

# Active Measures: Then and Now



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# Introduction

- Overview of Soviet intelligence
- What are active measures
- Soviet-era active measures
- Active measures in the post-Soviet era

# Introduction

- What happened in 2016
- Current RIS active measures
- Sources for further research

# Soviet Intelligence Services

Two main elements of SIS:

- State security service
- Military intelligence

# History of Soviet Security Police (KGB)

- 1917-22: Cheka
- 1922-34: GPU/OGPU
- 1934-1941: NKVD
- 1941;1943-46: NKGB
- 1946-54: MGB
- **1954-91: Committee for State Security (Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti: KGB)**

# KGB Foreign Intelligence

- 1920: INO (International Department)
- 1953: First Main Directorate (FMD) of MGB/KGB

# The “Neighbors”: The GRU

- Soviet/Russian military intelligence
- Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff
- De facto subordinated to KGB from 1930s-1991



# KGB Foreign Intelligence Methods

- Espionage: collecting information from foreign adversaries through human and technical means (spying)
  - Legal and Illegal
- “Active Measures”
- “Special Tasks”

# Active Measures

- Use of propaganda and disinformation to advance USSR interests, undermine adversaries
- Provocations/false and misleading information/“Fake news” stories/forgeries/
- Influence target audience (public and decision makers)

# Why Active Measures

- “Soviet leaders do not regard war and politics as distinct conditions....politics is a continual state of war carried on by a wide variety of means.”
- “Moscow views international politics as a constant struggle. Soviet leaders employ a broad range of military and non-military measures against all adversaries.”

# Active Measures



• Source: <http://documentstalk.com/wp/agayants-ivan/>

- Tsarist lineage (“Protocols”)
- “Dezinformatsiya”; Intensified in late 1950s
- Centralized in 1959: Department D of FMD
- Became Service A in 1962
- “Fraternal” services participated

# Active Measures

- “The term “Active Measures’ came into use in the USSR in the 1950s to describe overt and covert techniques for influencing events and behaviour in foreign countries. Disinformation – the intentional dissemination of false information – is just one of many elements that made up active measures operations.”

Source: Cull, Nicholas J., Vasily Gatov, Peter Pomerantsev, Anne Applebaum and Alistair Shawcross. [“Soviet Subversion, Disinformation and Propaganda: How the West Fought Against it. An Analytic History, with Lessons for the Present: Final Report.”](#) LSE Consulting, October 2017. P. 6

# Active Measures

- “Our friends in Moscow call it ‘dezinformatsiya.’ Our enemies in America call it ‘active measures,’ and I, dear friends, call it ‘my favorite pastime.’”  
—Col. Rolf Wagenbreth, Director of Department X, East German foreign intelligence (STASI)

Source: Schoen, Fletcher and Christopher J. Lamb. [\*Deception, Disinformation, and Strategic Communications: How One Interagency Group Made a Major Difference\*](#). Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2012. P. 8

# Active Measures

- USA regarded as “Main Adversary” from 1945-91.
- Top priority target of KGB
- NATO/UK/France/West Germany
- Influence public opinion/divide western alliance

# Active Measures

- Foster and exploit divisions in US society
- Increase anti-Americanism abroad/divide US from allies
- More successful overseas than in USA

# Active Measures

- Notable increase in late 1950s
- First major campaigns directed at West Germany
  - Kampfverband-1957
  - Swastika campaign-1959
- JFK assassination conspiracy theories
- 350-400 actions per year by 1965

# Active Measures

- Intensified in 1970s
- Philip Agee/CAIB
- Forged US letters/military manuals
  - FM 30-31B
  - Italian letter
  - “Holocaust Again for Europe”
- 1979 represented active measures “peak” (T. Rid)

# Active Measures The US Response

- Inconsistent for many years
- 1961-first congressional hearing; “Lawrence Britt” in 1971
- Additional hearings in 1979-82
- 1981-Active Measures Working Group
- US Information Agency played lead role

# Operation Denver



- Most famous Soviet active measures campaign
- AIDS was created in lab at Ft. Detrick, MD
- Three decade history of BW accusations against the US

Cartoon published in Pravda, October 31, 1986, alleging that AIDS was the work of American biological warfare researchers. Reproduced in: Geissler, Erhard and Robert Hunt Sprinkle. "Disinformation Squared: Was the HIV-from-Fort-Detrick Myth a Stasi Success?" *Politics and the Life Sciences: The Journal of the Association for Politics and the Life Sciences* 32 2 (2013): 2-99. P.27. DOI:10.2990/32 2 2

# Operation Denver

- ‘We are conducting a series of [active] measures in connection with the appearance in recent years in the USA of a new and dangerous disease, “Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome – AIDS” ..., and its subsequent, large-scale spread to other countries, including those in Western Europe. The goal of these measures is to create a favorable opinion for us abroad that this disease is the result of secret experiments with a new type of biological weapon by the secret services of the USA and the Pentagon that spun out of control.’

