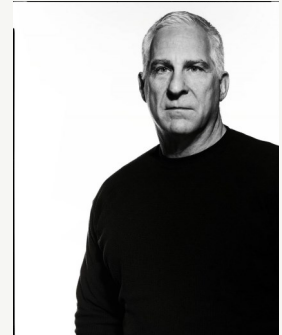


Russian ‘Active Measures’



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



John Sipher

John Sipher retired in 2014 after a 28-year career in the CIA's National Clandestine Service, which included serving in Moscow and running the CIA's Russia operations. Sipher served multiple overseas tours, as Chief of Station and Deputy Chief of Station, in Europe, the Balkans, Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia. He also ran Russian operations at headquarters. He retired as a member of the CIA's Senior Intelligence Service, and received the CIA's Distinguished Career Intelligence Medal. He is a director of client services at Crosslead, Inc.

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Executive Summary

For many in America, Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. election surfaced the term “active measures” for the first time. Europeans were more familiar with the behavior, if not the term. 2016 saw a renewed focus on Russian hybrid and political warfare – interference in elections throughout the west. Trolls, bots, fake news, cyber hacking and even assassination became regular features in the daily news.

“Active measures” is a term of art distinct from espionage and counterintelligence. Such activities include, efforts to control and manipulate foreign media, disinformation and deception, and political influence activities. When people think of intelligence in the modern era we think mostly of collection and analysis - espionage, cyber sleuthing, satellites and analytical support to policymakers. While Russian intelligence agencies also seeks to gain insights and steal secrets, they place far greater emphasis on subversion and political action.

This paper will look at elements of Russian active measures campaigns and compare the recent attacks on European and U.S. elections with previous Soviet and Russian activities. I will try to show that, while many of the techniques are new, the mindset and patterns of Russian spycraft are consistent over the decades. As such, it is worth spending more time studying past Russian active measures campaigns as we look to defend ourselves from future attacks.

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Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research
Robertson House, Slim Road, Camberley
GU15 4NP
Telephone: 01276 412708 Mil: 94261 2708
Facsimile 01276 412708 Mil 94261 2708

Introduction

Throughout the Cold War, each newly appointed U.S. ambassador to Moscow would trek to Princeton, New Jersey, to meet with our most famous diplomat, George Kennan, to seek his advice on dealing with Moscow. Kennan reportedly advised each new ambassador to visit almost any university library and check out a random book on 18th- or 19th-century Russian history. He held that they could learn as much about contemporary Soviet leaders and politics from old Russian tales as from anything written more recently: The more things change, the more they stay the same.

The same holds for understanding Russian active measures and our effort to prepare for Russian political and information warfare as we approach the 2018 U.S. mid-term elections. Revisiting material on historical Soviet and Russian espionage and disinformation campaigns can best prepare us for what is to come.

Since the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution the security services' first order of business was keeping the leadership firmly in power. The Cheka, OGPU, KGB and present Russian security services are seen as the sword and shield of the state. Sabotage, disruption, active measures and assassination are key central tenets to the functioning of the State. Such measures are designed to convince potential internal enemies that political change is impossible, and also keep external adversaries off-balance. Indeed, these methods are part and parcel of a larger strategic investment in hybrid warfare. As described by the Henry Jackson Institute, "Russia's information operations are used by the Kremlin as both a prelude to war, an alternative to war, and a handmaiden in war."

The 6 January 2017 official U.S. Intelligence Community Assessment on the Russian attacks on the 2016 U.S. election noted that, "Moscow's influence campaign followed a Russian messaging strategy that blends covert intelligence operations—such as cyber activity—with overt efforts by Russian Government agencies, state-funded media, third-party intermediaries, and paid social media users or 'trolls.' Russia, like its Soviet predecessor, has a history of conducting covert influence campaigns focused on US presidential elections that have used intelligence officers and agents and press placements to disparage candidates perceived as hostile to the Kremlin. Russia's intelligence services conducted cyber operations against targets associated with the 2016 US presidential election, including targets associated with both major US political parties."

We may not see a replay of the 2016 attacks against the U.S. election. However, since such activities are a central component of Russia's foreign and domestic policy, we will surely face Russian political warfare for some time to come. As the 2017 U.S. Directorate of National Intelligence concluded, "We assess Moscow will apply lessons learned from its Putin-ordered campaign aimed at the US presidential election to future influence efforts worldwide, including against US allies and their election processes."

