

'Crimea Is Ours!' Russian geopolitics and digital irony

June 1 2015



A popular caricature from Vkontakte shows Barack Obama playing a card game over the map of Crimea. In despair, he sees that his game is spoiled by the trump card depicting Putin with a Kalashnikov machine gun (Figure 3). Here, the will and agency of Ukraine and Crimea are manifestly ignored, as very plain, insignificant cards in the geopolitical card party. Credit: Vitalii Podvitskii.

In a new article published in the *Journal of Eurasian Geography and*

Economics Mikhail Suslov, researcher at Uppsala University, analyzes how the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 has been represented and discussed on Russian-language social networks. The article discusses the paradox of 'digital disempowerment' but also how no state can control digital irony.

The central geopolitical Russian trope represents Crimea as the quintessence of Russia, condensing East and West, historical memory of Russia's military spirit and Christian relics. Keeping this in mind, Mikhail Suslov's article discusses the phenomenon of 'digital geopolitics', that is the way in which grassroots are involved into speaking about - and thereby into doing - geopolitics.

In particular, the article analyses the paradox of 'digital disempowerment': on the one hand, digital environment fosters political activism, but on the other hand, geopolitical style of thinking disempowers because it creates the worldview, according to which personal political engagement is far less important than 'national interests', 'great geopolitical games', and 'clashes of civilizations'.

Building on this paradox, Suslov argues that social networks enable pro-Kremlin users to actually participate in the annexation of Crimea by actively performing their position vis-à-vis their geopolitical adversaries.

At the same time, the intersection of geopolitics and new media produce a culture of 'cynical reason' (Sloterdijk). He discusses geopolitical irony and trolling as popular devices of 'cynical reason', which aim to fight against Western values. The state, however, cannot control 'digital irony' from developing into the anti-Kremlin weapon, ridiculing pro-governments' initiatives.



The conspicuous absence of Ukraine from the 'big picture' of the annexation of Crimea reenacted a sort of post-neo-colonial denigration of Ukraine, whose history, culture, and political subjectivity are being ridiculed and rejected, often against the backdrop of blatantly sexual imagery (Wolff 1994). The salient example is verbal and visual depiction of Ukraine as a degraded woman having wild group sex with rascals; i.e. the US, the EU, and others. As a political caricature shows, Crimea, pictured as the unlucky husband of Ukraine, angrily leaves Ukraine for Russia. Credit: Vitalii Podvitskii.

"Thus, the hashtag 'Crimea is ours' became almost totally squatted by the opposition which produces hilarious effect by attaching this hashtag to news about disorders such as the falling ruble rate or busted sewage pipe

in a provincial town", says Mikhail Suslov.

More information: Mikhail Suslov, "Crimea Is Ours!" Russian popular geopolitics in the new media age, *Journal of Eurasian Geography and Economics*: www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15387216.2015.1038574

Provided by Uppsala University

Citation: 'Crimea Is Ours!' Russian geopolitics and digital irony (2015, June 1) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-06-crimea-russian-geopolitics-digital-irony.html>

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