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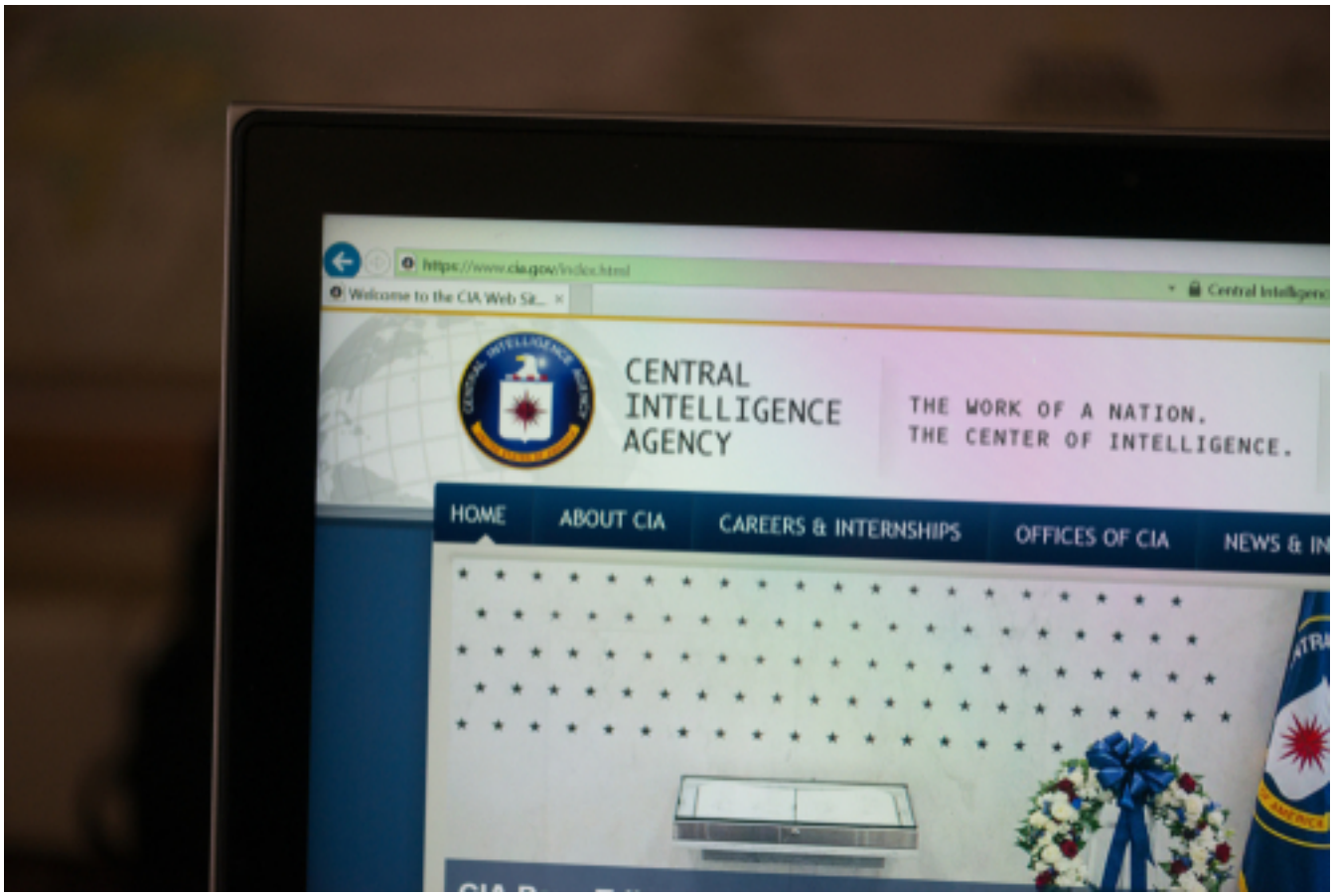
Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

CIA video - an intimate conversation with a Russian, which creates paranoia in the Kremlin



The Kremlin should not be worried about the new CIA project, which called on its citizens to cooperate using a video in Russian.Support for the aggression against Ukraine and Vladimir Putin's policy amounted to 83% last April (Levada Centre). This is at the level of the victorious enthusiasm from the first months of the aggression in the spring of last year.The entire Russian population still supports state leadership and the army in everything they do in Ukraine.This would also mean that the CIA invested poorly in a high-production video and carefully worded messages to attract Russian citizens to cooperate against their state leadership and the campaign in Ukraine.However, things are different. Either one of the 83% of Russians is lying that they support Putin and the Ukrainian operation, or the Kremlin is not sure of the strength of their patriotism.

