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From Cockroaches to Weather: What Isn't Russia Weaponizing?

Is nothing sacred?

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It's become something of a common refrain. In a Foreign Affairs essay published online in December 2017, former Vice President Joe Biden accused Russia of weaponizing corruption and the internet.

"Russia has invaded neighboring countries... More frequently and more insidiously, it has sought to weaken and subvert Western democracies from the inside by weaponizing information, cyberspace, energy and corruption," he wrote with former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Michael Carpenter.

Biden's observation got us wondering what else Russia has been accused of weaponizing in recent years. Here's the list we came up with:

1. Disability

Eurovision, Russia, and weaponized disability

“Russian officials and state-controlled TV channels refer to Ukraine’s ban on the entry of Samoilova as “inhumane,” stressing that she is a person with disability and moves on a wheelchair.”

— (Euromaidan Press, 03.28.17)

2. Dolphins

Russia looks to buy five dolphins with perfect teeth and killer instinct

“An unnamed source told the RIA Novosti state news agency in March 2014 that new training programmes were being designed to make the dolphins serve Russia’s military interests”

— (AFP, 03.09.16)

3. The energy sector

Russia has weaponized the energy sector in war against the West

“A critical Russia weapon in this war is the revenues accruing to Moscow from its oil and gas sales to Europe and Asia. This funds much of the information and cyber warfare as well as dirty money and subversion that Moscow directs around the globe.”

— (The Hill, 10.17.17)

Related article: Ded Moroz Says He Will Not Run For President

4. Federalism

“Weaponizing” Federalism? Russia and the Debate on Federalism / Decentralization in Ukraine and Other Post-Soviet States

“Most discussions of this topic, however, downplay and sometimes demonize federalism as a viable option for the country, largely because of the way in which Russia’s political leadership has aggressively promoted Ukraine’s federalization.”

— (Ukrainian Canadian Congress, 12.04.15)

5. History

Weaponizing History

“History is being increasingly politicized. Case in point, a recent documentary about the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.”

— (Russian Life Magazine, July/August 2007)

6. Hybrid business

Hybrid Business — The Risks In The Kremlin's Weaponization Of The Economy

“Russia's government has a pernicious habit of treating business as yet another arm of politics, and this habit goes far beyond the notions of ‘kleptocracy’ or ‘state capitalism."’

— (RFE/RL, 07.20.16)

7. Its financial default

Weaponized Default: Russia's Ultimate Answer to Western Aggression?

“Whatever Putin and Obama discuss at their possible meeting at the end of the month in New York, exceptionalist pressure over the bear won’t abate. So it pays for the bear to keep a lethal financial weapon in storage.”

— (Russia Insider, 09.19.15)

8. National trauma

Russia Has Weaponized Its National Trauma

“The Kremlin’s drive to weaponize information for the sake of rallying an already traumatized population behind an unrecognized, unjust war is leaving deep-seated scars that will last long after the dust has settled in East Ukraine.”

— (Read Russia, 09.18.15)

9. Its own population

Russia's Population Is Being Weaponized

“The Russian people are becoming weaponized - a vehicle for Vladimir Putin and his palace

guard at the Kremlin to use at their disposal. If Moscow wants to annex Crimea, the people will support it. If Moscow wants to support the regime of Bashar Assad with military force, as the latter drops barrel bombs on his people, the people will support it. If Moscow wants to further expand the Russian empire at the expense of some other nation-state, the people will, of course, support it."

— (Real Clear World, 12.03.17)

10. Media

How the Media Became One of Putin's Most Powerful Weapons

"After decades of wielding Soviet-style hard power, Russia is developing a subtler form of influence."

— (The Atlantic, 04.21.15)

Related article: More Russians Want to Vote for Putin, Poll Shows

11. Migration

Migrant crisis: Russia and Syria 'weaponizing' migration

"Russia and Syria are deliberately using migration as an aggressive strategy towards Europe, the senior Nato commander in Europe has said."

— (BBC, 03.02.16)

12. Pop singers and rock stars

How Russia weaponized Eurovision – not

"It's not that pop culture has been weaponized. It's more that Russia's geopolitical adventures over the last several years owe at least as much, if not more, to Jerry Springer as they do to Soviet military doctrines."

— (ECFR, 05.19.16)

13. Robotic cockroaches

Russia May Soon Have Weaponized Robotic Cockroaches

"Since drones are seemingly everywhere from war zones to suburban parks, it's safe to say that most militaries are focused on conquering the skies with new, bird-like gadgets.

However, despite this trend, Russia has just announced a new line of robotic cockroaches—a creepy crawler that Russia loves—that may see weaponization in the future."

— (Modern Notion, 09.28.15)

14. Social media

How Russia Weaponized Social Media With 'Social Bots'

"Congress held hearings last week on how Russia used social media to interfere with the presidential campaign. One key tool they used was "bots," computer programs that act like real people online."

— (NPR, 11.05.17)

15. Syrian refugees

Is Russia 'Weaponizing Refugees' To Advance Its Geopolitical Goals?

"Is Russia trying to "weaponize" refugees from Syria by using them as a geopolitical tool to undermine Turkey, the European Union, and NATO?"

— (RFE/RL, 02.19.16)

16. Weather

Can Russia control the weather? Climate researcher says CIA fears hostile nations are triggering floods and droughts

"If it seems like it never stops raining, blame the Russians. Or even the North Koreans."

— (Daily Mail, 02.15.15)

17. Tedium

The Weaponization of Tedium Is Putin's New Strategy

"Putin and his political technologists want to get people to the polling stations, by hook, crook or fancy gimmick. But they do not want them thinking too much beforehand about what that means."

— (The Moscow Times, 19.12.17)

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