and misleads both the Libyan population and the international community. Examples include fabricated reports about alleged actions of the United States or the European Union in Libya, as reflected in headlines and articles such as: "Why Western 'aid' fuels continuous chaos in this African country"³; "13 years ago, NATO operations caused civilian deaths: Will the alliance ever be held accountable?"⁴

Utilisation of Arabic information channels

Russia actively employs Arabic-language media outlets, such as *Sputnik Arabic* and *RT Arabic*, to reach the Libyan population and the broader Arab world. Messaging tailored to the cultural expectations of the audience gains greater credibility. For instance, narratives emphasise statements such as: "While Western mainstream media told us how bad Gaddafi was, Vladimir Putin was right in condemning NATO's attack on Libya and questioning the legality of the intervention and the removal of the leader of another sovereign country"⁵.

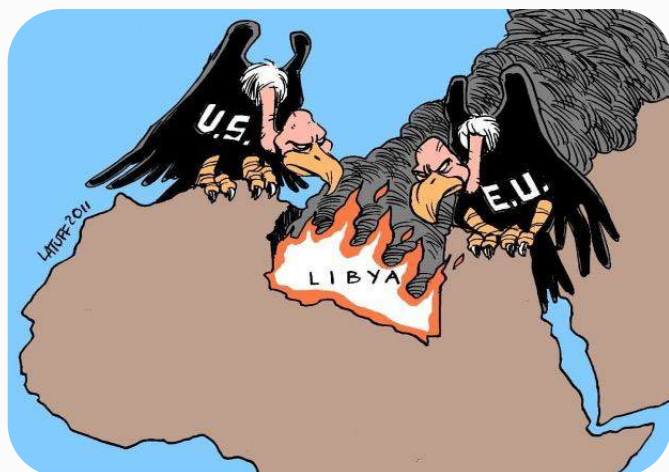
Manipulation of images and language

Disinformation involves visual manipulation, suggestive headlines, and language designed to provoke strong emotional reactions. Pro-Russian platforms frequently utilise Libyan street art and graffiti to enhance the authenticity of their messaging, often repurposing works by Libyan artists in entirely different contexts (photographs below).

³ A post on the Telegram platform from 17 September 2024, [online:] https://t.me/RU551470D4y_ENFR/29894 (access: 20.12.2024).

⁴ An article on the Azerbaijan24 platform from 29 August 2024, [online:] <https://www.azerbaycan24.com/en/13-years-ago-a-nato-operation-caused-civilian-deaths/> (access: 20.12.2024) and a post on the Telegram platform from 29 August 2024, [online:] https://t.me/RU551470D4y_ENFR/29407 (access: 20.12.2024).

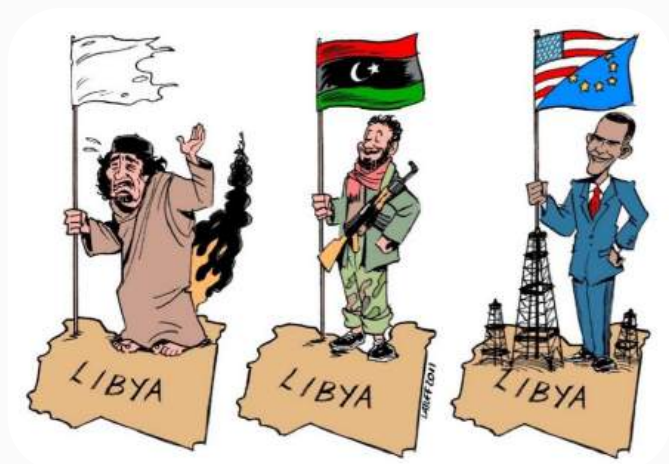
⁵ A post on the "X" platform from 20 October 2024, [online:] <https://x.com/ricwe123/status/1848044408207220768?t=OFXyo8M910foLc8LwwVirw&s=09> (access: 20.12.2024).



Graphic 2: <https://communist.red/five-years-after-gaddafi-s-death-a-balance-sheet-of-imperialist-intervention/> (access: 20.12.2024).



Graphic 3: <https://communist.red/five-years-after-gaddafi-s-death-a-balance-sheet-of-imperialist-intervention/> (access: 20.12.2024).



Graphic 4: <https://communist.red/five-years-after-gaddafi-s-death-a-balance-sheet-of-imperialist-intervention/> (access: 20.12.2024).

Chapter 2.

The Political and Media Situation in Libya

2.1. Political Background

For over a decade, Libya has struggled with chronic political and social instability, which intensified following the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi's regime in 2011. The lack of a strong central authority has led to rivalry among various political and military factions and attracted foreign actors seeking to expand their regional influence. Despite numerous peace initiatives, including processes led by the United Nations (UN), Libya remains divided between two main centres of power: the **western** region centred around **Tripoli** and the **eastern** region based in **Benghazi**.

The main political forces include:

- **Government of National Unity (GUN)**, led by Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh (arab. حكومة الوحدة الوطنية, *Hukūmat al-Wiḥda al-Waṭaniyya*).
- **Libyan National Army (LNA)**, commanded by General Khalifa Haftar (arab. الجيش الوطني الليبي تحت قيادة الجنرال خليفة حفتر, *Taḥta Qiyādat al-Jinrāl Khalīfa Ḥaftar*).
- **Interim Presidential Council** (arab. المجلس الرئاسي المؤقت, *Al-Majlis al-Ri'āsī al-Mu'aqqat*).
- **Libyan House of Representatives** (arab. مجلس النواب الليبي, *Majlis al-Nuwwāb al-Lībī*).

The Government of National Unity (GUN), established in 2021 as part of an internationally brokered peace process initiated by the United Nations (UN), was tasked with preparing the country for elections and strengthening a unified central authority. Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh leads the GUN. Despite formal backing from the UN, the GUN has repeatedly faced resistance from forces operating in eastern Libya, notably the **Libyan National Army (LNA)**, commanded by General Khalifa Haftar, which questions its legitimacy. Turkey provides military and logistical support to the Tripoli-based government. In 2019, Turkish assistance was pivotal in halting Haftar's offensive on Tripoli, which was crucial for maintaining the GUN's position in the capital. This intervention further exacerbated tensions between rival factions and their foreign allies.

The Libyan National Army (LNA), led by General Khalifa Haftar, controls significant portions of eastern and southern Libya, including key oil industry sectors. Haftar is supported by the **United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Russia**, which provide him with arms, technology, and financial resources. His goal is to establish a centralised authority legitimised through military power, posing a challenge to international efforts to build democratic institutions in Libya. Despite the failure of his offensive on Tripoli, the LNA continues to exert control over eastern and southern parts of the country. This ongoing power struggle reflects the broader competition between rival factions and their foreign backers, further complicating efforts to stabilise the region.

The Libyan House of Representatives (Majlis al-Nuwwab), based in Tobruk and established in 2014, functions as Libya's legislative body. However, its alignment with General Haftar and the **Libyan National Army (LNA)** has positioned it as an opponent to the UN-recognised **Government of National Unity (GUN)**. Amid challenges in achieving stability and political consensus, the **Interim Presidential Council**, chaired by Mohammad Menfi, was established in 2021 as the executive authority responsible for overseeing the transitional period and preparing the country for elections. Despite its mandate to unify the nation and develop a cohesive political vision, the Council has encountered numerous obstacles. Ongoing conflicts between Libya's eastern and western regions, along with the influence of foreign actors, have severely limited its territorial control. The Council's initiatives are frequently blocked by the House of Representatives, which leverages its legislative powers to obstruct key measures, hindering efforts to achieve unity and stability.

The House of Representatives plays a pivotal role in Libya's power structure, as established by the 2015 Libyan Political Agreement (Skhirat Agreement), which designated the Presidential Council as the executive authority and the House of Representatives as the legislative body. However, in practice, relations between these institutions are fraught with tension. The House often uses its veto power to block Presidential Council decisions, particularly on issues such as budget approval or government composition, when proposals do not align with the interests of eastern Libya, where the House is based. Some House members, aligned with General Haftar and the LNA, question the legitimacy of the Presidential Council, arguing that its mandate has expired. This position leads to systematic boycotts of the Council's initiatives, further complicating cooperation and the broader political process.

The rift between eastern and western Libya is rooted in political and economic disparities. The House represents the interests of the eastern regions, advocating for a more significant share in power and oil revenue distribution. This often results in the obstruction of centralisation initiatives. Foreign influence exacerbates these divisions, with Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Russia supporting the east, while Turkey and the UN back the

Presidential Council. This external interference intensifies the political impasse, undermining trust and collaboration between these institutions and significantly complicating efforts to stabilise the country.