For those academics, policymakers and practitioners interested in what we might expect from the Russians over the coming years, they would be wise to study past campaigns in an effort to understand the Russian mindset and doctrine. Of particular value are studies such as Christopher Andrew's works based on stolen material from Vasili Mitrokhin and Oleg Gordievski, including "The Sword and the Shield," "The World Was Going Our Way" and "Comrade Kryuchkov's Instructions." "Soviet Strategic Deception" by Andrew Marshall, "Russian Influence Campaigns Against the West" by Kevin McCauley and "Dezinformatsia" by Richard Shultz also provide useful background. Old U.S. State Department and Intelligence Community reports on Russian active measures are also worth dusting off.

Computer technology and the ubiquity of social media provide new means to support Russian subversion efforts. However, the playbook is not new. To best prepare for tomorrow, we should first revisit the past.

Overview and Explanation of Active Measures

In his new book, "The Assault on Intelligence," General Michael Hayden describes a series of internal policy meetings among key U.S. intelligence officials in the mid-1990s. The debate at the time was over whether the U.S. should be in the cyber business or aim for the larger goal "information dominance." He described the intensity of the discussion as akin to Jesuits arguing an issue of theology at a medieval University. Intelligence and military leaders contrasted cyber defense and attack options against the ability to shape how adversaries received and processed all information. They decided that information dominance, which included concepts such as deception, perception management, propaganda and psychological operations, as a bridge too far. Instead, the U.S. would seek to master the tactical aspects of "cyber dominance." The U.S. would seek to develop skills related to cyber-espionage, cyber-defense and offensive cyber-attacks, and would treat them as distinct and separate specialties managed by separate bureaucratic agencies.

The 2016 Russian assault on the U.S. election made clear that Russia instead chose the more ambitious strategy of information dominance, and that separating cyber defense from the larger threat of information warfare, the U.S. was ill-prepared for what they faced in 2016. Unlike the U.S., the Russian focus on political warfare and information operations was not one made in the 1990s or 2000s. It has been a central factor of Russian and Soviet intelligence for over 100 years and is at the heart of Russia's view that political warfare is as crucial as military action in defeating an enemy. Russian "Active Measures" include propaganda, media manipulation, disinformation, deception, use of forgeries, assassination, funding of extremist and opposition groups, spreading conspiracy theories and rumor, and cyber-attacks. According to Russian doctrine, the most important part of any effective active measures campaign is "Political Influence." Political influence involves using spies and cooperative contacts to directly promote Russian interests inside the political, intelligence, diplomatic and military structures of adversary countries. These individuals secretly working on behalf of Russia are called "agents-of-influence." Russian active measures are a form of asymmetric warfare. Like terrorism, such methods are a means of damaging an enemy without direct military force. They are means to compensate for the inability of the Russian state to compete with the west. As described by Tunku Varadarajan in the Wall Street Journal, Russia is "economically modest and technologically mediocre, so they look for ways to compensate, and subversion of competitors is an obvious, low-cost strategy."

These techniques were applied from the inception of the Soviet state. Shortly after the Russian Revolution 1917, the newly created Intelligence and security service (Cheka – OGPU) launched a sophisticated active measures campaign, which is still studied in western intelligence services. The "Trust" operation was a fake anti-Bolshevik resistance organization that was run by OGPU Chief Felix Dzerzhinsky from 1921-26. The complex operation took place in Europe and Asia and lured potential enemies to the Soviet Union where they could be captured and killed. British spy Sidney Reilly – Ian Fleming's model for the James Bond books - was the most famous individual who was lured to the Soviet Union, interrogated and executed. The OGPU created, sponsored and staffed the fake "Monarchist Union of Central Russia." The Soviet trap attracted opponents of the regime all over Europe. It ran for several years and led to the (literal) liquidation of the anti-Bolshevik resistance.

Indeed, the Soviet talent for subterfuge, subversion and terror likely had roots in the earlier Tsarist secret police. The Tsarist Okhrana penned the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," one of the world's most successful and notorious fictions that still resonates in anti-Semitic circles. As Brigitte Sion wrote in "My Jewish Learning," the fabricated text purports to be "the minutes of meetings held secretly by Jewish wise men plotting to control the world. Exposed many times as a forgery, the Protocols has nevertheless continued to be translated, published, and distributed all over the world... Its legacy is alive and well today in the charter for the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas, as well as among Holocaust deniers and conspiracy theorists." The centrality of the Tsarist secret police spawned a generation of underground political agitators. Indeed, the names Lenin and Stalin are cover names used to avoid the Okhrana. This attraction to perception management, political warfare and complex, multi-faceted operations has remained a staple of the Soviet and Russian special services ever since.