—Telegram from KGB to Bulgarian State Security, September 7, 1985.

Source: Selvage, Douglas and Christopher Nehring. [Operation “Denver”: KGB and Stasi Disinformation regarding AIDS](#). Sources and Methods Blog, Woodrow Wilson Center, July 22, 2019.

# Operation Denver

- Begun in 1983; Revitalized in 1985
- Aided by Stasi and Bulgarian intelligence
- Global impact from Fall 1985-Fall 1987
- Substantial US pushback
- Abandoned in Fall 1987; replaced by “baby parts” campaign

# Active Measures

- By 1985, Service A was spending \$3-4 billion per year
- Much of the KGB felt they were winning the struggle against the “Main Enemy” up until the Soviet collapse

# Russian Intelligence Today

- KGB broken up into several parts in 1991
- Most internal security functions became part of Federal Security Service (FSB)
- First Main Directorate became Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR)
- GRU gained autonomy (Now “GU”)



# Russian Intelligence Today

- Russian Intelligence Services (RIS) see themselves as successors to Soviet security services
- Fundamental continuity of methods and worldview (adapted for digital age)

# Russian Intelligence Today

- America is still the “main target”
- Active Measures relabeled as “Support Measures”
- RIS see themselves at war with USA/liberal West (M. Galeotti)
- Belief that USSR was subverted by USA/West
- Fear that this will happen to Russia via “color revolutions”/democracy promotion
- RIS seek to weaken and discredit USA/NATO/EU

# Russian Intelligence Today

- *“Listen: we engage in foreign policy the way we engage in war, with every means, every weapon, every drop of blood. But like in war, we depend on both the strategy of the general in the High Command, and the bravery and initiative of the soldier in the trench.”*

Former Russian diplomat to Mark Galeotti, April 2017

Source: Controlling Chaos: How Russia manages its political war in Europe

([http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/controlling\\_chaos\\_how\\_russia\\_manages\\_its\\_political\\_war\\_in\\_europe](http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/controlling_chaos_how_russia_manages_its_political_war_in_europe))

# Russian Intelligence Today

- RIS compete against each other to carry out broader agenda (FSB v. SVR v. GRU)
- Use of Oligarchs/organized crime/financial corruption
- Exploitation of digital/cyber capabilities
- Soviet-era methods updated for 21<sup>st</sup> century



# Active Measures in the Digital Age

- Hacks to unearth compromising material (WADA, USADA, OPCW)
- Disinformation via social media
- Denial of Service (DDOS) attacks (Estonia, Georgia)

Source: <https://www.rferl.org/a/us-russia-facebook-manipulation-echoes-troll-factory-accounts/28722595.html>

# What Happened in 2016

- Two main elements:
  - Hacking/dumping of Democratic Party emails
  - Social media active measures campaign
- Not the first Soviet/Russian active measures campaign tied to US election
- Unprecedented in scope and intensity

# Email Hacking/Dumping

- 2015: Democratic National Committee (DNC) hacked by Cozy Bear (SVR)
- March/April 2016: DNC, DCCC and others affiliated with Clinton campaign hacked by Fancy Bear (GRU Unit 26165): over 300 individuals targeted
- June 2016: hacked emails released by GRU Unit 74455 via “DC Leaks” and “Guccifer 2”
- July 2016: Unit 74455 shares hacked emails with Wikileaks
- July 22: First Wikileaks email release

# Email Hacking/Dumping

- July 27: “Russia, if you’re listening...”
- Five hours later: Unit 26165 targets 15 email accounts at Hillary Clinton’s personal office
- October 7, 2016: John Podesta email release
- 33 email tranches released by Wikileaks between October 7- November 7
- Hacks of all 50 state election organizations
- No evidence vote tallies altered

# 2016 Election Hacks

- *“The General Staff Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) probably began cyber operations aimed at the US election by March 2016. We assess that the GRU operations resulted in the compromise of the personal e-mail accounts of Democratic Party officials and political figures. By May, the GRU had exfiltrated large volumes of data from the DNC.*
- *We assess with high confidence that the GRU relayed material it acquired from the DNC and senior Democratic officials to WikiLeaks.”*

Source: Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections.  
Office of the Director of National Intelligence, January 6, 2017.  
([https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA\\_2017\\_01.pdf](https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf))

# 2016 Social Media Active Measures

- Project Lakhta begun in 2014
- Designed to use fake social media accounts to influence public opinion in Russia and abroad
- Funded by “Putin’s Chef:” Yevgeny Prigozhin
- Internet Research Agency (i.e.: the “troll farm”)

# 2016 Social Media Active Measures

- April 2014 – “translator project”, focused on US
- YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
- \$35,000,000 from 1/2016-6/2018
- Creation of fake social media accounts to exacerbate existing divisions in US society (left and right)
  - “Secured Borders”
  - “Blacktivists”
  - “LGBT United”
  - “Heart of Texas”

# 2016 Social Media Active Measures

- 31,000,000 Facebook shares; 39,000,000 likes
- 185,000,000 Instagram likes, 4,000,000 comments
- 6,000,000 tweets; 73,000,000 user engagements
- Accounts targeting right-wing audiences encouraged voting for Trump
- Accounts targeting left-wing audiences discouraged voting for Clinton

'LIKE' IF YOU WANT JESUS TO WIN!