Its diverse social and cultural landscape further aggravates Libya's internal fragmentation. Libyan society is ethnically, tribally, and regionally divided, complicating constructing a unified state. The main ethnic groups include Arabs (approximately 90%), Berbers (around 5%), Tubu (2%), and Tuaregs (3%), each with distinct interests, histories, and divisions. Libya's social system is deeply rooted in tribal and clan loyalties, meaning that for many Libyans, allegiance to local leaders outweighs loyalty to the central government. Many tribes align themselves with either Haftar's forces or the GUN, further entrenching socio-political polarisation. The country's geographic and political divisions add another layer of complexity: Cyrenaica (eastern region) is a stronghold of the LNA and General Haftar, Tripolitania (western region) supports the Government of National Unity, Fezzan (southern region), often economically marginalised and neglected by both sides, is a source of social discontent and potential unrest.

2.2. Internal Conflicts Exploited by Disinformation

The Role of Social Media and Pro-Russian Media Channels in Libya – An Analysis of Disinformation

Libya's complex social and political divisions make it particularly vulnerable to disinformation campaigns that exacerbate internal conflicts. Key issues exploited by Russian disinformation include competition over oil resources, ethnic and tribal divisions, external actors' involvement, and controversies surrounding the electoral process and government legitimacy.

Libya holds some of the largest oil reserves in Africa, with proven reserves of approximately 48 billion barrels. Oil revenue forms the backbone of the nation's economy, and competition for control over oil fields, particularly in the eastern and southern regions, is a significant source of tension. Disinformation propagated by rival factions includes accusations of illegal extraction and corruption, which amplify antagonisms within local communities.

Tribal and ethnic stratification is deeply entrenched in Libya's social structure, especially in the south, where ethnic diversity and historical tensions create fertile ground for manipulation. Tribes play a critical role in the Libyan conflict, and differences among them are often exploited for political and strategic purposes, including in disinformation campaigns.

The Tubu and Tuareg tribes, residing in the southern regions, are particularly vulnerable to such actions, which escalate tensions and hinder peacebuilding and stabilisation efforts. In 2020, social media was flooded with false information and manipulated visual content concerning ethnic conflicts involving the Tubu tribe. Images depicting violence, house burnings, and attacks were often taken out of context or sourced from different times and places but were captioned to appear as current events. Some of these materials aimed to portray the Tubu tribe as aggressors seeking to destabilise the Fezzan region, despite such claims often lacking factual basis. These manipulated materials were widely disseminated on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter/'X', and WhatsApp, with the goal of not only fuelling local conflicts but also creating narratives that served the interests of specific political or military groups, such as factions aligned with the Government of National Unity (GUN) or the Libyan National Army (LNA).

The involvement of foreign powers, including Turkey, Russia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt, is another focal point for disinformation campaigns. Russian media outlets, such as Sputnik Arabic, frequently portray Turkey as a destabilising force in the region to undermine trust in the internationally recognised Government of National Unity and discourage the Libyan public from supporting its foreign allies.

By framing external actors in a particular light, disinformation efforts not only deepen mistrust among local communities but also serve the broader geopolitical objectives of external players, perpetuating instability and conflict in Libya.



Graphic 5: Intense American Activities in Libya... Growing Influence and Regional Conflicts. **Source:** Sputnik Arabic.



Graphic 6: Haftar Hosts Russian Deputy Defence Minister to Discuss Cooperation on Combating Terrorism and Enhancing Security in Libya. **Source:** Sputnik Arabic.

2.3. Media Landscape in Libya

Since the 2011 revolution and Muammar Gaddafi's overthrow, Libya has become one of the most complex and unstable media systems in the region. Libyan media have transformed into tools of propaganda, disinformation, and power struggles, utilised by both domestic political factions and foreign sponsors. Key events, such as General Khalifa Haftar's military offensive on Tripoli in 2019 and the signing of a permanent ceasefire under UN auspices the following year, highlight the critical role of media as a tool of influence during this turbulent period.

Russia has conducted significant information operations during Haftar's military campaigns, culminating in his April 2019 attack on Tripoli. Analysing 15 days at the start of the Libyan National Army's (LNA) offensive on Tripoli, researchers from the Centro Studi Internazionali (CSI) in Rome found that the Arabic version of RT.com recorded over 263,000 interactions related to content about Haftar⁶. Additionally, RT ranked second to YouTube among the most frequently shared domains in tweets related to the topic on Twitter/'X'. Notably, CSI's research revealed the existence of "integrated" and "automated news blogs," which were strategically coordinated to dominate the media space with content about Haftar. While it remains unclear whether the campaign was coordinated by

⁶ N. Greenberg, American Spring: How Russian State Media Translate American Protests for an Arab Audience, "International Journal of Communication", no 15/2021, s. 3.

a single state actor or multiple entities, CSI identified that two blog platforms were owned by an entity based in Saudi Arabia. This strategy mirrors the Russian “information fracturing” technique previously observed in the Egyptian media sphere. More strikingly, Russia collaborated with a broader network of regional allies within the larger pro-Haftar communication space, who regularly contributed to shaping narratives about the Libyan National Army (LNA). For example, in early May 2019, the Saudi channel Al-Arabiya published a report alleging that an Iranian arms shipment had arrived at the port in Misrata⁷. A few weeks later, on 21 May, reports emerged claiming that “Turkish ships carrying a large number of terrorists, including supporters of Daesh (ISIS),” had entered the port of Tripoli. Another report from 31 May, based on an article in *Jeune Afrique*, suggested that the ISIS leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, might have been seeking refuge in Libya⁸. RT also covered these events. For instance, on 30 April, it broadcast a segment in which a “London-based expert” presented Haftar’s narrative of restoring law and order. The broadcast featured a split-screen format, juxtaposing scenes of an **LNA military parade** (also shared on the official LNA Facebook page) with footage of a terrorist attack on an unspecified government complex. The first frame depicted a disciplined, determined, and meticulously organised display, while the second showed chaos and disorder, reinforcing the contrast between the two narratives.

Russia’s digital interference in Libya’s civil war exemplifies both the Kremlin’s growing influence within the region’s information ecosystem and the sophistication of its operational methods. By leveraging a synergistic network of media outlets, bots, and loyal partners, Russian information operations focus on shaping public perceptions by targeting the emotional and narrative aspects of the conflict. These actions rely on a carefully curated set of antagonists and protagonists, culturally charged symbols, and implicit messages suggesting that stability can only be achieved through the defeated total surrender or the victors’ absolute triumph.

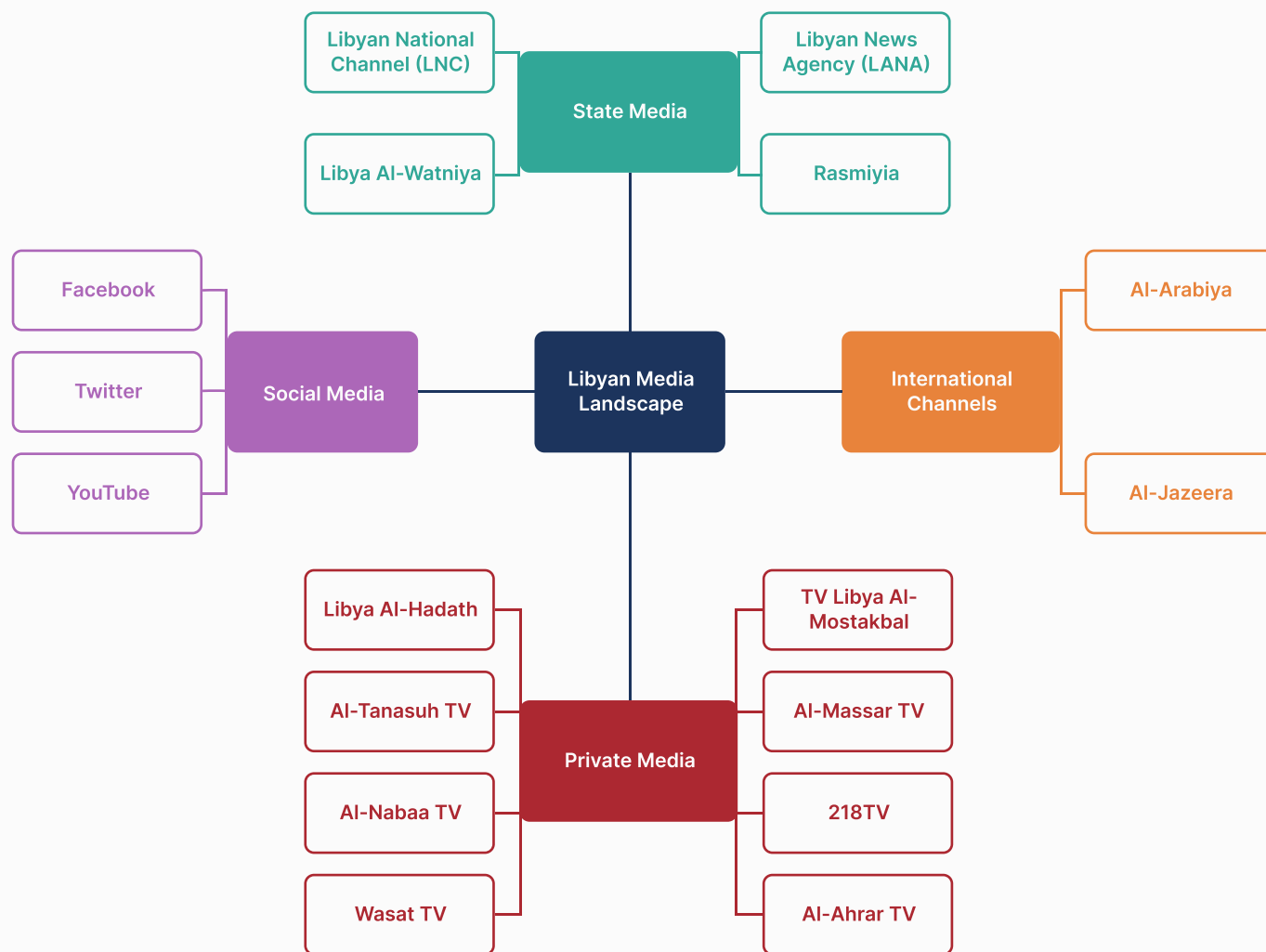
From Syria, through Egypt and Sudan, to Libya, the expansion of Russian information operations highlights how information manipulation has become a cornerstone of the Kremlin’s efforts to reshape the regional order. These operations bolster authoritarian regimes and amplify hostility towards the two primary “villains” in Moscow’s narrative: political Islam and Western liberalism.