Retaliation as a response

Officials in the leadership positions in the country threatened to retaliate against citizens who dared to use the CIA's application for the safe sharing of information."I am convinced that our special services are properly monitoring this space," said Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov, while Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said the CIA's project was "a very handy resource for tracking those who apply."Why would they threaten anyone if they are convinced that support for the state's policy is almost unanimous and that everyone who said so was speaking honestly?And why would the CIA take such an unprecedented step if it hopes to find collaborators among only 14% of Russians who said last April that they did not support aggression against Ukraine?

Breaking through a closed box

One of the CIA's motives to try and get information in this way, directly and through the social network dominantly used by the Russians (Telegram), lies in the fact that Russia has become a "closed box" from the point of view of communication.Every channel for providing alternative views to the local population has been closed by repression.Opposition political forces were trampled, critical media shut down, and every individual attempt to protest, which only happened at the start of the aggression, was met with cruel reprisals and harsh punishments.The CIA's video manages to jump over this barrier where there is no intermediary to convey an alternative message and address the audience directly through an available channel (Telegram) the audience trusts.The messages from the video are personalized and suggestive. The audience experiences them personally and is left to question in the free zone of their home surrounded by family.Action is one step away. ("We easily fall for lies, but we do know what our reality is - the reality in which we live and the reality we talk about in whispers")

Russians in emigration

The message is also intended for the hundreds of thousands of Russians who emigrated during the aggression against Ukraine and took with them knowledge and information, which they might share with someone who could help eliminate the reason why they had to emigrate."There are a lot of disaffected Russians out there now," said former CIA head of counterintelligence, James Olson, and added "they are ashamed and disgusted by what Putin is doing to their brother and sister Slavs in Ukraine."In this light, we should not forget the statement of David Marlowe, CIA's director of operations from last November that the Agency "is looking around the world for Russians who are as disgusted with that as we are."The CIA project was adapted to the traditional Russian reluctance towards political activism, which has been particularly pronounced since the start of the aggression due to repression.The video does not demand the impossible from the average Russian. It does not call for rebellion and heroism ("I don't believe in revolution"). It arouses the conscience, over which repression is not (yet) possible, and reminds change is achievable if a personal effort is made. (I stand firm, my

family stands firm. We will live decently, thanks to my actions).At the risk of being hypocritical, the CIA video promotes and supports patriotism ("This is my Russia, it will always be my Russia") in anyone who watches and thinks about it.But in that part also, the audience's conscience will be tested. Is it patriotism to stand by your country (government) when it attacks another country, or is it patriotism to stop such behaviour?

The feeling of threat in the Kremlin

The only problem with the CIA project is not the project itself but the risk it carries for anyone who wishes to access it.Even the very thought of possible retaliation, which has been widespread, particularly after the arrest of many anti-war activists, would be a strong deterrent for the Russians to cooperate with the CIA through its new application.The Kremlin will primarily use repression to defend itself against the CIA "attack," Moscow's high-ranking officials clearly stated in their first reactions.However, the manner in which the CIA addresses potential collaborators is such that the possibility of widespread retaliation is meaningless.According to the statements of unnamed officials, the target is not massive. It addresses thousands of Russians in the country and abroad within the range of information not necessarily from the field of intelligence or counterintelligence but science, cyber technology, finances, and the military.The effects of the unprecedented way of recruiting collaborators could be devastating for the Kremlin because it will encourage the feeling of insecurity and paranoia that is characteristic of it even when it is not waging wars.If it turned out that the CIA video brought information that would significantly reduce Russia's ability to wage an aggressive war, the Kremlin's feeling of threat and paranoia would be fully justified.