



What Happens Next? Intelligence Agencies' Role in the Post-War Era

As the war between Ukraine and Russia continues to reshape the global security landscape, intelligence agencies are already preparing for the post-war phase. The conflict has not only tested traditional intelligence methods but has also accelerated new approaches to cyber warfare, open-source intelligence (OSINT), and strategic deception. The question remains: **what role will intelligence agencies play in a post-war Ukraine and Russia?**

1. Ukraine: A Frontline Intelligence Battleground

Regardless of how the war ends, Ukraine will remain a critical intelligence battleground for both Western and Russian agencies. The country has gained significant experience in intelligence gathering, counterintelligence, and cyber operations. Ukraine's **SBU (Security Service of Ukraine)** and **GUR (Main Intelligence Directorate)** have been deeply engaged in both defensive and offensive operations, often with support from NATO intelligence networks.

Key Post-War Intelligence Challenges for Ukraine:

- **Countering Russian espionage:** Russia's intelligence agencies will continue to operate within Ukraine, using clandestine networks, sleeper agents, and cyber-attacks to destabilize the country.

It will depend on the government established in Ukraine after the war, but in any case, FSB and GRU will be very active. Ukraine remains within the FSB sphere of influence as it is part of what is known as the *near abroad*. GRU will be playing its role as Ukraine will remain a prewar zone.

Both agencies will penetrate as much as they can the local intelligence agencies (SBU and GUR mainly), as well as political and economical assets to keep them under Moscow influence.

- **European troops on the ground:** In the same vein, Western agencies will do the same. It will be a new intelligence front like Berlin was during the cold war.

Europe is likely to send troops to the ground, meaning that there will be a huge need for military intelligence. Gathering information on Russian military movements in the occupied territories will be an effort for European intelligence agencies with troops deployed on the ground.

For years, Western intelligence agencies have done nothing regarding Donbas or Crimea. During the war only the US and UK have made an incredible intelligence effort. Both countries (especially the UK) never downgraded the efforts and interest in Ukraine.

Obviously, it was key for them to detect that the war was imminent. Poland has very good information from Ukraine, too. France is far away positioned but diplomatically is in better shape than Germany or other EU stakeholders. Spain and Italy have never paid attention to the area and remain in the same mood. Testimonial presence (intelligence agencies) has been sent to Kyiv from Rome and Madrid and that's it.

Of course, the US intelligence community will not stop working in Ukraine. The efforts carried out before will not diminish after an agreement. It is likely to increase as it will be vital to supervise what the Russians do,



because the US acted as the power broker to strike a peace deal (I wouldn't use the word agreement, at least, at this stage).

Managing internal security risks:

- Domestic intelligence agencies in Europe will also have to keep an eye on the individuals who took part in the conflict, in either side. They are always eligible to work for the side they supported, and they know how to fight and use weapons. It is different from the foreign fighters that attended conflicts in favour of terrorist or Islamist groups. However, these individuals tend to be involved in extremist behaviours. Luckily, in the case of Ukraine, these numbers are not huge. Poland, UK, France and the Baltic states have the biggest numbers of mercenaries that have been involved in the conflict. Numbers are difficult to state but it will not surpass a couple of thousands at most.
- The presence of war veterans, displaced populations, and potential pro-Russian factions will require careful intelligence oversight to prevent internal instability.

2. Russia: A Rebuilding or a Declining Intelligence Power?

Russia's intelligence community has suffered significant reputational and operational damage during the war. The **FSB's failure to assess Ukrainian resistance**, the **GRU's flawed military intelligence**, and the **SVR's inability to predict Western responses** have led to internal purges and restructuring efforts within Russia's security apparatus.

Moreover, it must be remarked that during the years of the war in Ukraine the GRU (Russian intelligence agency) programme of illegals has been hit deadly by the West. A trickle of cases has been happening, and it ended up with the exchange of spies that took place in Ankara in August 2024.