Interviewed on CNN in 2007, Retired KGB General Oleg Kalugin described active measures as "the heart and soul of Soviet intelligence": "Not intelligence collection, but subversion: active measures to weaken the West, to drive wedges in the Western community alliances of all sorts, particularly NATO, to sow discord among allies, to weaken the United States in the eyes of the people of Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America, and thus to prepare ground in case the war really occurs." More recently, academics and foreign policy practitioners have focused on the issue of "hybrid warfare" and the so-called "The Gerasimov Doctrine." Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the Russian Army General staff and has written that Russian military strategy should combine all parts of state power, to include military, technological, information, diplomatic, economic, cultural and other tactics, deployed towards one set of strategic objectives. In this sense, active measures have long been part and parcel of Russia's larger use of irregular/asymmetric warfare and intelligence operations meant to influence their adversaries and prepare the ground in case a real war occurs.

Putin's History as Chekist

While practitioners would expect to see similarities between Soviet KGB tactics and those utilized today by the various Russian secret services, the almost two decade-long leadership of former KGB officer Vladimir Putin insures that the legacy is honored and built upon. Putin is a proud "Chekist." He relies on his intelligence and security services as his primary weapon to maintain control inside Russia and to challenge his international adversaries. Further, he utilizes active measures aspects of intelligence tradecraft in his personal statecraft. Prior to his political career, Putin was an officer in the KGB's First Chief Directorate. He worked in his home town of Leningrad monitoring and repressing dissidents and internal opposition, and eventually earned a foreign assignment in East Germany. He was serving in Dresden when the Soviet Union collapsed. After a stint managing foreign commercial contacts for the mayor of St. Petersburg, he moved to Moscow, eventually serving as Russian President Yeltsin's Director of the FSB, Russia's powerful internal security service. Putin used his time as FSB Director to protect his political bosses. His stint as FSB Chief is most remembered for broadcasting a clandestine video of Yeltsin's political enemy Russian Prosecutor General Yuriy Skuratov having sex with prostitutes.

Shortly thereafter, Putin was anointed as Yeltsin's successor, largely due to his fealty to Yeltsin and his family. Despite initial hopes that he would move Russia in a western, democratic direction due to his experience with the outside world, Putin quickly displayed his true colors. Among the first acts as President was to bring back the Soviet anthem and commission a plaque to honor Yuriy Andropov who Putin saw as a role model. Putin later marked the 90th anniversary of Andropov's birth with a statue in St. Petersburg. Putin did not hide his reverence for Andropov's belief in a strong hand, authoritarian policies, repression and view that the KGB should maintain the leading role in managing the state. Enemies would be destroyed. Dissent would not be tolerated.

Within several years of taking power, Putin had established political control over the media, economy and courts, and re-energized the security services. In this sense, Putin's policies and behavior over the past 15 years have increasingly appeared to follow historic Russian patterns of autocracy and paternalism. He has usurped the role of the "Good Tsar" or "Vozhd" — and emphasized Russian power. Putin's views and policies align with Russia's centuries-long perception that it has always been betrayed by the West. Russian tyrants have sought unchallenged power stemming from an inferiority complex and messianic vision of Russia as a nation unlike others. A Good Tsar can keep the country safe from those who would take advantage of its weaknesses. In such a state of constant fear of betrayal, Russia requires a powerful leader to ensure the maintenance of nationhood and vigilance. Real democracy is a threat. Indeed, Putin foments chaos overseas and invents stories of foreign danger, in turn selling himself as a strong leader who can protect his country from outsiders. The population is willing to trade transparency, political involvement and leaders who pilfer from the nation's coffers in exchange for stability and safety.

In a similar fashion, the attack against the 2016 U.S. presidential election like those against Ukraine and other western countries is as much aimed at an internal Russian audience as at foreign rivals. The message to Russians is that Putin is a respected and feared force on the world stage and that they should stand in awe of his strength. His attacks on multiculturalism, immigration, and gay marriage are meant to contrast the decadent and corrupt West against a stable Russia living under traditional values. It is all an elaborate narrative designed to keep him in power and protect his stolen riches. Like despots the world over, he fears his people. He knows that he can no longer count on a booming economy and rise in the standard of living to ensure their support, and instead, he has clutched onto blood-and-soil nationalism and uses his secret services to maintain control.