⁷ شاهد الأسلحة التي وصلت مصراتة على متن سفينة إيرانية, an article on the Al-Arabiya website from 2 May 2019, [online:] <https://www.alarabiya.net/north-africa/2019/05/02/بالعقوبات-ومدرجة-ايرانية-مصراتة> (access: 20.12.2024).

⁸ شبهات تلاحق باخرة تركيا بليبيا.. نقل دواعش, an article on the Al-Arabiya website from 31 May 2019, [online:] <https://www.alarabiya.net/north-africa/2019/05/21/شبهات-تلاحق-سفينة-تركيا-بليبيا-نقل-دواعش> (access: 20.12.2024).

Libya is inundated with information from various sources, which can be divided into several main categories, each with distinctive structures reflective of the state's media landscape, including:

- state media
- private media
- international news channels



Graphic 1: Mind map - Libyan Media Landscape.
Source: Author's Elaboration.

State Media

Examples include the Libyan National Channel (LNC)⁹ and the Libyan News Agency (LANA)¹⁰, które są kluczowymi państwowymi mediami informacyjnymi, funkcjonującymi głównie pod which are key state-run news outlets primarily operated under the control of the government in Tripoli. While they aim to convey the authorities official positions, their reach and effectiveness are limited by political divisions and internal conflicts. During Haftar's 2019 offensive, the LNC actively reported on Tripoli's resistance to his forces, attempting to rally public support for the UN-recognised government. **Libya Al-Watniya** is a state television channel overseen by Libyan authorities that presents the official government stance on domestic and international events. **Rasmiya**, another example, focuses on broadcasting government statements and covering national events. Rasmiya operates under the direct influence of the authorities.

Private Media

Examples of private television stations include Al-Ahrar TV¹¹, 218TV¹², Libya Al-Hadath¹³, Al-Nabaa TV¹⁴, TV Libya Al-Mostakbal¹⁵, Al-Ahrar¹⁶, Wasat TV¹⁷, Al-Massar TV¹⁸ and Al-Tanasuh TV¹⁹. These private channels are often aligned with local political and military factions. Libya Al-Ahrar TV: Founded in 2011 during the Libyan civil war, this channel is headquartered in Doha, Qatar, with additional studios in Benghazi and Tripoli. The station focuses on Libyan news and analysis, primarily funded by expatriates. Qatar supports the channel by providing technical staff through Alrayyan TV²⁰. While Libya Al-Ahrar emphasises freedom of speech, it faces challenges such as suspending its social media accounts due to political controversies.

⁹ Access:ny pod adresem: [online:] <https://libyaschannel.com/> (access: 20.12.2024).

¹⁰ Access:na pod adresem: [online:] <https://lana.gov.ly/index.php?lang=en> (access: 20.12.2024).

¹¹ Access:na pod adresem: [online:] <https://libyaalahrar.tv/> (access: 20.12.2024).

¹² Access:na pod adresem: [online:] <https://www.218tv.net/> (access: 20.12.2024).

¹³ Access:na pod adresem: [online:] <https://libyaalhadath.net/> (access: 20.12.2024).

¹⁴ Access:na pod adresem: [online:] <https://www.youtube.com/@alnabaashows3953/streams> (access: 20.12.2024).

¹⁵ Access:na pod adresem: [online:] <https://www.almustaqbal.ly/> (access: 20.12.2024).

¹⁶ Access:na pod adresem: [online:] <https://libyaalahrar.tv/live/> (access: 20.12.2024).

¹⁷ Access:na pod adresem: [online:] <https://alwasat.ly/live> (access: 20.12.2024).

¹⁸ Access:na pod adresem: [online:] <https://almasartv.ly/> (access: 20.12.2024).

¹⁹ Access:na pod adresem: [online:] <https://tanasuh.tv/fm/> (access: 20.12.2024).

²⁰ Access:na pod adresem: [online:] <https://www.alrayyan.tv/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%AB-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%B1/> (access: 20.12.2024).

218TV: This Libyan satellite television channel, available free of charge, was launched on 6 August 2015 in Amman, Jordan. It was co-founded by Huda El-Sarari, a Libyan women's rights activist, and her husband Mujahid Bosifi, a former opponent of Gaddafi's regime who had previously lived in the Netherlands. In 2017, the station expanded its operations to include a sister channel, 218 News. By 2019, 218 TV became one of the most popular channels in Libya, and Huda El-Sarari was recognised by Arabian Business magazine as one of the most influential figures in the Arab world. The channel, funded by the United Arab Emirates, consistently broadcasts content supportive of General Khalifa Haftar while criticising the government in Tripoli. This alignment makes it a significant player in the region's information war.

Libya Al-Hadath is a Benghazi-based television channel closely aligned with General Haftar. It is known for broadcasting content supporting Haftar's political narrative and armed forces. Its programming often criticises the Tripoli government and other political factions opposed to Haftar, particularly in the struggle for control over Libya. The channel has become a platform for voices favouring Haftar and his military campaigns, especially during the offensive aimed at capturing Tripoli. Libya Al-Hadath plays a key role as a political tool in the battle for Libya's future, promoting a stance aligned with Haftar's interests. It also broadcasts on YouTube under the name قناة ليبيا الحدث – Libya Alhadath TV²¹.

Al-Nabaa TV²², which operated until 2017, supported Islamist influences and criticised interventions by countries such as Egypt and the UAE, which backed Haftar. The channel was shut down under pressure from authorities in Tripoli. However, it continued operating until 2019 as a platform on YouTube under the name Alnabaa Shows²³.

TV Libya Al-Mostakbal is a public television station, but it is regarded as independent. It covers political reforms and domestic events in Libya while avoiding strong government influence. The station has become an important platform for discussing issues related to Libya's government and political reforms. It began broadcasting during the post-war period after the fall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime, contributing significantly to shaping Libya's new media landscape.

Libii.

Al-Ahrar TV is an opposition channel independent of the government, playing a key role in offering alternative perspectives on events in Libya. It is known for its criticism of the government and its support for political and social reforms in the country. The channel

²¹ Available at: [online:] <https://www.youtube.com/@libyaalhadath> (access: 20.12.2024).

²² Available at: [online:] <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/13602/Arab-Quartet-labeled-Nabaa-TV-as-terrorist-entity> (access: 20.12.2024).

²³ Available at: [online:] <https://www.youtube.com/@alnabaashows3953> (access: 20.12.2024).

started broadcasting during Libya's civil war and continues to operate as a medium promoting democratic dialogue, human rights, and freedom of speech.