Slovenia, Spain, The Netherlands and Germany have been some of the theatres where these cases have been finalised. Italy has had its share of cases, too. This is an excerpt of the main cases that involved Russian intelligence exposure after the war in Ukraine began (it's not an exhaustive list):



Fecha	Ubicación	Individuos Involucrados	Detalles
mar-22	Przemyśl, POLAND	Pablo González (also known as Pavel Rubtsov)	Spanish journalist arrested on suspicion of spying for Russia. Allegedly used his journalistic activities as a cover for espionage. Released in a prisoner swap in August 2024.
jun-22	The Hague, The Netherlands	Sergey Vladimirovich Cherkasov	Using the false identity of a Brazilian named Victor Muller Ferreira, Cherkasov attempted to infiltrate the International Criminal Court (ICC) as an intern to access information on investigations into Russian war crimes in Ukraine. He was detained at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport and subsequently deported to Brazil, where he was arrested for using fraudulent documents.
ago-22	Naples, Italy	Olga Kolobova (alias María Adela Kuhfeldt Rivera)	Se hizo pasar por una diseñadora de joyas peruana para infiltrarse en círculos sociales y militares de la OTAN en Nápoles. Desapareció en 2018 tras ser descubierta su verdadera identidad como agente del GRU ruso.
dic-22	Ljubljana, Slovenia	Artem Dultsev y Anna Dultseva	Posing as Argentine expatriates under the names Maria Meyer and Ludwig Gisch, this couple operated as "illegals" without diplomatic cover. They were arrested for espionage, and their children were unaware of their true identities until their return to Russia.
dic-22	Tromsø, Norway	Mikhail Mikushin	Operating under the Brazilian alias José Assis Giammaria, Mikushin worked as a researcher in security studies. He was arrested on his way to work, suspected of espionage activities for Russia.
dic-22	Berlin, Germany	Carsten L.	Former German intelligence officer arrested for allegedly passing classified information to Russia.
dic-22	Stockholm, Sweden	Sergey Skvortsov	Ciudadano sueco de origen ruso arrestado por realizar actividades de inteligencia ilegal contra Suecia y Estados Unidos en nombre de la inteligencia militar rusa.
dic-22	Stockholm, Sweden	Peyman and Payam Kia	Swedish brothers (Iranian origin) arrested and later convicted for spying on behalf of Russian military intelligence.
dic-22	Vienna, Austria	Egisto Ott	Oficial de inteligencia austriaco acusado de pasar información sensible a los servicios de inteligencia rusos
sep-23	London, UK	Cinco ciudadanos búlgaros	Acusados de formar parte de una red de espionaje rusa que tenía como objetivo a figuras de la oposición rusa en Europa. Presuntamente



			coordinados por Jan Marsalek, exejecutivo de Wirecard vinculado a la inteligencia rusa.
ago-24	Berlin, Germany	Vadim Krasikov	Condenado por asesinar a un exlíder insurgente checheno en el parque Kleiner Tiergarten de Berlín en 2019. Liberado a Rusia en un intercambio de prisioneros.
oct-24	Dublin, Ireland	Sergey Prokopiev y "Cobalt"	Prokopiev, oficial de inteligencia militar rusa, reclutó a "Cobalt", una figura política irlandesa, para influir en la política nacional. Prokopiev fue expulsado; "Cobalt" permaneció bajo investigación.



Half of the cases are related to illegals or grey illegals.

It goes without saying that the most important action that has taken place against Russian intelligence capabilities in the West has been the expulsion of over 700 hundred of its members since February 2022.