A lot of academic effort has gone into how to best define Putin's state — whether to call it totalitarian, a mafia state, crony capitalism, a criminal kleptocracy, a surveillance or security state, or a traditional autocratic system. While it has elements of all of these antecedents, it only has a single goal: control. Putin has created a fictional persona and an atmosphere of fear in order to control the population and convince them that he is the only answer. In this sense, Putin's security services play the same role as the KGB before them. Using lies, straw-men and the tools of propaganda, he seeks to control his people, and influence his external adversaries. If Putin knows one thing, it is that he can never show weakness or lose control; it seems that attaching himself to historic Russian orthodoxy and nationalism is his best bet for the short term.

Disinformation/Propaganda/Fake News

Russia has been employing the tools of deception for centuries. Both 18th century trickery by nobleman Grigori Potemkin to deceive Tsarina Catherine the Great and the deployment of bots and trolls on social media in our day are both means to manipulate thought and action. Deception is the art of tricking your enemy in to believing what you want him to believe. The Russians and Soviet security services have professionalized the tools of disinformation. Russian disinformation campaigns are almost too numerous to document. A Soviet disinformation campaign in the 1980s attempted to spread the theory that the AIDS virus was created by the Pentagon as part of an out-of-control secret biological warfare program.

Prior to the spread of digital social media platforms to spread disinformation, the Russians used a then-favorite mechanism to spread the false story – placing an article in an English-language newspaper in India. Then, using spies and collaborators, the KGB helped the article get picked up by increasingly credible media outlets, with the goal of eventually having it picked up by the western press. Once in circulation, the information would complicate efforts to tell truth from fiction, and sow distrust with western leaders. Similarly, a 1979 Russian disinformation effort led to the death of American diplomats in Pakistan. When an early Al-Qaida-like group seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca and called for the removal of the ruling Saudi family, the Russians spread an incendiary rumor that American troops were involved in the take-over of the holy site. The hoax inflamed Muslim fears and incited protests around the world. A mob in Islamabad stormed the U.S. Embassy and burned it to the ground, killing U.S. diplomats. During the Cold War and beyond, the KGB spread numerous false stories of U.S. assassination attempts, planted forged documents, stoked racial discord and provided support to violent groups. Former KGB officer Sergei Tretyakov's book "Comrade J" claims the Kremlin invented and disseminated the notion of nuclear winter in an effort to discredit U.S. missile deployments in Europe.

In Latin-America, the Kremlin circulated allegations that wealthy Americans were buying up and butchering poor children in order to use their body parts for transplants. The story even made it into the U.S. press. Some disinformation campaigns focused on enduring themes and were recycled again and again. Throughout the Third World, the Soviets portrayed the U.S. as a racist country, promoting numerous stories about despicable treatment of black and native Americans in the U.S. They rolled out disinformation campaigns to hinder U.S. efforts to support its European allies, especially attacking the deployment of U.S. weapon systems. One of the largest and most sophisticated operations was a massive effort to discredit the placement of intermediate range nuclear weapons in Europe, and the neutron bomb. The KGB often utilized forgeries to help support their narratives.

During the Cold war the KGB regularly tried to re-ignite violent passions related to Germany's Nazi past, disseminating inflammatory forgeries and even vandalizing synagogues on Christmas night in an effort to create copycats and spin up anti-Jewish activity. More recently, the Kremlin promoted a false story that immigrants from Syria had raped a little girl in Germany. Even the Russian foreign minister backed up the fake story, stoking hysteria that led to demonstrations and upheaval in Germany. In Ukraine, Russian intelligence operatives regularly circulate stories designed to inflame passions to include false reports of a three-year-old boy who was tortured and crucified by the Ukrainian military, the replacement of a WWII ceremony by a gay pride parade and a tale that the Ukrainian President was supporting a law to make Hitler's birthday a national holiday. More widely, the Kremlin orchestrated a coup attempt in Montenegro, stoked anti-EU sentiments in Britain in the lead-up to the BREXIT vote, spread rumors of rapes by migrants in Germany, and added fuel to the fire of secession discussions in Spanish Catalonia.