Wasat TV is a private television station offering a broad range of programming, including political, economic, and cultural content. It also covers international events and issues affecting the Arab world and other regions. With its diverse approach, the channel aims to provide a balanced perspective on current events in Libya and globally, attracting local and regional viewers. It launched operations in the early years following the fall of Gaddafi's regime.

Al-Massar TV is a private, independent television station that emphasises objective reporting of events and political analysis. The channel strives to offer a balanced view of the situation in Libya, covering political, social, and economic topics. It stands out as an alternative to state-controlled media, offering a mix of news, discussion programmes, and social topics.

Al-Tanasuh TV is a regional private station focused on Libya's local issues, such as health, education, and politics, in smaller regions of the country. Its programming is tailored to the needs and challenges of local communities, providing a more diverse and localised perspective on Libya's situation.

These stations reflect the diverse media landscape of Libya, offering a mix of public, private, and opposition viewpoints that play a crucial role in the national debate. Below is a table summarising information about private television stations in Libya:

Television Station	Type	Description	Year Founded	Location	Political Affiliation
Al-Ahrar TV	Opposition, Independent	Launched during the Libyan civil war in 2011. Known for criticising the government and supporting political and social reforms. Funded by Libyan expatriates and Qatar.	2011	Doha (Qatar), Benghazi, Tripoli	Supports opposition and reforms, critical of the Tripoli government

218TV	Private	Founded by Huda El-Sarari and her husband Mujahid Bosifi, a former opponent of the Gaddafi regime. Supports General Haftar while criticising the Tripoli government.	2015	Amman (Jordan)	Supports General Haftar, critical of the Tripoli government
Libya Al-Hadath	Private	Strongly aligned with General Haftar, frequently criticising the Tripoli government. Supports Haftar's political narrative and armed forces.	2015	Benghazi	Associated with General Haftar, supports his policies
Al-Nabaa TV	Opposition	Supported Islamist influences and criticised interventions by countries backing Haftar. Shut down in 2017, but continued operations on YouTube until 2019.	2015	Unspecified (Closed in 2017)	Supports Islamists, critical of UAE and Egypt backing Haftar
TV Libya Al-Mostakbal	Public, Independent	Public channel considered independent. Focuses on political reforms and domestic events in Libya while avoiding strong government influence.	2011	Tripoli	Independent, avoids government influence, promotes freedom of speech
Wasat TV	Private	Offers programming on politics, economy, culture, and international events. Strives to provide a balanced perspective on national and global issues.	2011	Tripoli	Independent, diverse approach to topics
Al-Massar TV	Private, Independent	Focuses on objective reporting of political, social, and economic events. Aims to present a balanced view of Libya's situation.	2011	Tripoli	Independent, objective, an alternative to state-controlled media

Al-Tanasuh TV	Private, Regional	Focused on local issues such as health, education, and politics in Libya's smaller regions. Provides programming tailored to local community needs.	2011	Unspecified (Regional)	Addresses local issues, offers a more diverse perspective
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Table 1: Media prywatne w Libii.
Source: Opracowanie własne.

International News Channels

Channels such as Al-Jazeera (Qatar), Al-Arabiya (UAE), and Sputnik Arabic (Russia) are widely accessible in Libya and deliver content aligned with their sponsors' policies. Al-Jazeera supports the government in Tripoli, while Al-Arabiya and Sputnik Arabic promote favourable narratives to Haftar. During General Haftar's 2019 offensive on Tripoli, Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya conducted intensive media campaigns reflecting the interests of their state sponsors. Al-Jazeera, funded by Qatar, supported the Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli, while Al-Arabiya, backed by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, favoured the Libyan National Army (LNA).

Examples of Al-Jazeera's Narratives:

- Al-Jazeera frequently emphasised calls from the international community to halt Haftar's military actions, quoting figures like UN Secretary-General António Guterres: "I am deeply concerned about military movements in Libya and the risk of confrontation. There is no military solution. Only dialogue among Libyans can resolve Libya's problems."²⁴
- The channel reported on the GNA forces' strategic victories, such as retaking the city of Gharyan from the LNA, portraying it as a significant blow to Haftar's position: "Libyan government forces have taken control of Gharyan, delivering a severe blow to Haftar's forces."²⁵

²⁴ Article on Al-Jazeera, 5 April 2019. Available at: [online:] <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/4/5/un-chief-deeply-concerned-as-fears-of-new-libya-war-loom> (access: 20.12.2024).

²⁵ Article on Al-Jazeera, 27 June 2019, [online:] <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/6/27/big-loss-libyas-un-recognised-government-retakes-key-town> (access: 20.12.2024).

'Big loss': Libya's UN-recognised government retakes key town

Government of National Accord has wrested Gharyan from Khalifa Haftar's forces, capturing troops.



27 Jun 2019



Graphic 8: Video footage about the recapture of the city of Gharyan.
Source: Al-Jazeera.com.

Examples of Al-Arabiya's Narratives:

- Al-Arabiya focused on portraying the LNA (Libyan National Army) as a force combating terrorism, emphasizing Haftar's actions against extremist groups.²⁶
- The station highlighted international support for the LNA from actors such as Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, presenting Haftar as a key figure in stabilizing the region.

Analyses indicate that both Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya tailor their messaging to align with the foreign policies of their sponsors, which influences how they report on conflicts such as the one in Libya. Studies of their coverage of other conflicts, such as in Gaza, reveal that both stations promote narratives consistent with the interests of the states funding them. As a result, audiences of these media outlets receive information filtered through the political interests of Qatar and Saudi Arabia, potentially leading to a one-sided

²⁶ Article on the Arab Reform Initiative, 13 December 2021, [online:] <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/4/5/un-chief-deeply-concerned-as-fears-of-new-libya-war-loom> (access: 20.12.2024).

perception of events in Libya and hindering an objective understanding of the situation.

Social Media and Online Platforms

Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube have become Libyans' primary information platforms. In July 2023, the number of Facebook users in Libya was approximately **6.77 million**, representing **92.7%** of the country's **population**²⁷. The popularity of this platform stems from its widespread accessibility and the lack of trust in traditional media. However, Facebook in Libya is also a space where false information and manipulation are disseminated, often exploited by various factions and foreign actors.



State media play a limited role in a politically and militarily divided country. The Libyan National Channel (LNC) and Libyan News Agency (LANA) primarily focus on promoting the government's policies in Tripoli, but their messaging is often disregarded by communities supporting General Haftar or other local leaders. **State media are frequently perceived as propaganda tools and do not enjoy significant public trust, especially outside of Tripoli.**

In contrast, private media in Libya are controlled by various political groups and militias, with financial backing from countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Turkey. Their primary aim is to promote the interests of specific political factions and their foreign sponsors, contributing to increased societal polarization. For instance, Libya Al-Hadath is closely aligned with General Haftar, broadcasting content that supports his actions while criticizing the government in Tripoli. Similarly, 218 TV, funded by the UAE, has aired pro-government content, advancing the interests of its sponsors²⁸.

Most Libyans perceive the state and private media as political propaganda tools, contributing to their scepticism and lack of trust in traditional sources of information²⁹. In collaboration with MENA Media Monitor, *the Libyan Center for Freedom of Press* (LCFP) prepared a report that monitored 450 hours of live broadcasts from nine popular television channels. The analysis focused on how key political figures, such as Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh, General Khalifa Haftar, and House of Representatives Speaker Aguila Saleh, were portrayed.

²⁷ Facebook users in Libya according to NapoleonCat statistics, [online:] <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-libya/2023/07/> (access: 20.12.2024).

²⁸ Report on the Human Rights Watch website from 2020, [online:] <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/libya> (access: 20.12.2024).

²⁹ Report by Democracy Reporting International, [online:] <https://digitalmonitor.democracy-reporting.org/ARA/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/LIBYA-SMM-REPORT-main-findings.pdf> (access: 20.12.2024).

The key findings from the report are as follows:

- The airtime allocated to individual figures varied depending on the profile of the media outlet. Channels such as TV February, closely aligned with Dbeibeh, and Libya Al-Hadath TV, linked to Haftar, devoted significant portions of their airtime to them.
- The portrayal of specific leaders reflected the narrative line of the respective media outlets.
- Women were marginalized, with 94% of the political figures featured being men³⁰.

Libyans place more trust in personal connections and the opinions of community leaders on Facebook than in official media sources. The low level of trust in official media and the high usage of social media make Libya particularly vulnerable to disinformation campaigns by foreign actors such as Russia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. As highlighted in the 2020 International Report on Democracy (Democracy Reporting International), the media ecosystem in Libya is highly susceptible to external interference. An example is the Mandela Libya Facebook page³¹, which has promoted the political ambitions of Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, the son of Muammar Gaddafi.



