Thursday, April 30, 2015
Papertiger Putin

Brandon Valeriano and Ryan C. Maness

This is not a warning. This is a wake-up call.\n
Given that Russia's bark is worse than its bite, there are several options for responding. John Mearsheimer, a noted scholar and advocate of what he calls "cyberpower," has written several articles on the topic, and his book, Cyber War versus Cyber Reality, is a must-read. Mearsheimer argues that cyberwarfare is a new form of power that can be used to achieve strategic objectives. He also suggests that Russia has used cyberwarfare as a means of exerting influence in the region.

However, Mearsheimer's assertions are based on limited evidence. The United States has not been able to attribute any cyberattacks to Russia with certainty. Moreover, the United States has not been able to demonstrate that cyberwarfare has achieved any strategic objectives. In fact, the United States has had limited success in using cyberwarfare to achieve its objectives.

The United States has used cyberwarfare as a means of exerting influence in the region. For example, in 2015, the United States carried out a cyberattack on Iran's nuclear facilities. The United States has also used cyberwarfare to disrupt Russian military operations in Syria.

Russia has used cyberwarfare as a means of exerting influence in the region as well. For example, in 2015, the Russian government launched a cyberattack on the Ukrainian government. The attack was successful, and it demonstrated that Russia has the capability to use cyberwarfare as a means of exerting influence in the region.

The United States and Russia have both used cyberwarfare as a means of exerting influence in the region. However, the United States has not been able to demonstrate that cyberwarfare has achieved any strategic objectives. In fact, the United States has had limited success in using cyberwarfare to achieve its objectives.

From Bad to Worse

Russia's involvement in the Ukraine conflict has not gone the way Putin intended. Betting that the West would decline to help new Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, Moscow attempted to strangle Ukraine's economy, nullifying the bailout package and the gas deal that the two countries signed under former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych's rule in 2014. But Putin's calculation proved incorrect; the West did offer financial support and training forces, granting Ukraine $17.5 billion in economic packages and loans to keep its economy afloat.

Meanwhile, as the West was coming to Kiev's aid, the price of oil collapsed, leaving Russia with barely enough funds to even contemplate purchasing a quarter of the new Tu-50 stealth jets it had planned on acquiring. That, combined with Russian soldiers and mercenaries' limited success in Ukraine so far, and the fact that the government had to move troops in from Siberia and force conscripts to sign up for the long term just to get enough boots on the ground at the border, a full-scale invasion of Ukraine seems unlikely, even as the ruble recovers.

For Russia, the story in Ukraine gets even worse. Russia's involvement in Ukraine has roots in the nation's role as a Soviet-era energy pipeline for natural gas sales from Russia to Western Europe. Until 2014, when civil strife began, 80 percent of Russian natural gas headed for Europe traversed through Ukrainian territory. To this day, gas supplies have been used as a political tool by Russia to keep Ukraine aligned with Moscow. But now, Russian pipelines in Ukraine operate at about half capacity, owing in part to Western sanctions, the effects of war, and a network of new pipelines that circumvent Ukraine. Thirty percent of all natural gas consumed in Europe comes from Russia, where state-owned Gazprom has been charging countries different prices according to the political stance of the government. Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Hungary are being charged well above the EU average price, due in part to their supplying gas back into Ukraine after the Russian shutoff. On the other hand, countries like Denmark, the Czech Republic, and Hungary are being charged well below the average EU price, as these governments have shown more support for Putin. Now the EU is accusing the company of charging different prices according to the political stance of the government.

Another source of Russian leverage over Ukraine is the gas pipeline. The Russian gas pipeline that runs through Ukraine carries 30 percent of all natural gas imported to the EU, where state-owned Gazprom has been charging countries different prices according to the political stance of the government. Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Hungary are being charged well above the EU average price, due in part to their supplying gas back into Ukraine after the Russian shutoff. On the other hand, countries like Denmark, the Czech Republic, and Hungary are being charged well below the average EU price, as these governments have shown more support for Putin. Now the EU is accusing the company of charging different prices according to the political stance of the government.

The United States and Russia have both used cyberwarfare as a means of exerting influence in the region. However, the United States has not been able to demonstrate that cyberwarfare has achieved any strategic objectives. In fact, the United States has had limited success in using cyberwarfare to achieve its objectives.

What's a World to Do?

Given that Russia's bark is worse than its bite, there are several options for responding. John Mearsheimer advocates buffer-state status for Ukraine, a seemingly interesting proposition that avoids a full-scale war in the region. Yet given the troubled history of warfare and occupation within buffer states such as Afghanistan and Poland, this idea becomes a nonstarter. Furthermore, buffer-state status can lead to continuous territorial disputes. Leaving Ukraine in limbo between the West and Russia is not a solution that is fair to Ukraine or to any other interested party.
Letting Russia assert its regional interests has resulted in outcomes that counter its own goals. And that is why rushing to deal with a perceived Russian threat would be folly. Continued support for Western allies and investment in alternative energy sources and cyberdefenses as (opposed to cyberoffensive capabilities) would lead to continued stability in the international system despite Russia’s use of force. Pushing a confrontation between the West and Russia will only lead to a demonstration of the West’s own weaknesses; strategically incompatible goals, limited weapons supplies (excluding the United States), and the West’s own vulnerability when it comes to cybersecurity would lead the West to appear weak just as it attempts to look strong.

Copyright © 2015 by the Council on Foreign Relations, Inc. All rights reserved. To request permission to distribute or reprint this article, please fill out and submit a Permissions Request Form. If you plan to use this article in a coursepack or academic website, visit Copyright Clearance Center to clear permission.

Source URL: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2015-04-30/paper-tiger-putin

Links
[17] https://ccdcoe.org/  
[19] https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&amp;rct=j&amp;q=&amp;esrc=s&amp;source=web&amp;cd=4&amp;cad=rja&amp;uact=8&amp;ved=0CCsQFjAD&amp;url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cnn.com%2F2015%2F04%2F13%2Fus-russians-hacked-the-white-house-2f%2F&amp;e=HQxVd-1pe3ogT-lGwBQ&amp;usg=AFQjCNHQ_IuJyWxMjIisacCallyKYOx2A&amp;sig2=KPrQj2Q5iLSp3FmVW9jkGw&amp;bv=bv.90790515,d.cGU  