The human cost of Russian disinformation is hard to calculate. We can only imagine the number of dead stemming from the public statement of Zimbabwe's Vice President Joshua Nkomo, who discounted efforts to promote safe sex, instead claiming AIDS virus had nothing to do with sex since it was merely a weapon of the U.S. military complex. Like the Soviet Union before them, Russia today also continues to spread propaganda. In the Soviet Union, propaganda themes were built into all aspects of state activity to include education, art, youth groups, social movements, front organizations, political advertising, cinema, radio, books and television. While Russia no longer is looking to spread communism, it uses television and social media to reinforce Kremlin policy and support active measures campaigns abroad.

The 2017 DNI intelligence assessment on Russian interference in the U.S. election concluded that; "RT America TV, a Kremlin-financed channel operated from within the United States, has substantially expanded its repertoire of programming that highlights criticism of alleged US shortcomings in democracy and civil liberties. The rapid expansion of RT's operations and budget and recent candid statements by RT's leadership point to the channel's importance to the Kremlin as a messaging tool and indicate a Kremlin directed campaign to undermine faith in the US Government and fuel political protest... RT's criticism of the US election was the latest facet of its broader and longer-standing anti-US messaging likely aimed at undermining viewers' trust in US democratic procedures and undercutting US criticism of Russia's political system. RT Editor in Chief Margarita Simonyan recently declared that the United States itself lacks democracy and that it has 'no moral right to teach the rest of the world'... RT's reports often characterize the United States as a "surveillance state" and allege widespread infringements of civil liberties, police brutality, and drone use." From blatant lies to muddy the information landscape to subtle efforts to use rumor and distortion Russian state propaganda outlets operate in support of the Kremlin's active measures campaigns.

Deception

While Russia's propaganda and disinformation efforts are aimed at a wide audience, deception campaigns are more focused efforts to influence the thought processes and actions of an enemy's elite. The goal of intelligence-sponsored deception is to fool the enemy's decisionmakers and intelligence services by manufacturing a false reality, and thus impacting policy. Disinformation and fake news can be an effective means to disorient an adversary and weaken its internal cohesion. Strategic deception, on the other hand, is a secret, offensive effort to create an alternative narrative that serves Moscow's interests. It was used in the past to safeguard the identity of Russian spies in the U.S. and uncover perceived threats to the regime. Efforts to deceive are most effective when they play to preconceived notions, telling an adversary something it is desperate to know. In this sense, Facebook and Russian deception have something in common – they succeed by selling us what we want to hear. Facebook tracks your likes and interests, providing you with what you are inclined to believe. Clever deception, especially when dipped in some of the same insights of behavioral psychology, does much the same thing.

In 2016, the Kremlin's goal was to turn the U.S. against itself and protect Russian interests. The KGB effort to safeguard the identity of its spies in 1980s Washington is a classic example of this deception strategy in action.

In the mid-1980s the KGB was facing a dilemma. They found themselves in the enviable position of having two highly placed spies inside the U.S. national security apparatus – Aldrich Ames at CIA and Robert Hanssen at FBI. The two had informed the KGB of a group of Soviet officials who had been spying for Washington. Despite KGB efforts to quietly remove the traitors from positions of access, the Soviet leadership insisted that the Russian spies be immediately arrested, imprisoned and executed. The KGB was left with the burden of safeguarding Ames and Hanssen from U.S. officials who would now be looking hard for explanations of why their long-time spies were suddenly uncovered. The Soviets needed to provide alternative explanations rather than allowing the Americans to accept the real answer – that they had their own spies in their midst. The Russians turned to one of their most developed and time-honored skills-sets – deception. They looked to send false signals to the Americans, forcing them to look anywhere else for an explanation for their losses, and not focus on a possible mole inside the grounds.

The deception effort was aimed directly within the walls of CIA. The KGB knew that CIA was hesitant to again turn itself inside-out looking for spies. CIA had suffered through a period of self-destruction at the hands of the recently-retired powerful counterintelligence chief James Jesus Angleton, who had convinced CIA leadership that the Soviets were ten feet tall. The subsequent hunt for moles inside CIA had destroyed careers, severely damaged the effort to recruit new spies and created a sense of paralyzing paranoia within the ranks. Into this atmosphere the Russians sought to create a narrative that the CIA's 1986 spy losses were a combination of poor CIA tradecraft, KGB luck, a technical penetration of Moscow Station and possibly a breach of CIA communications between their Headquarters and the field.