Graphic 9: https://www.facebook.com/libyamandela/?locale=pl_PL (access:: 2.09.2024).

³⁰ Report on the Libyan Center for Freedom of Press website, [online:] <https://lcfp.org.ly/project/political-propaganda-and-the-lack-of-pluralism-in-libyan-media/?lang=en> (access: 20.12.2024).

³¹ Manderla Libya website, [online:] <http://www.manlibya.com/> (access: 20.12.2024).

This page, created following the visit of Gaddafi representatives to Moscow, quickly gained significant popularity. Its posts received far more engagement than other pages on similar topics.



Graphic 10: <http://www.manlibya.com/> (access:: 2.09.2024).



Proekt, an independent Russian investigative outlet designated as an "undesirable" organization by Russian authorities in 2021, published a 2019 report about the Mandela Libya page. The report suggested that Mandela Libya could be one of the disinformation tools supported by Russia, with links to organizations involved in such operations³². In 2019, Facebook³³ removed accounts associated with Russian disinformation activities; however, this example demonstrates that external powers can quickly gain significant influence in the Libyan media landscape³⁴.

Based on the media landscape presented above in Libya, it can be concluded that it is divided and unstable, which fosters the spread of disinformation. As a result of numerous foreign interventions and the lack of a unified media narrative, Libyans rely on social media and informal communication channels. However, these are often exploited for deliberate manipulation and the incitement of political, social, or religious tensions.

³² Article on the Proekt website, 12 September 2019, [online:] <https://www.proekt.media/investigation/prigozhin-libya/> (access: 20.12.2024).

³³ Article on the Proekt website, 30 October 2019, [online:] <https://about.fb.com/news/2019/10/removing-more-coordinated-inauthentic-behavior-from-russia/> (access: 20.12.2024).

³⁴ Report by Democracy Reporting International, [online:] <https://digitalmonitor.democracy-reporting.org/ARA/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/LIBYA-SMM-REPORT-main-findings.pdf> (access: 20.12.2024).

While state media play a marginal role, private and social media have become the primary sources of information, making society more vulnerable to disinformation activities by external entities, including the Russian Federation.

Chapter 3.

Tools and Techniques of Disinformation Employed by Russia

3.1. Social Media Activity and Pro-Russian Media Channels in Libya – An Analysis of Disinformation

In recent years, Russian and pro-Russian entities have intensified their media activities in Libya, utilising various tools to shape public opinion and influence the country's political and social landscape. Through multifaceted campaigns on social media platforms and pro-Russian media channels in Arab countries, Russia conducts information operations that exacerbate polarisation, weaken state structures, and support pro-Russian political factions. The table below outlines examples of such activities in Libya, along with available details regarding their impact and content.

Tool	Type	Description of Activity	Examples of Actions and Impact
YouTube	Social Media	Publishing video materials promoting the LNA and Haftar	Videos documenting LNA activities, portraying Haftar as the defender of the country. These aimed to increase support for Haftar and weaken trust in the GNA.
Facebook	Social Media	Fake accounts supporting Haftar, criticising the GNA and Turkey	In 2019, these accounts published claims about alleged abuses by Turkish forces in Libya, fueling anti-Turkish sentiments.
X (formerly Twitter)	Social Media	Anonymous accounts spreading information about Turkish attacks on civilians	Misleading images and videos aimed to increase anti-Turkish sentiments and diminish trust in the GNA, particularly during Haftar's offensive on Tripoli.

RT Arabic (روسيا اليوم)	Russian State Media	Arabic RT channel supporting pro-Russian narratives in Libya, presenting Haftar as a stabilising figure	Since 2020, numerous interviews with Haftar and critical reports on Turkish intervention built pro-Russian perception and anti-Western narratives in Libya.
Sputnik Arabic (سبوتنيك بالعربي)	Russian State Media	Arabic Sputnik portal promoting anti-Western and pro-Russian narratives	In 2020, articles accused the GNA of cooperating with Islamists, strengthening the LNA's position and deepening divisions in Libyan society.
Al-Mayadeen (المیادین)	Pro-Russian Middle Eastern Channel	Channel supported by pro-Russian entities, promoting pro-Russian stances on the conflict	In 2021, publications highlighted Russia's role as a defender against Western "imperialism" and Turkey, shaping regional public opinion favourably for Russia.
Vkontakte (vk.com)	Russian Social Media Platform	Groups on VKontakte publishing pro-Russian content, portraying Haftar as the sole stabiliser in Libya	Increased support for pro-Russian narratives among the Libyan diaspora and CIS countries.
Telegram	Russian Social Media Platform	Anonymous channels on Telegram disseminating false information about GNA agreements with terrorist groups	Telegram played a crucial role in disinformation during Haftar's offensive on Tripoli, destabilising public sentiment and bolstering support for pro-Russian narratives.
SouthFront	Known Disinformation Portal	Portal publishing pro-Russian analyses of conflicts, accusing NATO and the West of destabilising Libya	Promoted anti-Western narratives, portraying Haftar as the "last line of defence" against imperialism.
Internet Research Agency (IRA)	Disinformation Organisation	Fake accounts and bot farms on Facebook and Twitter supporting anti-Turkish and pro-LNA narratives	The IRA destabilised Libya through anti-Turkish posts, bolstering support for Haftar and misinforming Libyan society, particularly between 2019-2020.

Fancy Bear	Hacking Group	Cyberattacks on Libyan media and government organisations to publish manipulated content	Fancy Bear targeted Libyan media, supporting the destabilisation of the country and spreading disinformation about government actions.
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Table 2: Tools of Disinformation.
Source: Author's Elaboration.

The examples collected in the table illustrate a range of activities, often involving manipulating information, creating fake accounts, and disseminating pro-Russian narratives. On platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter), Russia promoted the Libyan National Army (LNA) and its leader, Khalifa Haftar, as forces stabilising the state while undermining the credibility of the Government of National Unity (GNA). In the context of Russian state media, such as RT Arabic and Sputnik Arabic, materials were published accusing the GNA of collaborating with extremists, which aimed to deepen divisions within Libyan society. It is also worth noting that groups like the Internet Research Agency and Fancy Bear significantly contributed to the destabilisation of Libya through cyberattacks and bot farms, reinforcing pro-Russian narratives and misinforming the public. Fancy Bear, also known as APT28, is a hacking group linked to Russia's military intelligence agency, GRU. This group has conducted cyberattacks on government and military institutions in various countries, including Libya. These attacks aimed to gain access to confidential information and support pro-Russian narratives by manipulating data and spreading disinformation.

Examples of Activities:

- **Disinformation Campaigns:** The Internet Research Agency (IRA) conducted coordinated social media campaigns, spreading content that supported pro-Russian factions in Libya while discrediting their opponents. Fake accounts were used to disseminate disinformation to influence public opinion and destabilise the political situation.
- **Cyberattacks on Government Institutions:** Fancy Bear carried out phishing attacks on Libyan government institutions, attempting to gain access to confidential information that could be used for blackmail or political manipulation.

Although detailed information about their operations in Libya is not widely available or thoroughly documented, their global activities demonstrate their capability to conduct such operations. For example, Fancy Bear was responsible for phishing attacks during the investigation into the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 over Ukraine in 2014.

Similarly, the IRA conducted disinformation campaigns in Ukraine, further highlighting their operational reach and strategies³⁵.

In conclusion, Russia's overall activities in Libya demonstrate an intent to influence local political structures and shape social attitudes in a way that aligns with Russian interests in the region.

Regarding publications about Poland in Libyan media, content from key pro-Russian and Arab media sources, as well as social media platforms with a broad reach in the MENA region — including **RT Arabic**, **Sputnik Arabic**, **Al-Mayadeen**, **Vkontakte**, **Telegram** — was analyzed. The analysis revealed that information about Poland in these outlets is rare and typically focuses on broader international issues.

Tool	Type	Description of Activity	Examples of Actions and Impact
YouTube	Social Media	Videos on the migration situation at the Poland-Belarus border portraying Poland as unfriendly to migrants	Videos depict Poland as a country with restrictive migration policies, evoking negative emotions in MENA countries.
Facebook	Social Media	Fake accounts and pages posting about alleged anti-Islamic actions in Poland, often reinforcing negative opinions	Pro-Russian accounts and groups spread information about "anti-Islamic sentiments" in Poland, fostering resentment in Arab countries. Example: Fake accounts accusing Poland of Muslim migrant discrimination.
X (formerly Twitter)	Social Media	Posts accusing Poland of escalating migration tensions at the Belarus border and supporting anti-Islamic actions in the EU	Accounts linked to Russian narratives propagated claims that Poland sought to "cleanse" the EU of migrants from Arab countries, negatively impacting Poland's image in the MENA region.

