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# NJOHSP

## EXECUTIVE INTELLIGENCE BRIEF

March 31, 2020

## Psychological Operations Leveraged Against US, Allies Amid COVID-19 Pandemic

*Several near-peer competitor countries are leveraging the COVID-19 pandemic to conduct psychological operations against Western nations to undermine US and European credibility both domestically and globally.* Near-peer countries in the Great Power Competition, including China and Russia, are attempting to sow anti-US sentiments using disinformation via different mediums to alter the views of international governments and individuals. Psychological operations target audiences with selective information to influence their emotions and objective reasoning.

- Over the last few weeks, Chinese propaganda has focused on highlighting the country's international response to the disease, stating health workers are on the front lines trying to save humanity, as well as promoting stories about shortcomings from the United States and European Union. This is in addition to several false narratives in which Chinese diplomats and senior representatives have promoted a conspiracy theory over social media that the US Army brought COVID-19 to China and where the disease may have started in Italy.
- On March 30, *Rusiya Al-Yaum*, an Arabic-language version of *Russia Today*, published several anti-US and European stories focused on Western attempts to control financial markets and the oil industry. The publication also contained an opinion piece discussing NATO's attempts to discredit Russia's diplomatic response to assist with coronavirus-related activities in Italy.
- On March 23, Russian news agencies reported only 367 cases of COVID-19 infection across the country, despite its population of 146 million people bordering two epicenters of the disease: Asia and Europe. However, over the last week, open source reporting indicated that patients are overloading hospitals across Russia, and Moscow's mayor reported that official state numbers were wrong.



*China and Russia maintain extensive reach globally to influence ex-patriots and the international community in several languages.*

**NJOHSP strongly urges the public to use legitimate and credible organizations for accurate information, as well as to fact check claims from competing sources. Rumors can easily circulate within communities during a crisis, and the spread of disinformation can be stopped by choosing trusted sources of information. For more information, please visit <https://www.njohsp.gov/covid19>.**