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Estonia's public sector awareness of Adversary Information Operations

Master's thesis

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PhD

Tallinn 2024

Abstract

The 2023 National Security Concept of Estonia emphasizes in the security concerns that active information influence activities are an ongoing threat attributed to Russia. From the academic literature, Information Operations are considered as a cyber threat. This leads to the question, why is it not discussed more?

This study investigates the Estonia's public sector awareness of Adversary Information Operations. The scope of this study is limited to representatives of government and government affiliated organizations dealing with malicious cyber activities. As information regarding to Information Operations are considered highly sensitive and classified under the national security statute, only publicly available sources were analysed. With a hybrid mix of qualitative and quantitative research, the study examined the perceptions of the topic, mitigation, and detection of tools and tactics in a survey. For the validation of these findings' interviews were conducted with experts in the field of cybersecurity and communications.

The study finds that the Russian Federation does not distinguish between cyber-attacks and information operations, nor do they differentiate between peace time and war time. However, Estonia's tactics and techniques of countermeasures, even if concealed, have an overall good understanding of information influence activities, and have considerable defences in place.

This thesis is written in English and is 61 pages long, including 6 chapters, 12 figures and 2 tables.