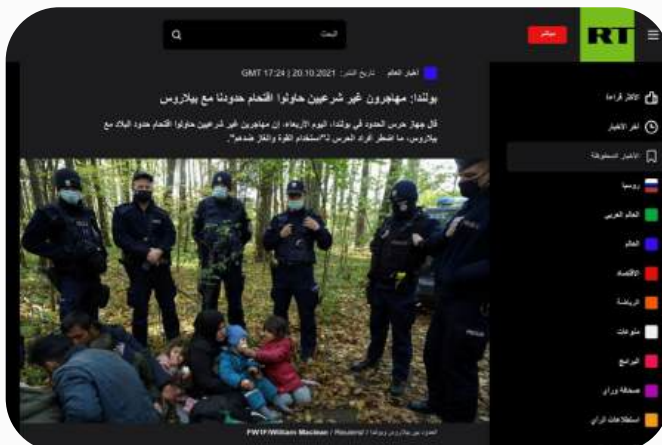
³⁵ Article on the HackRead website, [online:] <https://hackread.com/fancy-bears-hacked-mh17-crash-investigators/> (access: 20.12.2024).

RT Arabic روسيا اليوم	Russian State Media	RT Arabic published articles portraying Poland as an anti-immigration country, often criticising its actions toward migrants	Articles from 2021 accused Poland of human rights violations and inhumane treatment of migrants, aiming to amplify anti-Western sentiments among the Arab community.
Sputnik Arabic سبوتنيك بالعربي	Russian State Media	Sputnik Arabic frequently suggests that Poland adopts an ultra-nationalist approach to migrants, destabilising EU relations	Articles from 2022 portrayed Poland as a country causing migration crises.
Al-Mayadeen (المیادین)	Pro-Russian Middle Eastern Channel	Al-Mayadeen often presents Poland as part of an "anti-immigration alliance" in Europe, criticising its cooperation with the US and NATO	Al-Mayadeen published reports suggesting Poland supports US and NATO actions destabilising the MENA region, evoking negative associations in Arab countries. Example: Report titled "Poland as a NATO Bridge Against the East."
VKontakte (vk.com)	Russian Social Media Platform	Groups and pages on VKontakte post critical content about Poland, particularly regarding its migration policy and relations with Russia	In pro-Russian narrative communities, Poland is depicted as a "puppet" of the US, aiming to discredit it in Libya.
Telegram	Russian Social Media Platform	Anonymous Telegram channels publish content critical of Poland, often linked to migration and human rights issues	Telegram channels, especially in 2021-2022, released information and manipulated, fabricated videos about alleged "violent" actions by Poland toward migrants, reinforcing negative perceptions of Poland.
SouthFront	Known Disinformation Portal	Portal publishing analyses suggesting Poland, by supporting NATO, aims to destabilise Eastern Europe, impacting MENA countries amid the energy crisis	Content suggests Poland pursues aggressive foreign policies threatening regional stability, fostering resentment toward Poland in Arab countries.

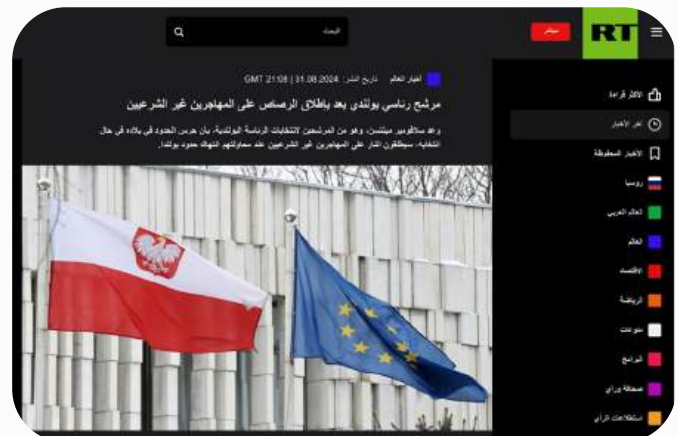
Internet Research Agency (IRA)	Disinformation Organisation	IRA conducts campaigns on Facebook and Twitter portraying Poland as anti-Islamic, anti-Arab, and racist	IRA destabilises Poland's image by spreading false news about alleged persecution of migrants. Example: Posts from 2020 claiming mosques in Poland were being closed.
Fancy Bear	Hacking Group	Cyberattacks on Polish media and institutions, followed by the publication of manipulated content criticising Poland's migration policies	Fancy Bear supports narratives of Poland as an anti-immigration country by manipulating information about its internal political situation.

Table 3: Disinformation Activities and Narratives About Poland in Social Media, Russian State Media, and Arab Channels That Could Shape Negative Perceptions of Poland in Libya and the MENA Region.

Source: Author's Elaboration.



Graphic 11: "Poland: Illegal immigrants attempted to storm our border with Belarus". **Source:** RT Arabic.



Graphic 12: "Polish presidential candidate promises to shoot illegal immigrants". **Source:** RT Arabic.



Graphic 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18: Scenes from the film "Asylum in Europe is a dream that turns into a nightmare... and the cost is 15.000 euros".

Source: RT Arabic³⁶.

An analysis of content published in Libyan media about Poland reveals a limited number of materials addressing the country. When information about Poland does appear, it is typically presented within a specific context, often related to international politics. For example, media outlets such as RT Arabic, Sputnik Arabic, and Al-Mayadeen feature articles on Poland's relations with Russia, sanctions, or energy policy. However, there is also content focused on anti-immigration or anti-Muslim issues, suggesting that narratives about Poland may be leveraged to achieve specific narrative objectives. Such content is

³⁶ Article on the RT Arabic website, 20 January 2021. <https://forum.rtarabic.com/prg/-الفي-15-والثمن-إلى-كايوس-والثمن-15-ألف/> (access: 20.12.2024).

even less frequent on social media platforms like VKontakte or Telegram. It is often embedded within broader discussions about the European Union, NATO, or migration policies when it does surface.



Graphic 19: "The consequences of Poland's announcement to cease support for the Ukrainian army are discussed by the French newspaper 'Le Figaro' and how Poland will cause significant harm to Ukraine by refusing to supply weapons to the Kyiv regime".

Source: Al-Mayadeen³⁷.

³⁷ Article on the Al-Mayadeen website, 22 September 2023, [online:] https://www.almayadeen.net/news/politics/--بولندا--لو-فيغارو-?utm_source=mango-searchx&utm_medium=exact_title&utm_campaign=بولندا (access: 20.12.2024).



Graphic 20: „The British newspaper Financial Times believes that Poland has escalated its rhetoric towards Ukraine beyond the trade dispute over grain, following remarks by its President Andrzej Duda, who described Ukraine as 'a drowning person grasping at their rescuer and pulling them into the depths'.

Source: Al-Mayadeen³⁸.

3.2. Practical Dimension of Russian Disinformation in Libya

Russia employs numerous disinformation techniques in Libya to shape public opinion, weaken political opponents, and support its allies, such as General Khalifa Haftar and the Libyan National Army (LNA). This report outlines key disinformation techniques used by Russia in Libya, along with specific examples. This systematic presentation of individual disinformation strategies is crucial for analyzing the impact of these actions on Poland's perception and the political and social situation in Libya. Moreover, identifying specific examples or quotes illustrates the practical application of these techniques, enabling a deeper understanding of their effects and potential consequences for the region.

³⁸ Article on the Al-Mayadeen website, 20 September 2023,, [online:] https://www.almayadeen.net/news/politics/-بولندا:-أوكرانيا-غريق-يتشبث-بمنقذه-ويسحبه-إلى-الأعماق?utm_source=mango-searchx&utm_medium=exact_title&utm_campaign=بولندا (access: 20.12.2024).

Here is a collection of quotes and source links that align with the analysis of media manipulation:

Quotes:

- **Anti-Western Sentiments and International Hypocrisy:**

„Uhe USA prevents the extradition of Abdullah Al-Senussi and Saif al-Islam Gaddafi to the International Criminal Court, as they consider the evidence against Saif al-Islam to be very weak.”³⁹

- **Political and Judicial Manipulation:**

„The International Criminal Court overlooks the greatest crimes committed in Libya by NATO itself to focus on corruption in dam construction.”⁴⁰

- **The Role of the USA and Trump:**

„American intelligence knows that if Saif al-Islam Gaddafi were to run in the elections, he would win and secure a victory in his favour.”⁴¹

- **Legacy of Colonialism:**

„You must never forget what this man has done to you. You carry the scars of colonialism and oppression, not only on your body but also in your mind, heart, and soul (...) Lumumba [Patrice Lumumba, the first Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo, overthrown in a coup supported by Belgium and the USA – editor’s note] was murdered by imperialist forces, but he was also a victim of his own mistakes. He did not realise in time that imperialists cannot be trusted. (author’s translation).”⁴²

- **Western Military Interventions:**

„Convoys belonging to the American Khalifa Haftar are heading west towards the city.”⁴³

³⁹ Facebook Libya Mandela, [online:] https://www.facebook.com/libyamandela/?locale=pl_PL (access 20.12.2024).