They did this primarily by dangling a double agent to the CIA Station in Moscow. Senior KGB counterintelligence officer Alexander Zhomov (GTPROLOGUE) made clandestine contact with the CIA Station Chief in Moscow, and over several months provided detailed information on the KGB monitoring CIA officers in the capital. Zhomov provided a wealth of real, sensitive information that was twisted slightly to shape a narrative that the CIA was ready to accept – that the losses were due to a mixture of CIA mistakes and KGB lucky breaks. Zhomov was taken more seriously than he might otherwise have been due to his high-level position in the KGB. The CIA was on guard for possible double agents who would sell false or low value information. Past experience, however, had taught them that the KGB was extremely unlikely to provide CIA direct contact with a senior staff officer with access to the crown jewels for fear that he might be turned. That's the very risk that the KGB took and changed their MO in furtherance of the highly crafted deception effort to protect their penetrations in Washington.

A separate but complementary project was also launched suggesting the KGB had success breaking into CIA's encrypted communications, which further taxed the agency's limited resources devoted to uncovering the reasons for the spy losses. All of these efforts were designed to shape the narrative, send signals to the Americans and buy time that could be used to protect their investments in Ames and Hanssen. Once CIA and FBI had finally untangled it all, the passage of time had bought the KGB several more years to exploit their investment in Ames and Hanssen. By the mid-80s, the CIA was ready to believe almost any other explanation other than the obvious – that they had a mole in their midst. Angleton's paralyzing paranoia and distrust had torn CIA apart to the point that the pendulum might have swung too far in the other direction. All it took was a little nudge from the KGB.

Assassination

Like the other elements associated with Russian active measures campaigns, assassination is a long-used tool of the Soviet and Russian State. Organized terror and hunting "enemies of the people" were features of Soviet intelligence right from the inception of the Soviet Union. The first Cheka Director Felix Dzerzhinsky stated it clearly; "We stand for organized terror - this should be frankly admitted. Terror is an absolute necessity during times of revolution. Our aim is to fight against the enemies of the Soviet Government and of the new order of life. We judge quickly. In most cases only a day passes between the apprehension of the criminal and his sentence. When confronted with evidence criminals in almost every case confess; and what argument can have greater weight than a criminal's own confession."

Like the Tsars before them, Soviet leaders realized that brutality was a necessary part of a dictatorship, even in a dictatorship of the proletariat. The relentless effort to hunt and kill enemies was as important as any other responsibilities of the intelligence services. Even at outbreak of WWII, arranging the liquidation of enemies such as Leon Trotsky was a higher priority than discovering the intentions of Adolf Hitler. Likewise, throughout the Cold War all defectors were tried in absentia and sentenced to death. The intelligence services were tasked to develop plans to find and kill them all. For example, the KGB had detailed plans to break the legs of renowned Soviet ballet dancer Rudolf Nuryev after he fled to the west.

Prior to the familiar assassination attempts against Sergei Skripal and Alexander Litvinenko of recent years, the KGB was skilled in the area of “wet work.” Serhii Plokhy’s book, “The Man with the Poison Gun” describes the 1959 assassination of Ukrainian national leader Stepan Bandera. Bandera’s death in Munich was assumed to be of natural causes until several years later when the KGB assassin defected to the west to tell his story. He described using a specially crafted gun with a small ampule of liquid spray poison that left no trace. Likewise, KGB operatives were sent to capture or kill high-profile defectors like Yuriy Nosenko and Nicholas Shadrin. Shadrin was eventually lured to Vienna where he was kidnapped and killed. Also, during the Cold War, a KGB officer who foolishly fell in love with an English woman he had hired as an English teacher was killed, his body stuffed in a suitcase and then tossed in the Seine river.

The KGB not only targets traitors from their midst but also those who are politically troublesome. Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko and Russian oppositionist Vladimir Kara-Murza were poisoned, while former Chechen President Yandarbiyev and Russian investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya were murdered. However, as with disinformation operations, there are too many state-sponsored murders to list. KGB assassination weapons ranged from toothpaste containers filled with poison gas and a sleeping powder that killed against internal enemies, to the use of radioactive polonium and the “novichok” nerve agent used against Sergei Skripal. Russia – like the Soviet Union before – is home to many of the best scientists in the world. Developing dastardly means of death continues to be a booming business.