Post-War Intelligence Shifts in Russia:

- **Strengthening internal control:** The Russian government will continue to focus on suppressing dissent, cracking down on internal opposition, and purging disloyal elements within the intelligence services. This process has already been implemented, and it is still ongoing. Navalny has already been erased. Trumps' spending cuts have also had an impact on the Russian NGOs established in the US. The arena seems promising for Putin's regime internally. If economic conditions improve (as it is likely due to the lifting or easing of sanctions), Putin's popularity will bloom.
- **Shifting intelligence focus to other global arenas:** Russia will try to rebuild its losses in Europe and the Western world. It needs to resume its activities in the West as the regime will need to watch over Europe's development. Europe is not a military opponent, but it is certainly a trade opponent and there lies its interest.

NATO institutions in Europe and other multilateral-organization seats will be of the utmost interest for the Russian intelligence services.

Russia may increase its intelligence operations toward Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, where it still has influence. Africa is living an increase of Russian presence, mainly in the Sahel region. This fact will also have an impact on Western intelligence agencies which will be forced to increase their efforts in an increasing hostile environment in the region.

- **Cyber capabilities:** Russia will likely double down on cyber espionage and influence operations, targeting Western democracies with more sophisticated disinformation campaigns.

3. NATO and Western Intelligence: Preparing for a New Cold War?

The war has strengthened NATO's intelligence collaboration (we mean cooperation among intelligence services regarding Russia), but the post-war period will require even more adaptability. The EU knows that without US intelligence support its likely mission in Ukraine will lack critical intelligence for the security of the troops deployed.

Right now, it is unclear what Trump administration is willing to do regarding this topic. On the ground CIA operatives surely want to cooperate. Long standing members of the CIA will be prone to cooperation. They are aware of its benefits regarding the improvement in overall security.

Given the sensitivity of the environment, it is likely that Trump will allow them to behave as they believe, especially because the intelligence world is a covert one. Under the hood, Trump doesn't need to be so harsh.

4. The Role of Cyber and Private Intelligence Firms

The war has demonstrated the power of **OSINT, satellite intelligence, and private sector involvement** in modern conflicts. Companies like **Palantir, Microsoft, and Starlink** have played crucial roles in Ukraine's war effort.



We do believe that private sector has come to stay. Governments, especially in highly technical environments (AI, space, to name a few), need the support and assistance of the private sector.

Post-War Trends in Private Intelligence:

- **Increased reliance on commercial satellites and AI-driven analytics.**
- **Stronger partnerships between governments and private intelligence firms.**
- **New challenges in regulating private sector involvement in military intelligence.**

Conclusion: A Long-Term Intelligence Conflict

The end of large-scale fighting in Ukraine will not mean an end to intelligence warfare. **Both Western and Russian agencies will continue their struggle for influence, with Ukraine serving as a key battleground.** Intelligence operations will shift toward cyber, economic, and political domains, ensuring that the post-war era remains just as complex as the conflict itself.

The control and influence over Ukrainian intelligence agencies and institutions are likely to ruffle some feathers in the other side.

The West will undoubtedly keep an eye on how Russia behaves and tries to influence Ukraine's future. The West will try to maintain an upper hand to control and restrain Russia from exceeding its commitments established in any peace agreement.

Ukraine will play the role Morocco played during II World War or Berlin during the Cold War—a highly contested zone for intelligence operations and political influence.

Ukrainian intelligence services will continue to be significantly penetrated (although the efforts to get rid of pro-Russian elements made during the war have been outstanding) and may not be entirely trustworthy. Pro-Russian operatives will remain embedded within Ukrainian intelligence ranks, while Western intelligence agencies will also attempt to exert their influence and secure key assets.

In the long run, trust will be established among Western agencies, despite occasional ups and downs and moments of mistrust due to Trump's shifting stance. However, this mistrust will be more apparent in the political sphere than in actual operations on the ground.

Although Moscow and Washington do effectively materialize an approach, it will be very hard to translate it with the same intensity between US and Russian intelligence agencies. **It's decades of training and hard work spent building networks and covert operations, only to dismantle them just because Trump and Putin happen to get along for whatever reason.** Putin understands this simple reasoning perfectly, but Trump may not.