⁴⁰ Facebook Libya Mandela, [online:] <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1148020316686883&set=a.377971547025101> (access 20.12.2024).

⁴¹ Facebook Libya Mandela, [online:] <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1148020316686883&set=a.377971547025101> (access 20.12.2024).

⁴² Facebook Libya Mandela, [online:] <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1256445549025433> (access 20.12.2024).

⁴³ Facebook Libya Mandela, [online:] <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=1150272739794974&set=pcb.1150272783128303> (access 20.12.2024).

- **Detention of Saif al-Islam's Supporters:**

„The continued detention of citizen Khalifa Amghar and his son by the Internal Security Service...”⁴⁴

Context:

1. *Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, the son of Muammar Gaddafi, was seen as a potential successor to his father and played a significant role in the structures of power before the regime's fall in 2011. After Gaddafi's overthrow, Libya descended into political chaos, with rival factions vying for control. Saif al-Islam, accused of crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court (ICC), remains a controversial figure. For some groups in Libya, however, he symbolizes the former order and is perceived as a potential leader capable of restoring stability.*

2. *The detention of Khalifa Amghar and his son by the Internal Security Service fits within a broader context of repression against supporters of Saif al-Islam. Such actions are part of the political struggle between various factions, some of which fear the return to power of individuals associated with the former regime. These detentions may also serve as a form of intimidation against Gaddafi's supporters and their families.*

3. **Purpose of Disinformation and Source Significance:** *The information originates from the Facebook page "Libya Mandela," suggesting it may be used to construct narratives of injustice and persecution, aiming to generate sympathy for Saif al-Islam and his supporters. Such content could mobilize support for his potential return to politics.*

- **Historical Manipulation:**

„A video from 2002 shows Netanyahu urging Americans to pressure for the overthrow of three states, including Libya.”⁴⁵

Context:

1. *In 2002, Netanyahu was a private individual whose statements did not carry formal diplomatic weight. However, taking such fragments out of context can be used in current media narratives to imply that Israel and the USA had planned interventions in Libya long before the Arab Spring erupted.*

⁴⁴ Facebook Libya Mandela, [online:] <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1150151046473810&set=a.377971547025101> (access 20.12.2024).

⁴⁵ Facebook Libya Mandela, [online:] <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1090160592179027> (access 20.12.2024).

2. **The purpose of such disinformation** is to reinforce the belief that Libya was a victim of external conspiracies, aligning with popular narratives about international plots targeting the Arab world.

- **Astroturfing and False Narratives:**

„Disgrace in Ma'arar – inscription on the wall of Bab al-Aziziyah: 'God Bless America'”.⁴⁶

Context:

1. Bab al-Aziziyah, Muammar Gaddafi's former main headquarters in Tripoli, was for decades a symbol of his power and resistance against the West. After the regime's fall in 2011, the site became a space for various political and social manifestations, including graffiti reflecting social and political divisions in Libya.

2. **The inscription "God Bless America":** Such slogans on the walls of Bab al-Aziziyah may be part of efforts to manipulate social perception. The inscription is an example of astroturfing, where seemingly spontaneous messages are, in reality, inspired by specific groups or individuals seeking to shape narratives. The phrase "God Bless America" in the context of a place as symbolic as Bab al-Aziziyah may have been intended to provoke emotions and controversy, suggesting U.S. involvement in Libya's downfall.

3. **Significance for anti-Western narratives:** Such inscriptions are often interpreted in Libya as provocation or ironic criticism of the U.S.'s role in destabilizing the country. In Libyan anti-Western discourses, these narratives often portray America as the primary instigator of chaos after 2011, especially regarding NATO's support for the rebellion against Gaddafi.

4. The English section reads **"God Bless U.S.A."** (Polish „Niech Bóg chroni USA”) expressing a positive attitude toward the U.S., possibly suggesting gratitude for overthrowing Gaddafi's regime, and in Arabic, it reads: "America, Britain, and France, and that's it.". In contrast, the Arabic text seems more ironic, downplaying the roles of other international players in the conflict. The backdrop of the wall, damaged during NATO's intervention, emphasizes the graffiti's symbolic meaning, reflecting Libya's political and social transformations. The accompanying commentary criticizes the author's gesture, highlighting divisions in Libyan society regarding the assessment of the U.S. and Western roles—for some, their actions were liberating, and for others, an intervention leading to chaos. This image and its historical and political context illustrate the tensions between conflicting narratives about NATO's intervention and the evolving international relations in the region.

⁴⁶ Facebook Libya Mandela, [online:] <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1146065073549074&set=a.377971547025101> (access 20.12.2024).

- **Russia as a Mediator:**

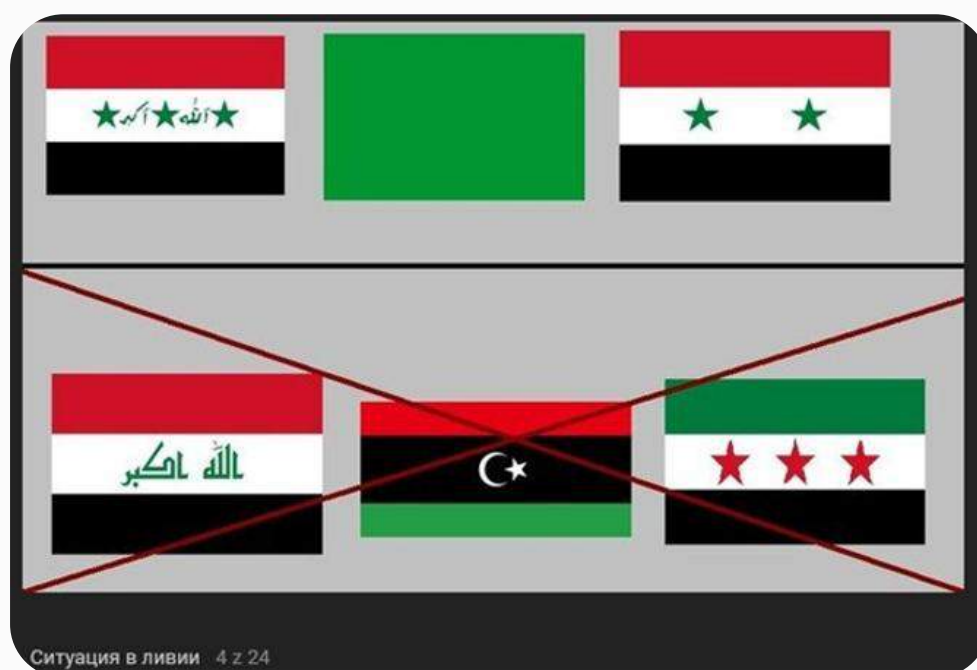
„Libya calls on Russia to help resolve the conflict.”⁴⁷

„The Russian president noted that the document says nothing about NATO's involvement in Libya.”⁴⁸

- **Manipulated Contexts:**

„Russian media manipulate images of destruction in Libya, presenting them as the result of Turkish drone operations.”⁴⁹

The above content exemplifies various media manipulation techniques, including fake news, conspiracy theories, and astroturfing. These narratives have been crafted to weaken the West's position in the region and reinforce pro-Russian narratives. An interesting example is the graphic below, featuring the Libyan flag prominently in its central point.



Graphic 21: https://vk.com/natogohome?z=photo-25799733_289863248%2Falbum-25799733_131815661%2Frev
(access 20.12.2024).

⁴⁷ Wpis w serwisie VKontakte, [online:] https://vk.com/natogohome?w=wall-25799733_63 (access 20.12.2024).

⁴⁸ Wpis w serwisie VKontakte, [online:] https://vk.com/natogohome?w=wall-25799733_63 (access 20.12.2024).

⁴⁹ Artykuł w serwisie Sputnik Arabic, [online:] <http://www.rusnovosti.ru/news/143159/> (access 20.12.2024).