Image posted by an IRA troll account during the 2016 election campaign. Shared by Senator Mark Warner (D-VA), November 1, 2017.

Source: <https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/hearings/open-hearing-social-media-influence-2016-us-elections>

# Did Russia Want Trump to Win?

- *“Russian efforts to influence the 2016 US presidential election represent the most recent expression of Moscow’s longstanding desire to undermine the US-led liberal democratic order, but these activities demonstrated a significant escalation in directness, level of activity, and scope of effort compared to previous operations.*
- *We assess Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the US presidential election. Russia’s goals were to undermine public faith in the US democratic process, denigrate Secretary Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency. We further assess Putin and the Russian Government developed a clear preference for President-elect Trump. We have high confidence in these judgments.”*

Source: Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, January 6, 2017.  
([https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA\\_2017\\_01.pdf](https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf))

# Did Russia Want Trump to Win?

- Questioned by (then) GOP majority on House Intel Committee
- Supported by Dems on committee, bipartisan conclusion of Senate Intel Committee
- Supported by Mueller investigation findings

# Mueller Findings

- *“The Special Counsel’s investigation established that Russia interfered in the 2016 presidential election principally through two operations. First, a Russian entity carried out a social media campaign that favored presidential candidate Donald J. Trump and disparaged presidential candidate Hillary Clinton.*
- *Second, a Russian intelligence service conducted computer-intrusion operations against entities, employees, and volunteers working on the Clinton Campaign and then released stolen documents.*
- *The investigation also identified numerous links between the Russian government and the Trump Campaign.*

# Mueller Findings

- *The Russian government perceived it would benefit from a Trump presidency and worked to secure that outcome*
- *The (Trump) Campaign expected it would benefit electorally from information stolen and released through Russian efforts,*
- *The investigation did not establish that members of the Trump Campaign conspired or coordinated with the Russian government in its election interference activities.”*

# Active Measures in 2020

- Russia (and others) continue to use social media to try to manipulate American politics and public opinion
  - 2020 Election
  - BLM protests
  - COVID-19

# Final Thoughts

- *“In this connection I would like to mention one thing. It would be a big mistake to make a conclusion that Communist agents have successfully penetrated all the non-Communist world and that they are responsible for all its trouble and problems....In the present competition between the Communist and the non-Communist world, Soviet-bloc intelligence is only one of many foreign policy instruments, and certainly not the most important one. Communist disinformation, propaganda and influence operation can't win that competition.”*

Ladislav Bittman (“Lawrence Britt”), May 5, 1971

Source: *Testimony of Lawrence Britt: Hearing Before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws, Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Ninety-Second Congress, First Session, May 5, 1971*

# Federal Information Sources on Active Measures

- Congressional Docs
- Executive Branch Docs
- Judicial Docs
- [Govinfo.gov](https://www.govinfo.gov)
- [Catalog.gpo.gov](https://www.catalog.gpo.gov)

# Congressional Sources

- Committee publications (hearings, reports, prints)
- Historical (1934-77):
  - House Un-American Activities Committee (Y4.Un 1/2)
  - House Committee on Internal Security (Y4.UN 8/15)
  - Senate Subcommittee on Internal Security (Y4.J89/2)
- Current (1970s-present):
  - [House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence](#) (Y4. IN 8/18)
  - [Senate Select Committee on Intelligence](#) (Y4.IN 8/19)
  - [Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe](#) (Y4. SE 2)

# Executive Branch Sources

- Intelligence Agencies:

- [FBI](#) (J 1.14)
- [CIA](#) (PREX 3)
- [NSA](#) (D 1.2)
- [Office of the Director of National Intelligence](#) (PREX 28)
- <https://www.justice.gov/sco>

- FOIA Libraries:

- <https://vault.fbi.gov/>
- <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/>
- <https://www.nsa.gov/news-features/declassified-documents/>
- <https://www.odni.gov/index.php/read-released-records>
- <https://www.justice.gov/oip/foia-library>

# CWIS Blog & LibGuide

- Blog: <http://blog.ecu.edu/sites/cwis/>
- LibGuide: <http://libguides.ecu.edu/cwis>



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