Political Influence

If active measures and hybrid warfare involve simply determining your enemy’s weaknesses and exploiting them, a necessary component of a successful campaign is a deep understanding of the enemy’s culture and political system. The more you know your enemy, the more effective you can be in pushing the proper buttons to create schisms and pain. In this sense, the critical component of an active measures campaign is to have human agents that can provide insight and intelligence, and even better, have contacts that can take action on your behalf. Despite a focus on subversion, the Soviet and Russian massive investment in intelligence has insured a ready stable of espionage assets. Indeed, prior to the Cuban missile crisis, Soviet intelligence collection was far better than that of the U.S. For much of the 20th century, Soviet and Russian intelligence had spies in almost every key U.S. agency. During WWII and the Cold War Russia ran spies in the White House U.S. Congress, State, Defense and Treasury Departments. For much of this time, the U.S. didn’t even have a single agent in Moscow.

During WWII, almost everything collected by the wartime U.S. intelligence Agency OSS flowed to Moscow. They penetrated the Atomic program so effectively that they could cross-check their reporting. Indeed, the Soviets knew more about the Manhattan project than Roosevelt’s own Vice President. At the time Russia had espionage agents that could steer policy (agents-of-influence) in key policy positions. Russian spies included Harry Dexter White, a senior Treasury official and the senior U.S. official at the 1944 [Bretton Woods conference](#). He was the major architect of the [International Monetary Fund](#) and [World Bank](#). Senior State Department official Alger Hiss was also a spy and a key player at the Yalta conference and was involved in the establishment of the UN. Similarly, Russian penetrations of U.S., British, German and allied intelligence services were many. However, what made the Russians particularly talented at devising schemes of deception and subversion has consistently weakened their ability to analyze and understand the intelligence they collected. The willingness to believe conspiracy theories has made the Russians experts in trickery but less skilled at understanding cultures with a different mindset.

Conclusion

As I commented in a Politico article (<https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/03/08/vladimir-putin-manipulation-2018-217334>), future Russian hybrid attacks against the U.S. will not follow the same form as they did in 2016. However, while Russia is unlikely to go after the same targets, they will most certainly approach the task with the same mindset and philosophy that has underpinned their activities over the past century.

As an asymmetric form of political warfare, future Russian active measures campaigns will likely follow the established pattern of looking for new weaknesses to exploit and striking areas that are not well defended. As former CIA and NSA Director Michael Hayden commented in a recent "Atlantic" article, "covert influence campaigns don't create divisions on the ground, they amplify them."

In 2016, the dysfunctional U.S. political environment was dry tinder for the Russians. A single match led to a wildfire. Most successful active measures campaigns are not born of elaborate schemes cooked up from whole cloth. Instead, they are often a series of opportunistic and tactical operations that come together due to a unique set of circumstances. In the case of the 2016 attacks, it wasn't particularly difficult to turn Americans against each other.

Like the West has done in the terrorism fight, it would be wise to steep ourselves in the relevant history and also take a hard look at ourselves. Like terrorism, we cannot stop it entirely but can harden key institutions and areas the Russians are likely to exploit. What are our unique fault lines? Where are we most vulnerable? It's a good bet that our gullibility and eagerness to think the worst of our political opponents is still the best place for the Russians to take aim. This is especially true given that the White House has done little to counter the Russian threat, instead couching it largely in domestic political terms. As long as our politics are tribal, our prejudices so obvious and we exist in a constant state of outrage, it will be easy for Russians (and others) to "meddle."

However, at the end of the day, if we try to defend everything, we defend nothing. Instead, we need to take advantage of our overwhelming power and the strength of our institutions and democracy. If we are confident in ourselves, these Russian attacks have little effect. Likewise, if we threaten Putin with the full might of the Western alliance, we will deter the most serious attacks. Putin engages in these asymmetric attacks because he can't take on the West directly. He is vulnerable, has no real allies, needs an enemy straw-man to justify his failures and has built few enduring institutions with real legitimacy to outlast him. If the West remains steadfast and fortifies its democratic institutions, Putin cannot win.

It is the objective of this paper to suggest that we can better defend ourselves and potentially deter Russian asymmetric attacks if we understand their history and patterns of behavior. We can expect the Russians to assess how far they can push before they face blowback. They will push right up to the line. A study of previous Russian campaigns can help us understand how they think and process their options. In so doing, we can more effectively defend ourselves and signal our resolve.