The graphic compares the flags of Iraq, Libya, and Syria. The upper section displays symbols of former regimes (Iraq's flag with the inscription "Allahu Akbar," Libya's green flag from the Gaddafi era, and Syria's flag under Bashar al-Assad's government). The lower section features the flags representing these countries' current political systems, including the Free Syrian Army flag, which are all crossed out with a red "X." The message suggests opposition to the current political orders that emerged from the Arab Spring revolutions and Western interventions, such as the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the overthrow of Gaddafi in Libya, and support for the Syrian opposition. The upper flags evoke nostalgia for former regimes, which are associated with more excellent stability and resistance to the West. In contrast, the crossing out of the lower flags underscores criticism of the new systems, portrayed as sources of chaos and destabilization in the region. The graphic aligns with a pro-Russian and anti-Western narrative, favouring the previous political order in the Middle East and North Africa.

The graphic below, which can often be seen in various configurations on social media, is an interesting topic. It depicts Muammar Gaddafi in the background and a coin held in a hand in the foreground. The Arabic inscriptions, such as "مشروع خطير تاريخي" ("A dangerous historical project") and "أسد أفريقيا" ("The Lion of Africa"), suggest a reference to the gold dinar project that Gaddafi promoted as a common African currency.



Graphic 22: <https://vk.com/public151394926> (access: 20.12.2024).

The coin likely symbolizes this project, which aimed to make African countries independent of international financial systems based on the dollar and euro. Gaddafi sought to create an African currency backed by gold reserves, which was intended to challenge the global financial system, particularly the West. Russia played a significant role in narratives promoting Gaddafi's legacy, especially his efforts to free Africa from Western influence. As a country that often questions the dominance of the dollar in international finance, Russia supported the idea of the gold dinar ("Золотой динар Каддафи"), seeing it as an opportunity to weaken the position of the US and EU in Africa.

Today, Russia, through its activities in Libya (e.g., support for General Khalifa Haftar), leverages anti-Western narratives and Gaddafi's legacy to build its influence on the continent. This image reinforces a pro-Russian message, emphasizing Gaddafi's struggle against the global financial system and his vision of African independence, which resonates with Russia's narrative of opposing Western hegemony. It also aligns with Russia's broader strategy of strengthening African influence by appealing to anti-colonial and anti-Western sentiments.

The context of the Wagner Group and the role of Yevgeny Viktorovich Prigozhin also deserve explanation. Prigozhin, the founder of the so-called troll factory, is closely associated with the private military company Wagner Group, which he established.



Graphic 23: <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-fate-of-the-wagner-group-in-syria-libya-and-sudan/> (access: 20.12.2024).

Another graphic depicts Prigozhin himself in military attire against the backdrop of Libya's black-red-green flag, symbolizing the current Libya following the overthrow of Gaddafi's regime. In the background, there is also a stylized rocket weapon with elements of the Libyan flag, all set against a yellow background. Prigozhin in military clothing may be portrayed as a symbol of a commander or someone closely tied to military actions, referencing the ongoing conflict in Libya, where the Wagner Group plays a significant role.



Graphic 24: <https://www.proekt.media/investigation/prigozhin-libya/> (access: 20.12.2024).

The rocket adorned with the Libyan flag references the military dimension of the conflict, suggesting ongoing armed struggles in the region and the Wagner Group's military support for one of the factions. The Libyan flag, representing the post-Arab Spring political system, is used in the graphic with a likely propagandistic intent to evoke nationalistic and patriotic emotions. The yellow background might symbolize Africa's wealth, such as oil or gold, which is central to Gaddafi's policies and remains a focal point of contemporary political disputes. The image appears to glorify Prigozhin as a symbol of strength and strategic importance in the fight for Libya's sovereignty. His depiction in the context of the flag, rocket, and military attire underscores the emphasis on the military's role in maintaining influence. Russia, supporting General Haftar in the Libyan conflict, has leveraged such visuals as propaganda tools to highlight the Wagner Group's involvement in stabilizing the region while criticizing Western interventions. The image serves as a patriotic-military visualization, presenting Prigozhin as a central figure and emphasizing his role in Russia's politico-military actions in Libya. Simultaneously, it legitimizes ongoing armed operations and reinforces the narrative of the significance of Russian support in the region.

Chapter 4.

Analysis of the Effects of Disinformation in Libya

Disinformation in Libya influences the country's political and social dynamics, with consequences for government decisions, public opinion, and overall political stability. Russian disinformation campaigns, conducted primarily through pro-Russian media such as RT Arabic and Sputnik Arabic, focus on supporting General Haftar's Libyan National Army, undermining the internationally recognized Government of National Unity (GNU). Publications from these media outlets often accuse the GNU of collaborating with terrorist groups, aiming to shape a negative perception of this institution in Libyan society. At the same time, they seek to strengthen Haftar's position by portraying him as the sole stabilizer of the state. This is intended to increase support for the Libyan general, especially in the context of his campaign against the GNU and its allies.

Disinformation also affects electoral processes, eroding trust in democratic institutions and leading to more significant political divisions. Understanding these impacts requires analyzing the context in which Libyan society operates—still haunted by the traumas of prolonged conflict and power struggles. Russian disinformation aims to deepen socio-political polarization by distorting perceptions of political and religious issues. A clear example is a 2021 publication by RT Arabic accusing Turkey of a "neocolonial" intervention in Libya, aiming to stir negative emotions within society and draw attention to Russia's role as a purported defender of Libya against foreign influence.

Additionally, Russia's disinformation efforts in Libya have significant international consequences. These campaigns aim to exacerbate tensions between Libya and its allies, including the United States and European Union member states, which view Russia as a threat to regional stability. An example of such campaigns is a 2022 publication by Sputnik Arabic suggesting that Poland is one of the main provocateurs of destabilization in the MENA region. This narrative sought to create a negative perception of Poland and Western states in local media and among Libyan communities. These negative narratives, portraying Poland as a country supporting NATO's aggressive policies, could lead to further marginalization of the state in the region and complicate Poland's cooperation with Arab countries.

Chapter 5.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Russian Disinformation as a Tool of Political Influence

Russia employs a wide range of disinformation activities in Libya, which are a key element of its political strategy. These information campaigns aim to weaken Western influence, support pro-Russian political factions, and portray Russia as a stabilizing regional actor. Such actions enable Russia to achieve strategic objectives with minimal military involvement.

Exploitation of Internal Divisions in Libya

Russia effectively leverages Libya's complex political, social, and ethnic divisions to strengthen its position. Disinformation fuels clan, ethnic, and political conflicts, further destabilizing the state. For instance, narratives about conflicts over oil resources and accusations of collaboration with terrorist groups are manipulated to sow discord.

Role of Social Media and Information Platforms

Social media platforms such as Facebook, VKontakte, Telegram, and YouTube play a central role in disseminating disinformation. Fake accounts, manipulated videos, and fabricated narratives increase polarization and weaken trust in democratic institutions. Activities such as creating Facebook bots or spreading manipulated content on Telegram effectively destabilize Libyan society.

Utilization of State Media and Pro-Russian Platforms

Pro-Russian media outlets, such as RT Arabic, Sputnik Arabic, and Al-Mayadeen, serve as tools for crafting anti-Western and pro-Russian narratives. These platforms effectively support pro-Russian political factions, such as General Haftar's Libyan National Army, while undermining the credibility of the Government of National Unity.

International Context and Anti-Western Narratives

Russian disinformation campaigns in Libya undermine the position of the United States and the European Union in the region. Narratives accusing the West of destabilization and presenting Russia as a neutral mediator effectively reduce Western influence while building a positive image of Russia.

Impact on Poland's Perception

Although Poland is not a primary target of Russian disinformation in Libya, occasional narratives portraying Poland as an anti-Islamic country or a NATO tool negatively affect its image in the MENA region. Such materials could hinder Poland's international cooperation with Arab countries.

Social and Political Impacts of Disinformation

Disinformation deepens social and political polarization in Libya, complicating democratic processes and exacerbating existing tensions. It also erodes public trust in government institutions, hindering efforts to build a stable state.

Libya's Significance in Russian Regional Policy

Libya is a strategically important point in Russia's policy for the Middle East and North Africa. Disinformation activities enable Moscow to expand its influence in a key region, enhancing its ability to affect neighbouring states and the broader geopolitical situation in the MENA region.

Russia's Long-Term Goals

Russia uses disinformation as a tool to achieve long-term political objectives. In Libya, this primarily involves limiting Western influence, promoting pro-Russian political actors, and securing economic interests, particularly in the energy sector.

Recommendations

Strengthen international cooperation in monitoring and countering disinformation in the MENA region

Increase media literacy among the Libyan population to reduce susceptibility to manipulation

Develop independent media in Libya to provide credible sources of information

Build international strategies to counter disinformation, especially regarding Russian activities in the region

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