

Ideas for Ramping up IfS Contributions to the Cause

Outcome(s):

Post-Salisbury, to:

- expose the attack while highlighting and countering Russian disinformation about it, to
- generate as much foreign support as possible for the UK, at every level and as soon as possible.

Approach(es):

IfS can immediately mobilise its international networks with the aim of:

- ramping up the scope and range of its activities and outputs to increase impact, to
- bolstering defences in countries identified as being of primary focus, and therefore
- shifting (inter)national public perceptions about Russian attacks and interference.

NB. IfS has long worked to educate Western decision-makers on Russia's overarching strategic narrative. Understanding, explaining and looking for vulnerabilities in the strategic coherence behind Russian actions is one of our core expertise areas. Western governments have generally lost their capacity for genuine strategic thinking, and often do not appreciate the linkages between apparently unrelated events.

We can now ramp up IfS capabilities to educate decision-makers and publics alike. whether we like it or not, Russia sees itself as being at war with us and we need to think as creatively as possible to defeat its disinformation narratives.

Potential immediate activities and outputs would fall under four broad categories: Personal, Events, Analysis/Technical and Media (including online).

Personal

- IfS to liaise with former Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko for permission to share his personal account of the Russian attempt on his life by dioxin poisoning pre-Orange Revolution in 2004. Hopefully he would also comment on Salisbury, which would highlight that this is not a new tactic by Russia – they have long shown previous willingness to engage in such brutality. The human story is key and can help focus attention on what a State-sponsored nerve agent attack looks like.
- Ukraine links with the Netherlands before the 2016 vote on the EU Association Agreement could be useful to exploit. Ukrainian youth visited the Netherlands and helped address prevailing negative views in national media (Russia-inspired). These views presented the Agreement as a threat. Again, the theme is that we have been here before... different story, more brutal tactics but the attempt to be divisive is the same. Civil society activism is alive and well in countries that seek to pursue democratic paths. These are our natural allies in the fight against Russian disinformation.
- Use public figures in our networks to approach celebrities and other 'social influencers' with large reach to spread our message further e.g. Gary Lineker on the World Cup.
- Reach out to Baltic, and Central & Eastern European diasporas across NATO member-states and elsewhere to relay pro-UK messaging back to their respective home countries.

Personal - In Confidence

- Publish striking images of SV Skripal in hospital and/or victims of similar exposures to nerve agents (something like the iconic 2006 photograph of Sasha Litvinenko on his deathbed). A high-impact visual story to help the public relate to the enormity of what has just happened in Salisbury.
- Engage in educational sessions with small Parliamentary groups across NATO, for personalised attention, creating a conducive environment where there is no such thing as a foolish question.

Events

- Sharing stories to counter the stream of disinformation: e.g. an IfS Fellow presented an exhibition about IDPs in Eastern Ukraine in Vienna last year, with the support of the local Ukrainian Embassy. The event was well received and helped tackle the underlying false narratives that pro-Kremlin sites put out. Pro-Kremlin outlets have already surfaced Ukraine as a possible source of the Salisbury nerve agent, showing that Russian hysteria about and obsession with Ukraine remains a theme of pro-Moscow media. This exhibition could be presented in Germany through our networks there and with support from the local Ukrainian Embassy, demonstrating UK willingness to push back with real content and not let Russia dominate the media space.
- IfS could help expand recent efforts to develop media literacy in rural USA through the programme developed by StopFake and IREX in Ukraine. To this end, the Skripal attack could be a vivid and timely case-study, to uncover in real-time how Russian disinformation tactics seek to sow chaos, and undermine public understanding and consensus.
- Ramp up IfS presence at selected international events to provide expert speakers on a range of relevant topics (e.g. Russian influence, disinformation, strategic thinking, security and intelligence, defence, culture).

Analysis/Technical

- Conduct information analysis and compile it in digestible formats, to show people the reality of Russian and other disinformation.
- Capture 'public' vs 'elite' reactions to and perceptions of Salisbury: is the public really as uninterested or uninformed as some commentators would have us believe? Or are 'elites' the real challenge to overcome in stopping Russian subversion and aggression? What evidence is there of UK and other public support – online polling?
- Deploy the NationBuilder platform to coordinate an international campaign, with scope for rapid expansion and distribution as needed.
- Commission forensic analysis of (social) media 'big data' on e.g. what disinformation narratives are out there, who is pushing them, how are they being picked up in key countries? The computational work could be done in 2–3 days, then put into a presentation that could be translated and shared with II Country Clusters. [Note: it would be essential to ensure that this work did not duplicate that already done by e.g. Alliance for Securing Democracy, CitizenLab, MIT]. (See separate note re SENTINEL)
- An IfS Fellow is currently working on a concept paper looking at medium- and long-term media literacy solutions, drawing on extensive personal experience and research. Findings to be shared as/when appropriate with sponsors, II Country Clusters and any other relevant parties.

Personal - In Confidence

- An IfS Senior Fellow is currently working on a paper looking at the concept of 'strategic immunity': how countries facing multi-layered subversion campaigns can develop 'whole-of-society' resistance to the numerous attack vectors Russia uses in the 21ST century. Findings to be shared as/when appropriate with sponsors, II Country Clusters and any other relevant parties.
- Expand the network of IfS associates and partner organisations to include e.g. DarthPutin, GlasnostGone, StopFake, European Values, Saper Vedere, and coordinate their efforts to mirror and amplify what IfS is already doing where possible.
- Create a real-time feed into the Sponsor with daily analysis on Russian disinformation, providing a constantly-updated narrative that could then be shared with Embassies, either via email or in another ready-made format they could then disseminate locally. [Note: it would be essential to ensure that this work did not duplicate that already done by e.g. Alliance for Securing Democracy).

Media

- Maintain active social media publication of IfS material on Russian disinformation, in this case regarding the Skripal assassination attempt and all that flows from it.
- Gather material from reputable analysts and journalists in IfS social media feeds, so that they become the definitive repository for daily commentary on Russian disinformation and Western efforts to counteract it.
- Use materials produced by II Country Clusters that is engaging and in forms that the general public consumes, particularly on mobile devices.
- Be sure to cover the latest research and proposals on disinformation and media literacy, with the aim of educating the public.
- Use the Patreon platform to 'commission' or suggest ideas for different kinds of outputs from highly talented and creative artists e.g. online videos on an instance where Russia has been caught lying. IfS could be anonymous funders.
- Concerted IfS and partner effort to counter the narrative that Russia controls European energy supplies e.g. the Danes have just said 'no' to NordStream 2 running through their waters, but Copenhagen needs clear international support if we are to succeed in stopping NS2.
- Timeline and/or infographic showing what Russia has done to date: e.g. Litvinenko, Estonia, Georgia, Crimea, Ukraine, MH17, Syria, Skripal. Show the pattern of lies, denial and aggression. What exactly would constitute 'proof' for Russia? (Perhaps people would be more forthcoming with evidence if witnesses did not have an odd habit of dying suddenly and violently).
- Concerted effort to reach out to relevant journalists.
- Find ways to remove e.g. RT/Ruptly video and infographic content from mainstream media e.g. newspaper websites, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, etc. Such content is quite professionally done, entertaining and cheap (or even free) for cash-strapped mainstream media outlets. But for these reasons, this kind of content gets numerous 'clicks' and is therefore picked up by reputable outlets that help spread Russian disinformation.

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